

ACADEMIC DECATHLON

RABOBANK THEATRE

OCTOBER 26, 2005

MUSIC OF THE RENAISSANCE

What follows is the bare bones of commentary by Jerome Kleinsasser in the morning of October 26 at the 2005 Academic Decathlon Concert at the Rabobank Theatre in Bakersfield before some 1700 team members and other high school students.

Performing groups included the Bakersfield College Chorale and Chamber Singers, and members of the Bakersfield Masterworks Chorale, all under the direction of Dr. Ronald H. Kean.

Other performers included brass players Ron Christian, Dennis Herbst, Jason Armistead, and Fred Chynoweth.

Nine performing members of Musica Angelica, the leading early music ensemble in Los Angeles, also participated by accompanying some of the selections on the Academic Decathlon repertoire list. In addition, they also presented the Dufay Chanson upon which the mass Gloria is based, as well as several extended examples of Renaissance instrumental music by Adriano Banchieri, William Byrd, and anonymous selections published by Pierre Attaignant.

What was the Renaissance?

The Renaissance is the name given to that period in European history that spans from the end of the Medieval period to the beginning of the Modern Era. In music, we generally consider the period beginning around 1400 and extending to around 1600, taking place first in Northern Europe and Italy, and eventually in England. For the first time in history, people widely thought about history, and viewed the world as through a rear-view mirror.

The term "Renaissance" itself, literally means "rebirth," but, you may ask, rebirth of what? It is essentially the rebirth of humanism, marked by rediscoveries of ancient writings, science and the arts, and their rational applications to the human experience.

With regard to music, however, the term "Renaissance" helps define a musical period, but not the music itself because there was very little attempt during those years to recreate ancient music. As a matter of fact, what little people knew then about ancient Greek and Roman music was to a considerable degree speculative and inaccurate. It was not until very late in the Renaissance period that musicians attempted to determine what ancient music may have consisted of. So music of this period continued to further develop

ideas from the Medieval era, but greatly expanded the harmonic and coloristic palate.

This morning we have for you a program of music drawing from some of the earliest music in Renaissance style, to some music from the very end of the era.

DUNSTABLE - QUAM PULCHRA ES

We begin with the music of one John Dunstable (b c1390; d 24 Dec 1453). He was likely the first English composer to be internationally recognized during his lifetime. He wasn't simply a musician but, like many others in the Renaissance, his interests ranged widely, including both mathematics and astronomy.

Dunstable was known to have traveled on the continent in a time when it was rare for musicians to cross the English channel. He did so, it is believed, while a member of the entourage of the Duke of Bedford.

For our purposes, the importance here is that Dunstable brought to the European continent what came to be known as the "Contenance Angloise," meaning the English character or style of music. That means his music often shows a preference for full triadic sonorities, this in a time when what we today think of as three part harmony was extremely rare, if indeed it was known in Europe at all. Moreover, in the selection we are about to hear, he has those unusual three-part chords gently move around the scale in parallel motion.

It is difficult for us to imagine how strikingly original the motet "Quam pulchra es" must have been in its time. For one thing, when creating a new musical composition, it was customary to borrow a line or two from some other, older selection, and create a new setting for it. This motet, however, seems to have been completely new with no borrowing from any other music. (A motet is a composition for several voice parts based on a sacred Latin text.)

Then there's the matter of the words being sung. Music listeners were accustomed in that time to hearing multiple texts sung at once, often several different poems were sung simultaneously, creating something of a musical jumble. But here we have all three voices generally singing the same words at the same time.

What Dunstable accomplished here was an unusual new clarity in presentation of the text to the listener. The words themselves take on new importance.

Dunstable selected a text drawn from scripture, as he adapted lines from the seventh Song of Solomon in the Old Testament. Here the biblical poet compares the charms of his lover to objects of beauty in nature, like palm trees, and pomegranates and dates, items found

in warm climates (all of which certainly **MUST** have been exotic to a chilly Englishman in the early 15th century!)

DUFAY BALLADE "Se la face ay pale."

Composing music for use in the Roman Catholic mass service was one of the principal concerns of musicians throughout the Renaissance. During that period, there was scarcely a major composer who did not try his hand at creating music for the Catholic mass service.

Very often, the music for the mass service was based on a melody taken from a popular song. Such is the case of the "Gloria" from the Mass "Se la face ay pale" by Guillaume Dufay (ca. 1397 - 1474). Here, Dufay borrowed a melody from one of his own tunes that he wrote in the 1430s.

Dufay was the most highly regarded composer of his day in French-speaking lands. Like Dunstable, Dufay composed both secular and sacred music, and sometimes carried musical ideas from one style of music over to another.

Dufay came from humble circumstances; his mother was a single woman and his father was a priest. He seems to have been quite a good singer, as his name appears on chorus rosters in various cathedrals between his native Cambrai (in what is now Belgium)

down to the ducal courts of Rimini and Pesaro, two sunny towns on the Adriatic Sea east of Florence, Italy.

Let's listen first to a simple ballade written by Dufay. It is a melancholy love song. Dealing with the ancient theme of unrequited love, the text reads:

"If my face is pale, the cause is love, and it is so bitter for me to love, that I would throw myself in the sea. Then would she see - the fair lady to whom I belong - that I can have no joy without her."

Dufay's ballade calls for three musicians, each with his or her own rather melodious part.

DUFAY MASS "Se la face ay pale"

Early in the Renaissance, musicians continued the time-honored Medieval tradition of taking a musical idea, one perhaps centuries old, and creating something new from it. In this case, somewhere around 1450, Dufay took one line from his own ballade and used it as the principal organizing theme for a mass setting. He used the tune in each of the five movements of this mass.

Hence, we have what musicians refer to as the "Se la face ay pale" mass. It was during the Renaissance, by the way, that the idea of composing five sections of the mass setting, the Kyrie, the Gloria, the Credo, the Sanctus, and the Agnus Dei, took root. It is a practice that continues in the work of many composers in our own time.

This morning we have for you the "Gloria" section of that mass. Performances of these works often included solo instruments doubling one or the other, or all, of the voice parts. This morning we will hear a version with voices providing the upper two lines, while the lower two parts will be played instrumentally - a perfectly legitimate Renaissance tradition.

Which part, you ask, will have the melody drawn from the ballade we just heard? Answer: it will be in the higher of the two instruments, but even if you were familiar with the ballade tune, you would not likely recognize the melody because it is now played in very long notes. You see, the series of pitches from that original melody is what was considered important, not that it appear as it did in the original song.

This is one of those mysteries of Renaissance music. In all likelihood, the listeners were unaware of the source of the melody and would not have recognized it if they knew it in the first place. It is likely even some of the performers did not know it either. It was this peculiar hidden quality, known only to the composer and a few in his inner circle, that added to the curiosity of the piece.

This "Gloria" setting is in three sections, each containing a complete statement of the tune. To make it even more interesting, Dufay wrote each section in a different time signature or rhythmic structure. The tune in the tenor part begins with long notes making it impossible to recognize the tune from the ballade, but each of the sections to follow has shorter note values, so that one might identify the original tunes in the final statement.

JOSQUIN DES PREZ "Absalon fili mi" ("Absalon, my son")

While many Renaissance composers were devoted to the composition of masses, it was the motet that offered them the greatest artistic freedom, if for no other reason than that the composer could select the poem to be sung. The leading composer of motets two generations after Dufay, the time of the mid-Renaissance, was Josquin des Prez. He served several of the wealthiest courts of his day.

Josquin's popularity and influence were immense, this in a time when the only mass medium, if one may call it that, was printed music, and music printing was barely in its crude infancy and very costly.

The motet we hear this morning is *Absalon fili mi*, a setting from ca. 1500 of the biblical text from the book of Samuel wherein David laments the death of his disobedient son, Absalon. Here the composer exercises what came to be known as "Musica reservata," where the music is written in a style that subtly emphasizes the meaning of the text being sung. Since it is a lament, Josquin used darkly rich harmonies, and at the close, as the text describes the sorrowful descent into hell, the voice parts gradually proceed downward to their lowest registers.

DUFAY RONDEAU "Adieu ces bons vins de Lannoys"

The life of a Renaissance musician was often an itinerant one, moving from province to province, from cathedral to cathedral, or court to court. And very often, if in the service of a wealthy Duke or Prince, composers would travel with an entourage as a member of the chapel or as a court musician.

Let's return for a moment to the music of Guillaume Dufay. We're not sure exactly where Dufay was in the year 1426, but it is easy to imagine, from the rondeau we hear next, that he was sorry to have to leave the French town of Lannoys. The poetic form of the rondeau allowed him to repeatedly bid farewell to the good wines of Lannoys, to the townsfolk, to his Welsh companions, and especially, to the woman he loved so well. He recalls the isolated deep woods where their trysts occurred. At one point, he is in such despair, he tells us he finds himself searching for nuts because he cannot find beans or peas - and he is very annoyed.

The number of times this song is referenced in various manuscripts throughout Europe seems to indicate it was unusually popular.

ISAAC TENOR LIED "Innsbruck, ich muss dich lassen" (after 1510) Another farewell ode is by the Flemish composer Heinrich Isaac (c. 1450 - 1517). As a composer connected with the Hapsburg dynasty, Isaac was particularly influential in German-speaking countries, though he eventually joined the migration of composers southward to Italy, and spent his last years in Florence.

In Isaac's music we see a number of trends that will over the next 200 years lead us to that greatest of all German composers, J. S. Bach. German polyphonic music of Isaac's time tends to be more syllabic than its French or Italian counterparts, the melody may be found in either the tenor or soprano part, and the musical phrases tend to be rather short and even in length. There is relatively little polyphonic interaction between vocal parts. Thus, one may see that the German chorale or hymn style so often associated with the Baroque master J. S. Bach has its origins in music of Isaac's generation.

As Dufay sang farewell to the wines of Lannoys, Isaac bids farewell to the beautiful town of Innsbruck. Another feature that differentiates German music from its Italian counterpart, is that the German text invokes the benediction of the Lord toward its end.

JOSQUIN DES PREZ FROTTOLA "El Grillo"

The song type known as the frottola may be thought of as the rap music of its day. By that I mean it was music of the streets. The subject of a frottola was frequently drawn from improvised poetry, was rambunctious in mood, and may have had some kind of hidden meanings with political or social undertones. Musically, it is very direct, syllabic, and with a simple melody of limited range in the top voice.

Josquin's *El Grillo* (dating from 1505) is ostensibly about a cricket. Now don't for a minute think anyone would write a song just to celebrate a noisy insect. Some scholars believe this song dates from Josquin's brief service in the court at Ferrara in Italy. And further, that "Grillo" refers to a singer of that name, possibly of Spanish origins - hence the article "el" and not the Italian "il" - a singer who turned down more lucrative offers elsewhere to remain at the court served by Josquin, hence he "sang for love," not money.

Also, you may note in the refrain how Josquin innocently attempted to imitate the singing of a cricket, as the high and low voices alternate with the words "Dale-dale, beve-beve, grillo-

grillo, canta-canta."

JOHANN WALTER CHORALE "Ein feste Burg is unser Gott"

From the raucous frottola of northern Italy we return to Germany for the sacred music of Johann Walter. Walter was associated with the great Protestant reformer Martin Luther. They worked together to help shape Lutheran musical traditions, and Walter was directly responsible for the publication and distribution of the earliest Lutheran song books. He also was the first important Lutheran composer of polyphonic music. As music director of churches in a German town, and at the same time a school teacher, he was the prototype for the figure of J. S. Bach 200 years hence.

Martin Luther himself was quite an accomplished musician. By all accounts he was a respectable player of the lute and also the recorder, and a well-regarded tenor singer. His chorale tune "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott" (A mighty fortress is our God) has since over the centuries become the international anthem of the Lutheran church. Luther's original tune was monophonic, that is to say, simply a melody with no accompaniment. It was Walter who first fleshed it out harmonically and bequeathed it to generations of composers to come.

PALESTRINA "Agnus Dei" fr. Pope Marcellus Mass.

The theological challenges the Protestant revolt presented to the Roman Church resulted in some profound reassessment within the Catholic church itself. An ecumenical council met off and on for 18 years (1545 – 1563) in the northern Italian town of Trento, an assembly that came to be known as the Council of Trent, and addressed necessary modifications in the practices of the Catholic Church. In contrast to the Protestant Reformation, this movement became known as the “Counter Reformation.” The subject of music was a relatively small, but yet very important, part of the deliberations of the Council of Trent.

There was the issue of language. Since only the clergy and a few highly educated individuals could understand the Latin language in which the services of the Roman church were held, the Council considered doing away with Latin in favor of a language more readily understood by members of the church congregations. But this was considered unrealistic when one considered the various countries (Italy, Spain, France) and variety of languages the Church would have to accommodate in its services, so Latin survived as the official language of the Church.

When it came to the matter of words and music, the Council of Trent discussed whether polyphonic music should be banned altogether, since the text being sung was often lost among the various interlaced voice parts. It was decided that polyphonic music should be continued, but that composers should attempt to make the text recognizable to the listeners. This meant adjusting the surface of the music generally away from polyphony (multiple lines) to homophony (where all the voice parts sing the same words at the same time).

One musical figure towering above all others, one whose music seems to encapsulate the reforms of the Council of Trent, was Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (ca. 1525 – 1594). It was the music of Palestrina that most artfully combined musical expression with clarity of text.

Palestrina spent his entire adult life working in and around the various chapels in Rome and in the Vatican. The extent of his polyphonic musical creations can only be described as mind-boggling: he wrote over 100 masses, several hundred motets and dozens of other examples of music for the worship service.

The individual Palestrina mass that most fully incorporates the reforms of the Council of Trent is known as the “Pope Marcellus Mass,” dedicated as it was to Marcellus II, a pope who reigned for merely 20 days in 1555. The exact connection to this particular Pope is unclear. What makes the Pope Marcellus Mass different from most of its siblings is its quasi-homophonic character, where the various voice parts sing the same words simultaneously.

However, in their wisdom, whomever it was that selected the music for this year’s national academic decathlon, opted for the “Agnus Dei,” the most uncharacteristic section of this mass to demonstrate the Tridentine reforms. Since the “Agnus Dei” section of the mass has relatively few words of text, compared, say, to the Gloria or Credo sections, Palestrina thus set it in the older, imitative musical style, in which the individual voice parts start each section separately, one after the other.

Nonetheless, the expressive beauty of Palestrina's Renaissance style is inescapable.

WILLIAM BYRD ANTHEM (1540 - 1623) "Sing Joyfully Unto God"

The English counterpart to the motet of the Catholic Church was called the "anthem." There were essentially two kinds of anthems: the "verse anthem," which contained music for both soloists and chorus, and the "full anthem," where which stands on its own with or without accompaniment or soloists.

William Byrd had the distinction of being the last composer of the Catholic faith to serve the Anglican Church of the first Queen Elizabeth. He was equally at home writing either Latin motets or English anthems. Byrd was entirely familiar with the latest polyphonic styles on the Continent, and was capable of applying them to his motets and anthems. In his English anthems, Byrd took extreme care in making sure the accented syllables of the words landed on strong beats in the music; he was particularly fastidious in this matter. And he attempted to make the music demonstrate the meaning of the text. For example, in his setting of the 81st Psalm, the first time all six voice parts sing simultaneously is when the Psalmist says "Sing loud to the God of Jacob."

VICTORIA MOTET (1548 - 1611) "O Magnum Mysterium"

Without question, the greatest Spanish composer of the Renaissance was Tomás Luis de Victoria. In fact, Victoria was among the greatest composers of church music in his time. His music was particularly unique in its intensity and mystical qualities. Victoria was born in the town of Avila (northwest of Madrid), also the home of the mystic St. Teresa.

As a very gifted singer, at the age of 14, Victoria was summoned from his hometown of Avila to Rome, where he entered a Jesuit College. There he studied Latin and in 1572, at the age of 24, he produced his first collection of motets. It seems certain that Victoria would have known Palestrina at this time, and quite possibly was his student. Victoria quickly moved up in the musical circles of the Roman Church. In 1583, after tiring of the pace of life in the sacred music of Rome, he requested of Spanish King Philip II, and was awarded, a musical position in Madrid. There he became musical director of an important convent, which, under his direction, became the elite artistic center of Spain for sacred music. He held forth there until his death in 1611.

The motet "O Magnum Mysterium" (O Great Mystery) is a good example of Victoria's skill in crafting in music the wonder of the virgin birth, occurring as it did in, of all places, a stable in front of animals. A translation of the Latin text reads "O great mystery and awesome sacrament, that animals should see the Lord, newly born." Victoria later combines this sense of wonder with a fleeting romantic duet between the soprano and bass lines on the words "O beata Virgo" (O Blessed Virgin). This sense of beauty combined with wonder is typical of much of the music of Tomás Luis de Victoria.

SERMISY PARISIAN CHANSON "Tant que vivray"

We've briefly visited musical Italy, England and Spain; we turn now to Renaissance France. Most of what we have heard and talked about this morning could be found in 16th-century France. What was new and unique there, however, was the attempt by French composers and publishers to find dynamic means of serving the poetic text through musical settings.

In this way, French composers were less concerned about the structural imitation found in the vocal lines of motets and masses so much as in bringing a fine poem forward as cleanly and clearly as possible. In this, they produced the "Parisian chanson." It has a quality we heard in the frottola by Josquin, with a clear-cut melody in the top voice, and all the voices moving together in a chordal texture. One musical characteristic of the Parisian chanson is that phrases often begin with the rhythm of one longer note followed by two shorter notes, each half the value of the first. In fact, in the chanson we have for you, virtually every one of the 18 phrases begins with that rhythmic idea. Further, each phrase ends with a long note in all voices. The composer is Claudin Sermisy (c. 1490 - 1562), a prolific composer who served the royal family in France.

MARENZIO MADRIGAL "Solo e pensoso"

Of all Renaissance musical forms, the most adventuresome was the Italian madrigal. It served, in fact, as the musical laboratory for experimentation during the 16th century. It is in the development of the Italian madrigal that we see the sources of stylistic changes that will lead us to the next musical era - the Baroque. Particularly from the mid-16th century forward, the madrigal became the most popular form of secular polyphony.

Madrigals were designed, not as concert music, but for the participation of informed amateur performers and were a source of entertainment in sophisticated households.

Madrigals came in all shapes and sizes - for three to twelve voice parts, they could be simple or flamboyant, light-hearted or sad, funny or serious, chaste or bawdy. In madrigals, there was something for every musical taste.

Many madrigal composers went to great extremes to devise music that vividly communicated the meaning of the text being sung. When music did this, it was said to be painting a musical picture of the text meaning - "text painting" - or it may have been termed "madrigalistic."

Luca Marenzio was among the composers who took this relationship of word and notes very seriously. There is scarcely a phrase in his madrigal "Solo e pensoso" where the music is not directly related to the words being sung. This madrigal is set for soprano, alto, 2 tenor parts, and bass. The first words we hear are "Solo e pensoso" - "alone and pensive." Marenzio sets the top part, the soprano, in a way different from the other four parts - in other words, it is alone and pensive. This part slowly ascends by half steps, covering a total of 15 pitches from G over an octave to A, before it begins its descent. Meanwhile, each of the remaining four voice lines, one after the other, have individually begun with another idea; a methodically descending line, until all five voice parts are involved. Each line of the text has its own musical identity.

DOWLAND LUTE SONG "Come Heavy Sleep"

Madrigal composers often provided musical accompaniments for playing on the lute. In fact, if there were not enough singers around, very often a madrigal could be sung simply by a solo voice accompanied by lute. Hence, we have the birth of the English lute song.

More than any other, the name of John Dowland is associated with the English lute song. We're not sure if Dowland was born in England or Ireland, but in any event, he made his way to the Continent and worked for a while in France and Germany, before traveling to Italy in an attempt to study with Luca Marenzio. He eventually became one of the most renowned musicians in Europe, though he had to wait until 1612 before realizing his desire to serve the English court.

Come Heavy Sleep dates from 1597 and is written both for solo voice with lute or for a vocal quartet. We began with the music of the Englishman John Dunstable, and we conclude with that of another, John Dowland.

MORLEY MADRIGAL "Now is the Month of Maying"

Most of the musical developments of the madrigal genre happened in Italy, but madrigal scores made their way to England and ignited interest there in the form. It wasn't until the publication entitled "Musica Transalpina" (1588) came along that serious interest in the genre began in England. Interest in the style by Queen Elizabeth also propelled the style forward in that country.

English madrigals were less experimental and ground-breaking when compared to the Italian, but they were generally light-hearted and very enjoyable for musical amateurs to perform.

Credit for establishing the madrigal solidly on English soil usually goes to Thomas Morley (1557 - 1602), who wrote two dozen madrigals in Italian and over a hundred in English.

Some English madrigals have a nonsense refrain of "Fa la la" (such as in "Deck the halls with boughs of holly, fa la la..."). This is a tradition carried over from the Italian madrigal-like "balletto," which incorporated a genteel dance done by the singers.