

Dufay (attrb)- Missa Puisque je vis
Loyset Compere - Omnium bonorum plena
Dufay - Ave regina celorum

Sleeve Notes

The Missa Puisque je vis has been on the fringes of the Dufay canon since 1963, when Laurence Feininger suggested the attribution in his edition of the Mass. Like many of Feininger's ascriptions to Dufay, this one was made on stylistic grounds which he promised to defend in a monograph that never, in the event, appeared. While his suggestions met with understandable skepticism, the discoveries of subsequent scholarship have garnered strong support for some of his ascriptions on the basis of external evidence. It seemed clear that his connoisseurship – especially considering the state of knowledge in the period in which he was working – was of a remarkably high order, and that any Feininger attribution is worthy of the closest consideration.

The aural impression of the Mass strongly underscores the plausibility of Feininger's suggestion: to listen to the Missa Puisque je vis against a background of familiarity with Dufay's musical language is to be immersed in a style that is instantly recognizable. And whether or not (as seems unlikely) we will ever be able to prove Dufay's authorship of this piece, those who admire his music will quickly appreciate that it is on a level entirely comparable to that of his firmly attributed late Masses. In particular, the Mass shares much with his Missa Ecce ancilla domini which, with a copying date in the early 1460s, is probably its close contemporary. Both Masses are cast in a texturally open and melodically lucid style of the greatest elegance and flexibility.

Like the majority of Masses of the later fifteenth century, the Missa Puisque je vis is built on the music of a courtly song praising an unattainable lady who, in the context of the Mass, becomes the Virgin, prime intercessor for human souls. The text of the song, whose tenor – in standard fashion – forms the tenor of the Mass, makes the double meaning clear: 'Ever since I saw the gracious glance and the beauty of my lady and mistress I am filled with joy and regain my happiness, relieved of all the ills I have suffered. Hoping that I may be ever better in her sight, all my life to serve her youthfulness ... I wish to hold to the amorous path and the road to love by the straightest route' The song survives in ten manuscripts, anonymously in all but one, where it is ascribed to Dufay himself.

The desire for the heavenly intercession of the Virgin again motivated the composition of our first motet: Compère's justly famous Omnium bonorum plena. Here again an ostensibly secular song is enlisted in the entreaty, in this case the tenor of Hayne van Ghizeghem's celebrated De tous biens plaine, which even shares its text incipit ('Full of all good things') with the Latin first line of the motet. While, as in the Mass, only the music of the song is heard in the motet (its tenor in the motet's tenor, while other voices allude to the song here and there), the double meaning of its absent text resounds just as

strongly: 'My mistress is full of all good things; everyone owes her the tribute of honour, for she is as perfect in virtue as was ever any goddess. Seeing her I have such joy that there is paradise in my heart. I have no care for other riches than to be her servant' In contrast to the Mass, though, the prayer for intercession in this motet is placed in the mouths of specific individuals: the singers who are named in its text, with Dufay, 'moon of all music and light of singers', heading up the list in pride of place. This prayer for the 'masters of songs' suggests, as Rob Wegman has noted, a sense of brotherhood and concern for mutual welfare in the manner of a confraternity, and while no certain occasion for a meeting between all these luminaries is known (David Fallows plausibly suggested a meeting of the Burgundian Court, the French Royal Court and the singers of Cambrai Cathedral at Cambrai in 1468) the motet attests to a powerful sense of commonality among 'those who sing'.

The following two tracks are fruits of our on-going search for motets evincing the virtuosity, sweep and quirkiness typified by the style of Antoine Busnois (see our earlier recordings on *A Marriage of England and Burgundy* (CDA67129) and 'Busnois: Missa L'homme armé, Domarto: Missa Spiritus almus, etc.' (CDA67319)). Though known from Petrucci's 1504 collection *Motetti C*, *Concede nobis domine* (the one non-Marian work on this disc) is clearly expressive of an earlier aesthetic. It was probably composed in the 1470s or '80s, around the same time as *Salve maris stella*, which is found uniquely in the Verona manuscript 755, a source copied in the 1480s. Whoever composed these striking works, they are linked – at least to contemporary ears – by a sense of drive and formal coherence rare before Josquin. Rather like the contemporary Venetian artistic strain dubbed by Berenson the 'Giorgionesque', these motets seem at the very least to be linked by emulation of the style of one of the fifteenth century's great originals. Both are presented here for the first time, *Concede nobis domine* with new words for its textless second half composed by Leofranc Holford-Strevens.

The same transition from general veneration to specific plea for intercession that shaped the text of *Omnium bonorum plena* and so many other Marian motets also characterizes *Salve maris stella*. The cryptic words of this motet pray for Mary's mediation on behalf of a 'true hero' named as 'Charolus' (in the tenor and bass) and 'Henricus' (in the top part) whose plea, to judge from references in the text, has some association with the sea and safe maritime travel. While the motet may have originated as a prayer for safe passage on a pilgrimage, Rob Wegman has suggested to me a more specific possible scenario in the person of Henry Tudor, the future Henry VII of England, and the occasion of his invasion of England in 1485. Since Henry had been living in Brittany for some years, his assault on his intended kingdom involved the crossing of the English Channel, the putative source of the seafaring motifs in the text of the motet. His ultimately successful venture (ending in the death of Richard III on Bosworth Field) was preceded by an abortive one two years previously, when stormy seas had thwarted his attack, as recounted by the contemporary chronicler Polydore Vergil (I thank Professor Wegman for this material; I have modernized the English):

...Henry...had prepared an army of 5,000 Bretons and furnished a navy of 15 ships

[which] began to sail with prosperous wind the 6th ides of October in the year of health [1483]...But a little before [a] sudden tempest arose, with which he was so afflicted that his ships were constrained by force of a cruel gale of wind to turn their course [to] one way [and] another; [some] of them were blown back into Normandy, others into Brittany. The ship [in which] Henry was, with one other, tossed all the night long with the waves, came at the last very early in the morning, when the wind grew calm, upon the south coast of [England] ... From here Earl Henry, viewing afar off all the shore beset with soldiers, which King Richard ... had everywhere [placed], gave open commandment that not one man of them all should [land] before the [remainder] of the ships should come together ... But ... after that he [saw] none of his own ships within view, [he] hoisted up sail, and with prosperous wind came into Normandy, so that a man may think the very blast of the wind drove him back from danger. (Polydore Vergil, *Anglia Historia* (London: J B Nichols, 1846), p 210-11)

Such an experience would certainly have provided ample motivation, on the occasion of Henry's next attempt, for a prayer to the Virgin to 'Pray to [her] son that ... he may drive away the reproaches that the sea of the world now heaps up' and lead the would-be king to 'safe shores'. If such was indeed the motet's aim, then it would seem its prayers were answered: Vergil informs us that:

... after he had made his prayers to God that he might have a happy and prosperous journey, he [set sail] from the mouth of the Seine with [just] two thousand armed men and a few ships, the calends of August, and with a soft southern wind. (p 216)

This hypothesis does nothing, of course, to explain the presence of the name 'Charolus' in two of the voice parts, though this could reflect, as Wegman has proposed, an attempt to adapt the motet for another magnate, for example the contemporary Charles VIII of France.

The disc's most personal invocation to the Virgin is its last: Dufay's own. This sung prayer has long occupied a prominent place in western music history on account of the deeply expressive nature of its utterance, clearly audible to us more than five centuries after its composition. Its fame also stems from the allusion to its most personal moment in the *Agnus Dei* of the same composer's *Missa Ave regina celorum* and (as argued in my sleeve notes to our recording of that work on CDA66854), the *Gloria* of his *Mass for St Anthony of Padua*. Though composed by the mid-1460s, when it was copied into a choirbook of Dufay's home Cathedral of Cambrai, it was clearly conceived from the beginning with a view to the composer's end, as a personal plea to shorten his time in purgatory. This is vividly expressed through Dufay's famous request, in his will, that the motet be sung by the choirboys and three men at his bedside at the point of his death, a request that, sadly, as we learn from his executors' account, could not be fulfilled 'due to the brevity of time'. The performance took place instead the next day as part of the composer's *exequies*. Even more startling than the personal tropes, added to the standard words of the Marian antiphon, is the nature of their musical settings. This is particularly true of the latter of the two, where – almost a century before the earliest documented equation between the minor mode and 'sadness' – the composer without warning suddenly switches into a dark minor sonority with notated melodic diminished fourths. It

is almost as if Dufay is consciously appealing to the prayers – and sensibilities – of a future age, one which, like presumably his own, could not fail to miss the poignancy of his utterance.

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