

GUILLAUME DUFAY (?1397-1474) Mass for St Anthony Abbot
GILLES DE BINCHOIS (c1400-1460) Motets

Sleeve Notes

This recording presents two contrasting works – a ten-movement plenary mass (Ordinary and Propers) perhaps by Guillaume Dufay; and *Nove cantum melodie*, the only surviving isorhythmic motet by Dufay's great contemporary Gilles Binchois – both of which were originally written and performed in honour of St Anthony Abbot (also known as St Anthony 'of Vienne' or 'of the Viennois', after the region south-east of Lyon where his medieval shrine, and the founding community of the Antonine order, were situated). The texts and music of the mass celebrate the feast of St Anthony (17 January) as it would have been sung in the singers' chapel at Cambrai Cathedral during the later decades of the fifteenth century. The motet, by contrast, addresses Anthony as the name-saint of a new-born Burgundian prince, at whose ceremonial baptism in January 1431 it was first sung. This grand and beautiful four-voice work (here presented in a newly reconstructed version) is complemented by further Latin-texted works by Binchois: another motet, written for three voices in a gentler but no less beautiful style, on the theme of the Cross and the Holy Lance; and three mass movements (Kyrie, Sanctus, Agnus Dei) taken from the relatively large yet little-known corpus of sacred music by a musician known primarily as one of the very greatest of chanson composers.

* * *

In his will, Dufay bequeathed two manuscripts of his own music to the chapel of St Stephen at Cambrai Cathedral, the great ecclesiastical foundation in northern France where he had been trained and educated and to which he later returned as a resident canon. Cambrai had in a very real sense made Dufay what he was, musically and intellectually, however far afield the middle stages of his brilliant international career might have taken him. And so it is fitting that he should have remembered the cathedral singers (whose 'home chapel' this was), as a musical body with a strong sense of collective identity, when making provision for the destiny of both his soul and his compositions after his death.

We know that one of the manuscripts contained the Mass for St Anthony of Padua, the other the three-voice Requiem and the Mass for St Anthony Abbot. Neither manuscript has survived, but it seems possible that two of the three works have. The 'Padua' mass was first identified as such more than twenty years ago by David Fallows. In the manuscript sources it exists not as a single entity but in two separate parts, neither of them provided with an identifying title, each written in a different place within the famous group of fifteenth-century codices preserved at Trent in northern Italy, but both fortunately identifiable by other means. (The complete mass has been recorded by The Binchois Consort on Hyperion CDA66854.) And although no attributed copy of the Mass for St Anthony Abbot has come down to us, an anonymous *Missa Beati Anthonii* found in one of the other Trent manuscripts corresponds exactly to the liturgical details of the feast as it was celebrated in the singers' chapel at Cambrai during the second half of the

fifteenth century, as Alejandro Planchart has demonstrated. Its Proper movements use the precise combination of texts and melodies found only in the chapel chant books and, it would seem, nowhere else. This valuable evidence, plus the fact that the melodic echoes of what we are coming to recognize as Dufay's mature three-voice style seem so direct and at times so striking, means that the speculative question of identifying this anonymous Trent composition with the 'other' St Anthony mass by Dufay becomes a matter of real possibility and excitement.

Listeners will of course judge for themselves. If the audible echoes of Dufay are often beautifully – indeed, movingly – clear, there are also passages where the case seems less clear-cut. This however could easily stem from our as yet imperfect grasp of the more unfamiliar subtleties, and above all the sheer variety, of the composer's later three-voice style. For although it has sometimes been assumed that in later life he largely abandoned three-part writing in his sacred music in favour of the more 'advanced' possibilities of four-part texture, it now seems certain that this picture is an over-simplification. (Quite apart from the two St Anthony masses, the lost Requiem mentioned above is known to have been composed for three voices, and also to have been a product of his old age.) It has also been suggested, not implausibly, by Planchart that the St Anthony Abbot mass could conceivably have been the work of a brilliant pupil or disciple at Cambrai, someone well versed in the master's style from both the singer's and the composer's point of view. Yet more important than its probable authorship, in the last resort, are its unmistakable beauty and clarity. Listening for living traces of Dufay is pleasurable in itself and a rewarding exercise in connoisseurship. But in the end it is the sustained musical fascination, the flow and translucency of texture, and the sheer inventiveness of line and rhythm that will envelop the attentive listener and carry him or her right inside the sound-world of this remarkable work.

The Mass for St Anthony Abbot is a three-voice plenary mass comprising the sections of the Ordinary together with movements of the Proper (Introit, Gradual, Alleluia, Offertory) which set the texts of the day, and thus mark the special character of the individual feast. The absence in the source of both the Kyrie and the Communion has been compensated for in Planchart's edition used for this performance, in the first case by reusing the Agnus music to the words of the Kyrie, and in the second by the inclusion of a contemporary setting of the appropriate Communion from elsewhere in the Trent codices. The Proper movements use the prescribed plainchants, which are flexibly rhythmicized and elaborated in the highest voice-part, and presented as long arcs of melody that unfold concurrently with the freely invented lower voices. The result is a free flow of polyphony of generally contemplative character that is tautened, and given focus and momentum, by the beautifully judged interaction of the vocal lines, in particular by their rhythmic interplay. The Ordinary movements, too, are conceived in a freely unfolding style that has no overtly dramatic or declamatory gestures, but is driven forward both by the careful dovetailing of the parts, with their incisive offset rhythms and melodic independence, and also by the skilful control of the cadences, in terms of their relative force and varied placement.

Beyond the moments of strong demarcation which come with the section breaks, there is one clearly audible structural marker: the top voice opens each of the five Ordinary movements with the same beautifully crafted 'motto opening', the first segment of which begins with the descending tetrachord F–E–D–C before expanding to fill the entire middle octave, C–C, of its range (the total compass of the part extends three notes either side of this). Along with a few other characteristic melodic ideas, this archetypically simple pattern recurs in a variety of figurative guises during the course of the work, though it does so more as part of the ever-changing ebb and flow of the piece than as a 'motive' or 'theme' in the modern sense. This observation further serves to highlight the way in which this style, far from projecting its effects with the kind of self-dramatizing insistence we might expect from the experience of later music, instead allows its ideas to proliferate with little concern for direct repetition or other similarly clear-cut auditory cues. It aims, rather, at a maximum of variety and invention (Tinctoris's famed *varietas*) within an overall textural ideal of unforced clarity and balance. This of course doesn't mean that it refuses ever to adopt a more demonstrative tone of voice. On the contrary, it goes through passages of melodic and rhythmic intensification, and even presents flashes of brilliance and moments of grandeur, from time to time. (The 'Cum Sancto Spiritu' at the end of the Gloria, the brilliant high-lying melody of the 'Et ponam' section of the Gradual, and the 'et vitam venturi' conclusion to the Credo are cases in point.) But these serve precisely to reinforce, by means of contrast, the listener's cumulative impression of an infinitely subtle, endlessly inventive play of sonority in which technical and expressive means have been mastered with elegance and ease.

Binchois's four-voice *Nove cantum melodie* was written for a grand ceremonial event, the baptism of a new male heir to the duchy of Burgundy in January 1431. It was therefore conceived as an appropriately festive adornment to the occasion, and would perhaps have been sung by the full complement of Philip the Good's chapel singers, all of whom are named in its text – though it is equally possible that, as here, it would have been sung by a group of soloists. Either way, Binchois would have been at the very centre of the performance, as singer and surely also as director. The child was to be baptized Antoine, whence the association with the 'guardian' figure of St Anthony Abbot (and with St Anthony of Padua, who, as a further namesake, is also addressed within the text). The motet is based on a repeating isorhythmic tenor pattern which underpins the whole edifice, serving to ground and structure the music across the dynamic shifts of metre that help to propel the composition through its three linked, continuously unfolding sections. Full performance of this work has hitherto been precluded by the absence of two voices from the first section. These have now been reconstructed and it is in this newly completed form that the work is recorded here. Its overall proportions are controlled by the segmentation and layout of the tenor melody. Binchois's manipulation not only of the notes themselves and of their individual durations, but also of their division into extended rhythmic groups separated by carefully planned and measured gaps, sets up the whole temporal framework of the piece. And in doing so he also sketches in the harmonic (that is, cadential) background against which the polyphony is composed. The fifteen pitches of this 'stretched cantus firmus' are taken from the first part of the Kyrie 'in simplici die', though quite why Binchois should have selected a Kyrie for this purpose remains a mystery. But whatever his precise motivation may have been, the musical pattern derived

from the (presumed) chant original is miraculously well-shaped and ideally suited to its structural and expressive function within the finished composition. In the performing edition prepared for this recording, the wordless motet tenor has been supplied with a short, freely invented Latin dictum of fifteen syllables, one to a note, in praise of St Anthony.

Drawing on both the northern Franco-Flemish and, more importantly, the English tradition of motet-writing (in contrast to the strongly Italianate character of most of Dufay's grand motet output at this period), *Nove cantum* nevertheless goes beyond its models in adopting three-part texture, in place of the more usual duos, for the polyphonic sections between the tenor entries. This in itself would make the motet striking and original, but Binchois's inventiveness goes further. In the reduced-voice sections – which though melodically free are also controlled by isorhythm – he writes music that, in almost virtuosic defiance of the rhythmic schemes to which they are bound, is fluid and propulsive, and so provides a striking foil to the more solid, even monumental cast of the full four-voice sections structured around the sustained tenor notes. This fundamental contrast serves to energize and drive the whole composition, and shows how a skilled composer, while working in a craftsmanlike way to fulfil his professional functions and tasks, and drawing on the full range of received techniques and approaches available to him, might arrive at artistic solutions of astonishing subtlety and complexity without obscuring the brilliant simplicity of the basic idea.

Domitor Hectoris is composed in a quite different style. It falls into two sections and exhibits varied duo combinations between the three individual voices, as well as the full trio texture. The rise and fall of the vocal lines is handled with Binchois's customary fluency and intelligence, and, as in many of the songs, the meditative plangency of the idiom is shot through with distinctive melodic and rhythmic features which allow the music to grow and intensify without undermining its essentially poetic and lyric mode of utterance. The sense of sheer ease and flow is seductive, but also to an extent deceptive. The melodic contours are in fact delicately controlled and the music's trajectory carefully plotted, yet without any sense of inappropriate rigour or constraint. The same goes for the overall pacing and for the expressive 'points of arrival' within the course of the piece, which all seem quite effortless but are in fact beautifully – and surely quite consciously – judged. All in all, Binchois's subtle rhetorical expansion of the motet's 'lyric moment' has been effected with a sense of naturalness that artfully conceals the mechanics of elaboration. Indeed, Binchois had no equal as a melodist in the fifteenth century, and this is as apparent here as in his *rondeaux* and *ballades*. The motet text is a subtly woven tissue of ideas and images elaborated around the concepts of the Cross and the Holy Lance, and their symbolic place in the scheme of Christian redemption. Though the theological and symbolic associations are complex and ramified, the poem itself is lucidly expressed, with a beautiful simplicity and concision, and shows, like Binchois's music, an exquisite sense of expressive tact and decorum.

The three mass movements are also written in an essentially lyric idiom which, while being notably concise, nevertheless shows a clear sense of musical shape and contour, as well as a liking for occasional harmonic twists and moments of melodic daring. These

details serve to give point and focus to the polyphony, and endow it with a sense of eventfulness within its relatively short span. The movements show a close functional and stylistic relationship to the 'workaday' plainchant idiom with which every musician of the era would have been familiar, and with which his whole sense of melodic profile would have been imbued. But Binchois shows a special sensitivity to the ways in which polyphonic 'interval music' of this kind can be made to subtly extend and intensify, by harmonic means, the aura that surrounds monophonic lines, while still staying close to both the letter and the spirit of the chant melodies. The Kyrie 'in simplici die' in particular has a beautiful – and beautifully simple – chant, found nowhere else except for the fragment used in *Nove cantum melodie*, and which in its (reconstructed) *alternatim* form shows a clear musical growth through the series of nine invocations to the final extended polyphonic 'Kyrie eleison'. From their presentation in the manuscript sources, where they are provided with the plainsong intonations heard here, the *Sanctus/Agnus* pair might well appear to be chant-based too. But, unusually for Binchois in such movements, they too lack a known chant model, and in this case it is much less easy to decide whether or not the music does in fact refer to such a model (though the intonations at least should in theory be traceable). If, in contrast to the exciting complexities of *Nove cantum melodie* and to the poise and flow of *Domitor Hectoris*, these mass movements of their very nature tend to show us the succinct, even aphoristic side of Binchois's art, they are nevertheless expressive of an idiom which, within its economy and concision, also implies more than it states, and thus is able to achieve an unobtrusive sophistication in even its simplest lyric utterances.

A note on St Anthony Abbot

The two St Anthonys are often confused today, and perhaps more surprisingly were sometimes invoked together (also a potential source of confusion) in the Middle Ages. This doubtless occurred chiefly because of the 'kinship' of their shared name. Yet such kinship, however arbitrary it might appear to us, was highly valued throughout the medieval period and beyond. For all social classes from peasants to princes the name-saint was an important figure, one frequently thought of as a kind of patron or guardian, and certainly as a privileged interlocutor and advocate in the realm of prayer. The affective bond linking an individual to his or her name-saint was thus a precious, even intimate one that was keenly felt. And the observance of the name-day in connection with the relevant saint's feast was to remain a standard mode of celebration and of formal ceremonial festivity throughout Catholic Europe right through into the early nineteenth century. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries particularly, name-day celebrations at princely courts would often have been the occasion for important musical events and special commissions, including cantatas, serenatas and even Metastasian operas. And in general the appeal to particular saints was felt to be an integral part of daily life, both public and private, throughout this period – something that moreover was expressed in a variety of ways both in art and in social practice. Polyphonic pieces written for saints' days or for special votive celebrations, or even just for reasons of personal devotion, were the late medieval and early Renaissance equivalent of such cultural expressions. And both Dufay's mass (if it is his) and Binchois's motet fit into this pattern in their rather

different ways – the former being more liturgical, the latter more ceremonial in emphasis. But the figure of St Anthony is central to both.

St Anthony Abbot (c251–356) was a man of many facets. A holy man and a hermit, he was perhaps the most famous of all the Egyptian desert fathers, a seeker after truth and a lover of the sacred texts, a contemplative who also taught and so attracted many disciples as well as religious tourists. He was in fact an all-round exponent of 'heroic virtue' as the Middle Ages understood it. As such, it is perhaps not surprising that he should have become the spiritual forefather and figurehead of Western monasticism, though he himself never founded an order. His life is unusually well documented, beginning with the famous first-hand biography written by St Athanasius, who had known him personally, though this did not of course in any way preclude the accumulation of legends from early on. But his period of great fame in the medieval West occurred only later, after the supposed translation of his relics in the eleventh century via Alexandria and Constantinople to their eventual resting place at La Motte St-Didier, south-east of Vienne, where the Antonine order was later established. (The place is now known as Saint-Antoine en Viennois or St-Antoine l'Abbaye, in the department of the Isère: it lies due south of Berlioz's birth-place, and is on the western fringes of the region around Grenoble, which was Messiaen's spiritual home and where he spent most of his summer vacations composing.) The miraculous healing powers of the relics made of the shrine a place of great pilgrimage, and this, together with the charitable and curative activities of the Brothers Hospitallers who bore his name, made him one of the most beloved and admired of saints. He was generally depicted in the garb of the medieval order, and, in addition to sequences of images depicting scenes from his life, the more colourful incidents such as the famous temptations in the desert offered visual artists great scope for vivid and striking effects – famously Bosch and Bruegel (the latter inspiring Flaubert), and also Matthias Grünewald in parts of the great Isenheim altarpiece now in Colmar (which inspired the great scene of visionary torment in Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler*). But his primary significance to the Middle Ages was as a spiritual warrior who 'fought manfully', as we are twice reminded in the Mass for St Anthony Abbot. These words appear in the 'Vox de caelo' text which is used for a short independent antiphon by Binchois, as well as for the Alleluia and (in part) for the Offertory of the mass. It was one of the best-known verbal tags from the great fund of anecdotes about the saint, both factual and legendary, which survive in the various hagiographical and biographical sources. It occupies a prominent place, for instance, in the hugely popular *Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Voragine, one of the most widely copied of all medieval texts, and one of the earliest books printed by Caxton.

Anthony of Padua (c1193–1231, canonized 1232) on the other hand was a figure of medieval rather than late-antique history. He was born in Lisbon and was one of the most eminent personalities of the early Franciscan movement. He was active as a missionary, and this activity was linked with the development of his legendary skills as a preacher. In pragmatic fashion he first began sermonizing 'the infidel' and promulgating the virtues of the Christian gospel. But after his fairly swift move to Italy he continued to preach with tremendous energy and drive, seemingly all the time and everywhere, even to the fishes (as Mahler remembered in the *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* songs), exhorting, persuading

and admonishing according to the needs and dictates of the occasion. In later years he settled at Padua where his shrine was established, and where the great basilica named in his honour, which survives today, was built.

The *Missa Sancti Anthonii de Padua* was probably composed around 1450 or slightly before (the surviving version was copied in the mid-1450s, according to Peter Wright's latest dating of its sources). We learn from the composer's executors' account that it had already been in use at Cambrai for the celebration of the saint's feast on 13 June for a considerable time prior to his death. The will directs that the mass should be sung annually in his memory, for the salvation of his own and others' souls (those close to him, by ties of blood or friendship). On the other hand the 'Vienne' mass seems rather to have been an offering by Dufay to the singers' chapel as a whole – a broader gesture with more of a collective and indeed social intention, in contrast to the highly personalized intention of the 'Padua' mass. They both, however, embody and express in their different ways the ethos – as well as the sheer skill – of the community of musicians who surely first sang them and continued to do so, we may safely assume, for several decades.

A note on anonymity, authorship and attribution

The medieval world was never so wholly given over to anonymity in art as historians have at times implied. There are enough surviving artists' signatures in manuscript illuminations and on portal sculptures or picture frames, as well as evidence of careful attributions in at least some musical sources, to make this clear. And yet it cannot be denied that most art was indeed sent out into the world without a name attached, in and for itself, whether it was intended in the first place to be craftsmanlike and functional or to make an individualized aesthetic statement, or else (as seems in most cases likely) some more subtle combination of the two. Faced with the apparent paradox of the free, relatively unconstrained appreciation that is possible with anonymous music (and seems to be encouraged by the facts of fifteenth-century transmission), and the aural filter which inevitably comes into play when reading or listening with a view to its attribution, what might be an appropriate response to a fifteenth-century piece such as the present one for which the authorship is a matter of debate?

As I have suggested above, it is the music of the St Anthony Abbot mass which primarily commands our attention – for its own sake, for its intrinsic nature and imaginative qualities, rather than specifically as a witness to Dufay's authorial hand, however interesting and instructive it may be when it is perceived as an expression of his art and as a marker in his stylistic development. Giving oneself wholly to the musical experience in depth and detail will in the end prove more fully involving than the search for particular traits of style, however sophisticated and fine-grained the process of detection. Thus the perception of beauty and clarity will ultimately come before the quest for authorship. Yet that said, no one interested in the musical evolution of the fifteenth century would want to ignore the distinctive contribution of keen and inventive minds towards the great collective flowering of its polyphonic art. And to enquire after the intrinsic nature of the St Anthony Abbot mass, even as musical interpreters and listeners

rather than as historians, is implicitly to begin to seek out the relation of the distinctive to the normative, of 'central' to 'subsidiary' styles, and so on.

Yet it is also possible to look for evidence beyond the confines of such complex and delicately balanced technical and interpretative questions. Given the cultural and institutional priorities of a place such as Cambrai it appears unthinkable that, if so eminent a figure as Dufay had specifically composed and then donated a mass of his own to the singers' chapel for ongoing use, another composer might have come along and written another mass of exactly the same type for the same liturgical space, in direct competition with the great man during his final years. However talented and ambitious, however much of a disciple or of a favoured pupil this presumed singer-composer might have been, a gesture of this kind would surely have been construed as at best irreverent and at worst insulting. And what was true during the master's lifetime would have been even more so after his death. It seems very unlikely that anyone would have been allowed to upstage or supplant the revered Dufay at Cambrai, least of all at the heart of St Stephen's chapel where he was himself buried, where his memory was invoked throughout the year, and where his presence was regularly conjured up in the constantly renewed singing of his music – a physically immediate yet also ghostly presence for those that had known the man, or knew his reputation. Viewed in this light, the mass must surely be Dufay's.

A note on sources and performing editions

The performing edition of the *Missa Sancti Anthonii Viennensis* (or *Abbatis*) has been edited by Alejandro Enrique Planchart from the anonymously transmitted plenary mass in the MS Trent 89, fols. 59'–70' (copied probably c1461–3, according to the latest dating), with the following additions: (i) the Communion 'Orabat Dei famulus' (missing in Tr89) taken from the group of anonymous Mass Propers for St Anthony Abbot in Trent 88 (fols. 181v–182r), and (ii) a 'new' Kyrie (also missing in Tr89) contrafacted from the extant *Agnus Dei*, the Kyrie words being underlaid to the *Agnus* music to provide the missing movement. Such sharing of material between Kyrie and *Agnus* is sometimes encountered in complete fifteenth- and sixteenth-century mass settings. (It is worth noting in passing that, apart from 'Orabat Dei famulus', the group of Tr88 Propers does not use the texts found in the Cambrai chant books, and so cannot have originated there.)

Performing editions of the Binchois works have been prepared by Philip Weller, who has also reconstructed the first part of the motet *Nove cantum melodie*, and devised a ninefold alternatim version of the musically related Kyrie 'in simplici die' (probably meaning 'for the celebration of Mass on the occasion of a simplex feast' rather than just 'normal, everyday'). He has also added Latin words where necessary, including a text for the motet's *cantus firmus*, praising St Anthony in a manner in keeping with that of the authentic texts, while at the same time adding appropriate vocal articulations for the singing of the tenor line, not least by ensuring the coincidence of the tautly focused French 'u' vowel with the long held Gs that define the shape of this foundational voice. The motet and the Kyrie survive in manuscript sources now in Modena, Trent and Aosta (*Domitor Hectoris* is also preserved in Aosta). No chant source for the Kyrie has yet been

discovered. But the general contours and other melodic features of Binchois's tenor part (phrase incipits, internal repetition, musical rhyme) make it clear that this is indeed a Kyrie chant. Quite what its status and provenance might be is hard to say. But it could be an example of a relatively late chant, composed maybe in the fourteenth or even the fifteenth century, which did not gain wide currency and which has therefore not survived elsewhere (though it is more than possible that a fifteenth-century or earlier concordance in a chant source will still be found).

The various Latin texts have been edited, reconstructed and translated by Philip Weller. Leo Franc Holford-Strevens generously brought his eye and ear for good as well as ingenious emendations to bear on the words of *Nove cantum melodie* during the crucial second phase of work, prior to the final stage of reconstruction.

Philip Weller © 2005

Track Listing

Guillaume Dufay (attr.) (?1397–1474) **Mass for St Anthony Abbot [50'50]**

1. Introit *Scitote quoniam mirificavit* [5'25]
2. Kyrie [2'53]
3. Gloria [8'34]
4. Gradual *Thronus eius sicut sol* [4'16]
5. Alleluia with verse *Vox de caelo* [5'27]
6. Credo [9'09]
7. Offertory *Inclito Anthonio Spiritus Sanctus dixit* [3'05]
8. Sanctus [6'06]
9. Agnus Dei [3'22]
10. Communion *Orabat Dei famulus* (anon.) [2'02]

Gilles Binchois (c1400–1460)

11. **Domitor Hectoris** [4'07]
12. **Kyrie 'in simplici die'** [2'16]
13. **Sanctus** [4'42]
14. **Agnus Dei** [3'21]
15. **Nove cantum melodie** [5'00]