

## **GUILLAUME DUFAY (c1400-1474)**

### **Music for St James the Greater**

#### Sleeve Notes

St James the Greater occupied a role of great significance in the medieval imagination. Apostle of Christ, foster son of the Virgin Mary and brother of St John the Evangelist, James was also, as the text of Dufay's motet *Rite majorem* testifies, one of three witnesses of the Transfiguration of Christ and the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was also the first Bishop of Jerusalem and the first apostle to die for the Faith, being put to the sword by Herod Agrippa. For medieval men and women, though, he was first and foremost the patron saint of pilgrims, and Santiago de Compostela, the location of his shrine in north-eastern Spain, yielded in importance as a focus of pilgrimage only to the Holy Land and Rome.

Given the known details of James's life, it might be wondered how he came to be associated with Spain. In fact, the tradition linking him with that country began many centuries after he had died. It seems to have originated in the ninth century, and was explained by various legends, of which the following two were among those which gained widespread currency. The first holds that, after death, James was placed in a boat with its sails set and which the next day arrived on the shores of Spain. A still more fantastical tradition has the Saint's relics miraculously conveyed from Jerusalem to Spain in a marble ship. The ship was spotted entering port by a knight, whose horse took fright and plunged into the sea. Saving himself by boarding the ship, the knight stumbled upon the body of the Saint. He also, so the story goes, found his clothes covered in scallop shells, one of the traditional symbols of Saint James, and one which is commonly found on the tombs of pilgrims who had made the pilgrimage to Santiago.

Vital though such legends were, however, for sustaining the aura surrounding Saint James, the high status of his shrine really grew out of its association with Charlemagne: according to a legend first documented in the twelfth century—more than three centuries after Charlemagne's death—St James appeared to the King in a dream. He complained that his bones were lying unrecognised and unvenerated in Santiago, at that time still under the control of the moors. James revealed the road, marked out by stars, to Santiago and charged Charlemagne to go there and liberate his shrine from the infidel.

Imbued in this way with powerful political and Christian significance, the shrine of St James grew enormously in importance as the Saint became a symbol of the defence of Christianity against the moors. By the twelfth century his veneration was fully established, as we learn from the famous *Codex Calixtinus*:

..it is a source of wonder and gladness to see the choirs of pilgrims in perpetual vigil by the venerable altar of Santiago: Teutons in one place, Franks in another, Italians in another....Some play the cittern, others lyres, kettledrums, flutes, flageolets, trumpets, harps, violins, British or Welsh crwth, some singing with citterns, others accompanied by divers instruments.

By the time of Dufay the cult had been in full swing for more than three hundred years, backed up by myriad legends of miracles, and, not least, by powerful political and religious support. Pilgrimage to Compostela was considered desirable for anybody who was anybody in late medieval Europe; the journey made by Chaucer's Wife of Bath is emblematic of its great popularity in England. Remnants of such veneration can be seen in medieval churches today in the scallop-adorned tombs of pilgrims and in medieval stained glass windows depicting the Saint himself as a pilgrim, complete with pilgrim's hat with scallop motif, pilgrim's staff, or 'bourdon' (more on this below) and pilgrim's purse, or 'skrip'.

It is not difficult, then, to see why Dufay might have written a Mass for St James; much more difficult is to ascertain the specific circumstances where and for whom. Various theories have been advanced, though none as yet proved. Margaret Bent will shortly present the substance of a plausible theory that the Mass could have been associated with Pietro Emiliani, Bishop of Vicenza in the late 1420s, around the time the one surviving copy of the complete Mass was made in the Veneto, and possibly in Vicenza itself. Emiliani, who may have been closely associated with the compilation of the manuscript in question, could have had the Mass composed from scratch or customised by the composition of the Alleluia, the only movement, its text and chant otherwise unknown, whose text specifically mentions St James. Bent has ascertained that Emiliani paid for pilgrims to go to Compostela to venerate the Saint on his behalf, providing a likely scenario for the compilation of the Mass.

An older view held that the Mass could have been composed for St Jacques de la Boucherie in Paris, a church well known as a starting point for the pilgrimage to Compostela. More significantly, this was the church where Robert Auclou, whose name and position appears in acrostic in Dufay's motet *Rite majorem* (also performed on this recording) was curate from 1420. *Rite majorem*, its colourful text recounting well-known miracles of Saint James (see for example Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend*), has long been associated with the Mass on the basis of the clearly audible stylistic similarities between the two works. Barbara Hagg has pointed out the possible further significance of the fact that, following the Mass which they would have attended before departing from the church for Compostela, pilgrims would have had their staffs, or 'bourdons', blessed. Thus this final item of ritual before departure would have followed the communion, whose text is set in Dufay's Mass in the parallel technique known as *fauxbourdon*. The possible punning significance of the use of this technique in a Mass for the pilgrim saint has not been lost on scholars in the past, but a scenario such as this would give it a powerful extra charge.

However, the liturgical evidence of the choice of propers in Dufay's Mass is at best equivocal, and Hagg has suggested rather that Dufay may have composed the Mass for Auclou elsewhere, possibly in Rome or Bologna. The latter was proposed some years ago by Alejandro Planchart as a possible site for the composition of the Mass. Certainly Dufay and Auclou, whose careers were further intertwined through coincident associations with the Papal Court, Cambrai Cathedral and St Donatian's, Bruges, were both in Bologna in the later 1420s in the orbit of the papal legate there, Cardinal Louis

Aleman. Thus the motet could have been composed in Bologna, either with the Mass or as a later appendage to it.

Much has traditionally been made of the stylistic variety encompassed by the nine movements of this Mass 'cycle', something which has been seen as a likely reflection of composition in a series of stylistic 'layers'. Such a division seems to be articulated by the Mass's manuscript sources: the first three Ordinary movements—albeit in somewhat garbled readings—in the Trent Codices, the complete Ordinary (labelled 'de apostolis') in the Aosta Codex, and, finally, the entire Mass in the Bologna manuscript Q15. Further grist for the same mill has been drawn from Dufay's varied approaches to borrowed chants: tenor statements of appropriate chant melodies in the Sanctus and Agnus Dei versus absence of obvious chant references in the first three Ordinary movements (with one exception: each third section of the Kyrie paraphrases the Kyrie chant *Cunctipotens*, a melody usually associated with feasts of apostles). By contrast, the first three Proper sections, which are generally more elaborate than their Ordinary counterparts, are each built solidly on chant paraphrases in the tenor. Finally, outside the whole scheme stands the fauxbourdon Communion, its chant laid out in parallel fourths in the two upper parts.

However, the mill has undoubtedly been driven by anachronistic assumptions: as David Fallows has noted, establishment of standardized procedures for musically linking the movements of a polyphonic Mass was still some way off at the time the *Missa Sancti Jacobi* was composed. It may, rather, be more fruitful to see the Mass's stylistic diversity as a reflection of liturgical considerations, Proper movements separating Ordinary movements, with, in turn, the Sanctus and Agnus Dei, parts of the Eucharist per se, standing apart from the Ordinary sections (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo) which preceded it. Such a view may draw support from the presence of the sort of brief repeated ideas identified by Fallows at various points in the Mass, precisely the sort of motivic common ground which one might expect to have resulted from an uninterrupted span of composition.

Diverting in the abstract, however, concern with such details dissipates as soon as we enter the sound world of the music. To experience the profundity of Dufay's Mass, with (at least to modern voices and ears) its broader consistency of vision, is quickly to see surface detail blend into the whole, to the point that it almost seems prudent simply to let the music 'speak for itself.'

A few observations will suffice. The texture of the *Missa Sancti Jacobi* is typically one of finely-chiselled rhetorical gestures passing from voice to voice. Always far above the routine, this sometimes, as in the Alleluia, rises to a pitch of heightened eloquence. As in the same composer's Mass for St Anthony of Padua, though, it is in the Offertory, the moment at which we are ushered into the liturgy of the Eucharist proper, where this expression reaches its summit. As in all the most deeply affecting music of its age, the pacing in this movement seems wonderfully judged, the extraordinary interlocking 'triadic' figures between the upper voices at 'sonus eorum' providing a fitting prelude to the concluding alternations of shared melodic phrases on the '[verba] eorum' which brings this remarkable movement to a close. At the other end of the expressive scale, and also as in the St Anthony Mass, it is in the Osanna of the Sanctus where this deep

contemplation is finally released in what are perhaps the most expansive musical gestures of the Mass. It is surely not too fanciful to see in the *Missa Sancti Jacobi* a mirror of the spiritual journey of the Mass itself, from dignified preparation through mystical enactment to fulfilment and final peroration.

It is possible that the motet *Rite majorem* was intended for a liturgical performance in close association with that of the Mass: Planchart has observed that the text of the motet, with its 'life and miracles' format, closely mirrors the similar text of the Prose for St Nicholas, *Sospitati dedit*. A parody of the latter frequently did duty as the Vespers prose for St James, and it may be that a similar purpose was envisaged for *Rite majorem*.

This is a tightly structured motet, its lower voices presenting the same melodic succession and two statements of a rhythmic pattern in each half, while an isorhythmic scheme heard twice in the upper duo in the first half is exchanged for another in the second. The organisation goes further than this, though: the two upper voices in the second half exchange the melodic contours they had outlined in the first half, while at the same time introducing a pervasively imitative idiom which had been entirely absent up to the half-way point. Controlled though it may be, however, the motet is in no way austere: far from encasing it in an unyielding armature, its structure gives rise rather to an inwardness and concentration which lend it a deeply absorbing quality.

Compared with the contemplative *Rite majorem*, the style of the next motet, *Balsamus et munda cera*, smacks of a more public statement. Its text reveals that it was composed to celebrate the distribution of wax figures of the *Agnus Dei*, a ceremony which took place on the Saturday after Easter in the first year of a pope's reign and every seven years thereafter. Because of this its performance can be dated with unusual accuracy to April 7, 1431, the appropriate date in the reign of Eugenius IV. As in *Rite majorem*, the two upper voices are cast in two isorhythmic pairs, a twice-repeated rhythmic succession in part 1 being followed by another in part 2. By contrast, in the two lower voices the two parts of the motet present a pair of musical mirrors, the notes of each first half being repeated in reverse order in the second. Again, though, this structure is experienced by the listener not as a musical straitjacket but as a coherent mould into which the composer pours a beautiful interplay of imitative ideas over a firm rhythmic and contrapuntal support. While the background structure remains mostly below the surface, it can be harnessed—as when the beginning of the second isorhythmic pair in the upper voices unveils new musical ideas at 'Morte repentina'—to exhilarating effect.

By contrast with the complexities of these motets, the *Gloria-Credo* pair which follows them on the recording present a texture sewn together from phrase-settings crafted from a free interplay of little melodic/ rhythmic gestures. These movements are best known for their long, separate *Amens* which quote French and Italian popular songs. Obvious enough from their four-square nature, these quotations are highlighted in one manuscript by the presence of what were evidently their original words: 'Tu m'as monté sur la pance et rien n'a fait' ('You have mounted me on the paunch and done nothing') and 'Otre te reface dieu que ce m'a fait' ('May God do to you what he has done to me') in the *Gloria* and 'La vilanella non è bella, se non la dominica' ('The peasant girl is only pretty on

Sundays') in the Credo. The Italian text is clearly one of those vestiges of ex tempore traditions which from time to time pierce the surface of written Italian 'art' music: William Prizer has found the same words (albeit with different music) in a barzioletta by Antonio Capriolo of Brescia in Petrucci's ninth book of frottole (1509). The joyful connotations of the Easter texts which appear alongside these passages in the manuscript, and which are heard on this recording (see below), may explain the choice of these 'up-beat', if irreverent, interpolations.

For the last piece on this disc, St James is joined by his fellow apostle, St Andrew. *Apostolo glorioso* was apparently composed for the rededication to St Andrew in 1426 of a church in Patras, where, according to medieval tradition, he had been crucified and buried. The reason why Dufay would have composed a motet for an event in the Peloponnese is revealed in the fact that the Archbishop of Patras was a member of the Malatesta family of Pesaro, a dynasty for whom Dufay worked at various times in the early 1420s.

*Apostolo glorioso* is in Dufay's most brilliant and extrovert style, its five-voice texture emphasizing the splendour of its vigorous rhythms and high tessitura. With its glittering, festive introduction and four sections in two accelerating pan-isorhythmic pairs it forms a relentless and irresistible paean to its chosen saint. If ever a medieval prayer for intercession reached its intended hearer, this must have been it.

### **Music for St James the Greater**

#### **THE BINCHOIS CONSORT**

MARK CHAMBERS, DAVID GOULD alto I

FERGUS McLUSKY, ROBIN TYSON alto II

JAMES GILCHRIST, CHRIS WATSON tenor I

ANDREW CARWOOD, EDWIN SIMPSON tenor II

ANDREW KIRKMAN conductor

#### Contents:

Mass for St James the Greater [41'08]

1. Introit [4'28]

2. Kyrie [5'26]

3. Gloria [4'48]

4. Alleluia [5'20]

5. Credo [8'40]

6. Offertory [3'41]

7. Sanctus [4'16]

8. Agnus Dei [2'42]

9. Communio [1'47]

10. Rite majorem Jacobum canamus / Arcibus summis miseri reclusi [4'19]

11. Balsamus et munda cera [4'31]

12. Gloria - [5'52]

13. Credo [6'50]

14. *Apostolo glorioso* [3'47]

