Spitalfields music festival
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Choir of the Chapels Royal, HM Tower of London

Messiaen and Palestrina's masses intertwine

Wednesday 9th July | Tower of London

Missa Dum Complerentur
Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, 1525-94

Messe de la Pentecôte
Olivier Messiaen, 1908-92

Motet
Dum complerentur

Entrée - Les langues de feu

Missa Dum Complerentur
Kyrie
Gloria
Credo

Offertoire - Les choses visibles et invisibles

Missa Dum Complerentur
Sanctus
Benedictus

Consecration - Le don de sagesse

Missa Dum Complerentur
Agnus Dei

Communion - Les oiseaux et les sources
Sortie - Le vent de l'Esprit

Choir of the Chapels Royal, HM Tower of London
Colm Carey Conductor

The concert this evening presents music that was composed to be performed during Mass for the Christian Feast of Pentecost. Pentecost recalls the descent of the Holy Spirit to Jesus' disciples after his Ascension to heaven and marks the end of the liturgical season of Easter. Each celebration of Mass is divided into two parts: the 'ordinary' of the mass denotes the portions of liturgical text that remain constant regardless of the specific feast or Saint's Day; by contrast, the 'propers' of the mass change depending on the liturgical season or particular feast day. Tonight Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina's Missa Dum Complerentur provides the music for the 'ordinary' and is interleaved with Olivier Messiaen's Messe de la Pentecôte which provides the 'propers'.

Palestrina is regarded as one of the greatest composers of the Renaissance and this year we celebrate the 500th anniversary of his birth. Palestrina's style couples purity of harmonic language with a beauty of melodic shape and graceful treatment of dissonance. Word painting is by turn overt or subtle, and the effect - while usually very measured - is always deeply expressive. This is exemplified in his motet Dum Complerentur which opens the concert. The motet vividly portrays the story of Pentecost as described in the Acts of the Apostles with energetic running notes depicting the 'violent rushing wind' that accompanied the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Missa Dum Complerentur is based on the many musical ideas contained within the motet. Palestrina weaves different strands together according to the various texts of the Mass. The drama of the story of Pentecost as painted in music by Palestrina is never far from the surface during Missa Dum Complerentur, and the end, for instance, of both the Gloria and Credo echo the energy and effervescence of the Alleluias first heard in the motet.

Olivier Messiaen, writing some four hundred years after Palestrina, is equally revered for his contribution to sacred music, inspired by many aspects of the Christian story. His musical language could not be more different from that of Palestrina(!) and some still find his unique harmonic palette to be challenging.

The Messe de la Pentecôte is in five movements, each covering a liturgical function or action during the Mass. The work originated as improvisations by Messiaen and was premiered by him as a formal cycle on Pentecost Sunday in 1951. Each movement comments on a specific textual idea expressed in the score.

i. Entreé: Les Langues de Feu (The Tongues of Fire) - "And there appeared unto them cloven tongues as of fire, and it sat upon each of them." (Acts of the Apostles, II.3.)

The first movement is a response to the tongues of fire that came upon the Apostles.
ii. Offertoire: Les Choses Visibles et Invisibles (Things visible and invisible) - (the Nicene Creed).

The second movement is a fantastically colourful meditation on things seen and unseen. Messiaen states - 'Things visible and invisible! There is everything in these words! Dimensions known and unknown: from the possible diameter of the universe to that of a proton, durations known and unknown: from the ages of galaxies to that of the wave associated with the proton, the spiritual world and the material world, grace and sin, angels and men, the powers of light and the powers of darkness, the vibrations of the atmosphere, plainsong, birdsong, the melody of waterdrops and the growling of the monstrous Beast of the Apocalypse - finally, all that is clear and tangible, and all that is obscure, mysterious

and supernatural, all that goes beyond science and reasoning, all that we cannot uncover, all that we will never understand...'

iii. Consecration: Le Don de Sagesse (The Gift of Wisdom) - "The Holy Ghost shall bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (St John's Gospel, XIV, 26.)

Of this movement Messiaen writes -
'Wisdom, Intelligence, Counsel, Strength, Learning, Piety, Fear: these are the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes us comprehend the hidden meaning of the words of Jesus, and to penetrate the mysteries that he taught us: that is the gift of Wisdom!'

iv. Communion: Les Oiseaux et les Sources (The Birds and the Springs) - "O all ye fountains, bless ye the Lord; O all ye fowls of the air, bless ye the Lord." (Daniel, III, 77,80. Apocrypha.)

Messiaen was deeply inspired by the natural world, and especially birdsong. This movement, to be played while the congregation receive the host, is a homage to the sounds of nature. The movement concludes with the highest and lowest note on the organ representing God's all-encompassing love.

v. Sortie: Le Vent de l'Esprit (The Wind of the Spirit) - "A rushing mighty wind filled all the house." (Acts of the Apostles, II, 2.)

The cycle concludes with an electric toccata - a mighty wind filling the house - portraying what must have been an overwhelming experience for the Apostles.

Colm Carey

The Choir of the Chapels Royal, HM Tower of London is widely regarded as one of Britain's leading chapel choirs and occupies a place at the heart of the nation's royal heritage. Formed of twelve professional singers - who also perform regularly with distinguished consorts and opera companies in the UK and abroad - the choir continues the tradition of musical excellence central to the English royal court.

The choir sings regularly at the Tower of London's two Chapels Royal, the Chapel of St Peter ad Vincula, built by Henry VIII in 1520, and the Chapel of St John the Evangelist, historically the monarchs' private chapel. Their services have a reputation for excellence, with a thriving congregation which includes visiting dignitaries, members of the Tower community, including Yeoman Warders ('Beefeaters') and their families, and some of the Tower's three million annual tourists.

The Choir of the Chapels Royal is often invited to sing at high-profile public and private occasions. Television and radio highlights include broadcasts for BBC television and Radios 3 and 4 (Channel 4 television and Classic FM. It has toured to South Africa, Ireland and Italy and has recorded two critically acclaimed CDs. The repertoire performed by the choir encompasses choral music from all ages, including music composed especially for the Chapels Royal in the Tower, including works by James MacMillan, Martin Baker, Francis Pott and Ben Rowarth. The English royal court has been an exceptional patron of music over the centuries, rivaled only by the Vatican. Musicians that have written and performed for English monarchs and their court include Handel, Tallis, Byrd, Gibbons, Purcell, Elgar, Howells, Tippett and Maxwell Davies, and the choir is proud to continue this distinguished tradition today.

Colm Carey
Master of Music, Chapel Royal, HM Tower of London

Colm Carey is widely acclaimed as an exciting, innovative and distinctive performer. Born in Dublin, Colm studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London, and subsequantly at the Conservatoire de Musique de Genève, winning the top performing awards, with distinction, at both institutions.

Colm's studies laid the foundation for a career as a concert organist which took him all over Europe, as well as to the USA, Canada and Australia. From 2003-16 Colm was Belfast City Organist and in addition to giving numerous recitals on the Mulholland Grand Organ in the Ulster Hall, he performed many concertos. As well as numerous broadcasts of his performances, Colm has recorded a number of CDs, as soloist, chamber musician and director. He was the featured organist on Paul McCartney's classical album, Ecce Cor Meum, which premièred at the Albert Hall in London (available on DVD) and the Carnegie Hall in New York, and his interpretation of Bach's The Art of Fugue (his first CD) has been admired for its originality and scholarship.

Latterly Colm Carey's career has focused on choral conducting. As Master of Music of the Chapels Royal, HM Tower of London, Colm directs the choir for the weekly services in the two historic Chapels Royal. Under his leadership the choir has gained a reputation for performances that are full of vitality and character. He has toured with the choir to South Africa, Italy and Ireland, and, as well as releasing a CD of music inspired by the Psalms of David, they have broadcast both live and recorded for Radio and TV. Under his direction the choir performs regularly in concert, with a wide repertoire ranging from medieval music to pieces commissioned by, and dedicated to, Colm and the choir.

Colm's interest in assuring imaginative and stimulating programming has led to the formation of Odyssean Ensemble - a flexible group of musicians brought together by him to explore, through innovative projects and collaborations, the notion of music being a journey that challenges the listener and stimulates the mind, body and senses. Odyssean Ensemble has carved a reputation for its lively and characterful live performances, and its début recording was released to 5* reviews both in the UK and abroad.

Colm has many interests outside the world of music including literature, the visual arts, rugby and tennis, cooking and fine wine! He recently gained a Certificate in Psychodynamic Counselling Skills and is a Verified Reiki Practitioner (www.ccreikihealing.com)