Orlando di Lasso

The Lamentations of Jeremiah

Renaissance Choir Sacramento

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Antelope, April 6, 7:00 pm
Sisters of Mercy Chapel, Auburn, April 8, 3 pm
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Sacramento, April 11, 7:30 pm
Program

Pange lingua (Spanish chant), Venatius Fortunatus (530-609)

The Choir

Verses 1, 2, 9, 10:

Sing, my tongue, the Savior’s glory; tell His triumph far and wide;
tell aloud the famous story of His body crucified;
how upon the cross a victim, vanquishing in death, He died.

Eating of the tree forbidden, man had sunk in Satan’s snare,
when our pitying Creator did this second tree prepare;
destined, many ages later, that first evil to repair.

Lofty tree, bend down thy branches, to embrace they sacred load;
oh, relax the native tension of that all too rigid wood;
gently, gently bear the members of thy dying King and God.

Tree, which solely wast found worthy the world’s Victim to sustain.
harbor from the raging tempest! ark that saved the world again!
Tree, with sacred blood anointed of the Lamb for sinners slain.

Pange lingua, Pablo Bruna (1611-1679)

Lee T. Lovallo, organ

Lamentationes Hieremiae prophetæ

Orlando di Lasso (1532-1594)

Lamentations: 1-6

Elizabeth Crain, reader

Lamentatio prima, Orlando di Lasso

The Choir
Pange lingua, Sebastian Aguilera de Heredia (1561-1627)  
Lee T. Lovallo, organ

Lamentations: 7-11  
Brian Lucas, reader

Lamentatio secunda, Orlando di Lasso  
The Choir

Pange lingua, por ce sol fa ut, Aguilera de Heredia  
Lee T. Lovallo, organ

Lamentations: 12-16  
Joan Hall, reader

Lamentatio tertia, Orlando di Lasso  
The Choir

Pange lingua, Antonio de Cabezón (1510-1566)  
Lee T. Lovallo, organ

Tantum ergo sacramentum, Giovanni Agostino Casoni  
(c. 1604-1669)  
The Choir

Down in adoration falling, Lo! the sacred Host we hail,  
Lo! oe’r ancient forms departing newer rites of grace prevail;  
Faith for all defects supplying, where the feeble senses fail.

To the everlasting Father, and the Son Who reigns on high  
With the Holy Spirit proceeding forth from each eternally,  
Be salvation, honor, blessing, might and endless majesty.  Amen.
Notes on Lasso’s Lamentations of Jeremiah

Orlando di Lasso completed his four-voice set of Lamentationes Hieremiae Prophetae in the sunset of an extraordinary career. Born around 1532 in the Franco-Flemish town of Mons, the future composer achieved early acclaim as a singer after traveling to Italy in the service of Ferrante Gonzaga, an Italian condottiere and high-ranking imperial officer. He spent formative years (1549-1554) in the rich musical environments of Naples, briefly, and then Rome, where his prestigious appointment as maestro di cappella at S. Giovanni in Laterano highlighted a meteoric professional ascent. In 1556, following an itinerant period in which he oversaw one of the earliest publications of his work in Antwerp, and appears to have traveled to England as a spy, Lasso was invited to join the court chapel of Albrecht V, Duke of Bavaria.

It was here, in Munich, that Lasso would come to be the most famous composer in Europe. Lasso’s fame was due in no small part to his prolific output and savvy approach to the newly viable marketplace for printed music. Pioneering a strategy that other composers would soon thereafter emulate, Lasso worked closely with printers in cities across the continent to control the circulation of his music and quickly secured a reputation for impeccable quality. His publications of chansons, madrigals, villanelle, motets, and masses in the following decades earned him epithets such as “divin Orlande” (divine Orlando) and “princeps musicorum” (prince of musicians). The latter, at least, was scarcely an overstatement. In 1570, Emperor Maximillian II elevated Lasso to the nobility, a virtually unprecedented honor among composers—a prince of musicians, indeed.

Under Lasso’s direction as Hofkapellmeister, the Bavarian court’s musical establishment flourished as one of Europe’s finest. His prodigious talent as composer, musician, and courtier was not lost on rivals to Albrecht and his successor Wilhelm V, with whom the composer maintained an evidently close friendship. King Charles IX of France repeatedly tried to entice the composer to the French court in the early 1570s, albeit with little success: the pull of his friendship with Wilhelm simply may have been too strong, and Lasso spent the remainder of his life living comfortably in Munich. Surviving letters from this episode, however, reveal that Charles was especially impressed by the famous chromatic cycle Prophetiae Sibyllarum, one of Lasso’s rare unpublished pieces.
A short biography of Lasso by his Munich colleague Samuel Quickelberg—another testament to the composer’s unprecedented success—confirms that exclusive access to such pieces was a principal benefit of being his employer. Quickelberg wrote: “Although it is true that songs by Orlando are present in abundance everywhere in the world, there are as yet many more, however, which presently are kept separately for his prince, and which he rarely allows to reach the public.” The four-voice *Lamentationes Hieremiae Prophetae* was never published, and was probably composed for the exclusive use of the Bavarian court chapel in the manner Quickelberg describes. The music survives in a single source, an elegant manuscript copied for the private library of the Duke and now held by the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich (thanks to whose digitization efforts it can now easily be viewed online).

Copied around 1585, a decade or so before Lasso’s death in 1594, the set remains a rare treat even today. The music participates in a long tradition, stretching far back before the Reformation, of polyphonic settings of the Lamentations designed for para-liturgical performance during Holy Week. Other notable examples of that tradition include often-programmed sets by Antoine Brumel and Thomas Tallis, as well as a second set by Lasso for five voices. Lasso’s four-voice set, however, is seldom performed. It follows the typical post-Tridentine format: three groups of three lamentations to have been sung over three days (Thursday, Friday, and Saturday).

Listen especially for Lasso’s stylistic differentiation between the text of each lamentation and the Hebrew letter (Aleph, Beth, etc.) that numbers it. In each case, the staid restraint applied to the text of the lament—reflecting both the gravity of the holy day and the priority of the text’s easy audibility in post-Tridentine musical reforms—gives way to or is preceded by an intense outpouring of melisma. The former invites meditation by easing the listener as if seamlessly into the text; the latter invites devotion through Lasso’s peerless handling of the emotional resources of late-Renaissance polyphony.

Mark Rodgers
PhD Candidate in Music History at Yale University
Renaissance Choir Sacramento

Soprano: Elizabeth Crain, Joan Hall, Rebecca Lee, Carol Smyth
Alto: Susan Scott, Anne Slakey, Paula Van Alstine-Alferness, ZhaoMin
Tenor: Jonathan Hansen*, Matthew Royal
Bass: Philip Horne, Brian Lucas, David Paterson*, Mark Swabey

* denotes guest singers
Organ: Bruce Crain; Rote: Paul Dessau
Director: Lee T. Lovallo

Formed in 2011 as a community chamber choir specializing in early motets and masses, Renaissance Choir Sacramento also performs a concert of madrigals in the late spring and Christmas music in the winter.

Rehearsals are Thursday evenings in Antelope. Prospective singers are invited to speak with the director, who can be reached at ltlovallo@gmail.com, 916.320.8423. Watch for news of our Madrigals Concert coming up soon!

We wish to thank our host institutions for granting us performance and rehearsal space, Umpqua Bank for free financial services, and St. Philomene Parish for the use of their handbells.

The Choir is a 501c3 non-profit institution; donations help support programs like this one, and they encourage us! Thank you.

www.RenaissanceChoirSacramento.com