

“Music is a real gift of God”

Martin Luther

In the Lutheran tradition there has always been room for singing and music: unison congregation singing, mixed voiced choir singing and organ playing (chorale arrangements). The organist and composer **Franz Tunder (1614-1667)** was a convinced Lutheran and a passionate musician, an excellent combination. His **PRAELUDIUM** is in g-minor, the key which Mattheson would later describe as “almost the most beautiful, because it is characterised by utter charm and graciousness”. This piece can be considered as being in the so-called stylus phantasticus, a very free way of composing which was very exciting, spontaneous and sparkling. The last chord is seamlessly connected to the introduction of the advent **NUN KOMM DER HEIDEN HEILAND**. This is one of the earliest songs of Martin Luther. He translated the Latin hymn *Veni, redemptor gentium* (**Ambrosius van Milaan, 339-397**) into German and maintained the old Ambrosian melody. This new hymn became one of the most popular hymns of the following century, with which the time of advent, and thus the ecclesiastical year was marked. The double choir motet of **Michael Praetorius (1571-1621)** is given a special sound by putting 1 soprano, 4 viola da gambas and organ positive in the first choir, and in the second choir 8 singers SATB, cornetto and church organ. The motet is followed by a chorale arrangement (**Anonymus, tabulatuur Ratsbüchlein van Lüneburg, 1650**) for church organ, and then five verses in harmonisation by Michael Praetorius.

Praetorius' slightly younger contemporary, **Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672)** was, in the field of church music, one of the most important Lutheran-protestant composers of the 17th century. Schütz wrote in many different styles, but one thing is always the same in his compositions: the meaning of the text and its central priority. That is certainly the case in the beautiful **O JESU NOMEN DULCE** (SWV 308), from the second set of his *Kleine Geistliche Konzerte* of 1639. A little gem based on the name of Jesus, from a mystical prayer hymn by *Bernard van Clervaux (1090-1153)*: Sweet as honey on the lips, a lovely melody in the ears, this piece is so tenderly and beautifully composed. It is a peaceful and refreshing moment of rest, where the loving interplay between text and music is fully expressed. In Medieval mysticism, unification with God through complete surrender was sought. These texts are an attempt to describe in words that which cannot be said. In this respect, mystical texts greatly resemble poetry. The remarkable text of **IN DULCI JUBILO** was written by the German mystic *Heinrich Seuse (1295-1366)*, who was called ‘Servant of Eternal Wisdom’. It is an extraordinary combination of Latin and medieval German. **Michael Praetorius** composed a polychoral motet based on this happy text that is here performed by an instrumental and a vocal ‘choir’. The motet is followed by two verses of a harmonisation by **Bartholomäus Gesius (1562-1613)**. As well as the transcendence of mysticism, there was also the allegory in the 17th century, that is, a message with a deeper meaning behind it. A good example is the text of **MARIA DURCH EIN DORNWALD GING** (**anonymus/F. Wakelkamp 1968-present,**) originally based in oral traditions. The precise historical background of the text and melody is hard to unravel, but it must have been rather well known in the 16th century. It speaks of Mary wandering through the forest with the child under her heart, it's possible that this is depicting Mary's visit to her cousin Elisabeth. In the background is a forest full of dead thorn bushes, a symbol of infertility and death. But then, when Mary comes by with the divine child, everything starts to flourish again and eventually “the thorns have borne roses”. The melody is sweet and simple and of utter beauty. **Frank Wakelkamp** set this old song in an early 17th century style, with various lines for four viols and frame drum. In the music you can hear Mary, come closer, walk through the forest, and disappear again.

The text of the Latin hymn **PUER NATUS IN BETHLEHEM** is pre-medieval and appeared in the middle of the 16th century in German with a new melody and was published in the *Psalmodia* of Lucas Lossius (1553).

Michael Praetorius made an interesting arrangement for his *Christmette*, a series of advent and Christmas settings for the service on Christmas Eve. Praetorius thought a lot about tempo and pulse, one of the most important issues in music. After all, when music is performed too slow or too quick, it loses its character and beauty. Praetorius often mentions in his treatise *Syntagma Musicum* of 1619 the ‘quiet pulse beat.’ He does

however add: "but everyone can also consider these things for himself". The thing is, that the choice to emphasise this 'quiet pulse beat' brings the vertical elements in this music much more to the surface, and the piece as a whole finds a very natural rhythm. The rhetorical tricolon "Singet, jubiliert, triumphiert" is a colourful and joyful confirmation of the verses, which in fact describe the Christmas story. Once again, the number 3 is not coincidental, and in line with this rhetorical figure of speech, we hear three instead of two soprano solo voices, constantly alternating and confirming one another. The motet is interrupted by two verses of the hymn set to a German Text in a nameless harmonisation sung by the choir, and concluded by an organ interlude (one of the variations on Puer Natus by **Paulus Siefert (1568-1666)** from the Lynar tabulaturas) as well as three verses sung by the congregation. Siefert came from Danzig (Poland), studied in Amsterdam but then went back to Warsaw to work at the court of the king. Poland and Bohemia were both closely connected with Germany in politics, trade and religion. **Alberik Mazák (1609-1661)** grew up in Ratibor, a small duchy near the border of Silesia and Prussia which was under the reign of the Bohemian king. He became a monk and choirmaster in a monastery in Vienna where he wrote composition for his own use. Many of his pieces ended up in the archbisschopal archives in the Czech city Kroměříž, which is well kept to this day, and contains a wealth of never published nor edited music. The mystical motet **NOBILISIME JESU** for two voices in echo is as plain and contemplative as if it were a meditation on Eternity and Infinity. This idea of eternity and infinity also greatly appealed to **Heinrich Schütz**. He was not a mystic, but did his work in the conviction that music's crucial function was to support the Word; music is supposed to interpret, inspire, express, deepen, broaden and elevate to all dimensions. The blithe Christmas motet **HEUTE IST CHRISTUS DER HERR GEBOREN**, on a text by *Nicolaus Decius (1485-1541)*, is a very good example, composed by Schütz in an appropriately joyous manner. Three voices which tumble over one another with coloratura ornaments, singing out the good news: Jesus has been born today! The Alleluia as a returning ultimate confirmation is a true celebration. For this performance by two sopranos and one alto, the music was transposed a fourth lower, a quite typical practice of the time. Similarly, the 6-voiced motet **ALLEIN GOTT IN DER HÖH SEI EHR** by **Michael Praetorius** was notated in the so-called Chiavette system, and is therefore sung a fourth lower. The preliminary sinfonia is in the same key. This motet is a choral arrangement of the eponymous church hymn, again by **Nicolaus Decius**, who wrote the text, as well as the melody. In this arrangement, the chorale is written in the three part tempus perfectum which is sung in a lofty and noble tempo, accompanied by the majestic church organ. This means that the motet parts by the 6 soloists seem to be of a light freshness which beautifully expresses the text.

In principle the medieval man was a man of eternity, his life was nourished with the desire of heaven. The earthly, transitory, and temporary were things with which he could not really get along. After all, life was not easy in those days, death was an omnipresent issue in everyone's life. The connection between heaven and earth was therefore far more obvious and natural than is the case today. In this manner, music offered a huge leap over death, directly from earth to heaven. The Christmas song **ILLIBATA TER BEATA** by **Petrus Hurtado (1620-1671)** fittingly has the title: "Heaven and earth are appealed to celebrate the birth of baby Jesus with spiritual joy". The song is from a collection of *Cantiones natalitiæ*, non-liturgical Christmas songs which were, however, allowed to be sung in the church during the Christmas season. Written as simple monodies, 1 voice and basso continuo, the songs could be embellished by adding extra instruments, ritornellos etc. Here you hear alongside the singer and chamber organ, an additional viol, cornett and frame drum.

The well-known prayer **VATER UNSER IM HIMMELREICH** (Our father, who art in heaven) comes from the hand of Martin Luther. It is possible that the melody had existed previously. This fully instrumental version is begun with a 4-voiced setting by **Hans Leo Hassler (1564-1612)**. Subsequently, we hear two variations by **Johann Ulrich Steigleder (1593-1635)** from his *Tabulaturbuch* of 1627. This collection contains 40 variations on the Vater Unser theme for church organ. In the preface Steigleder mentions that the performer is free to choose which variations he wants to play and in which order. He also writes that instruments or voices can be added. Variation 4 gets a whole new and individual sound played by four viols, whereby the various musical lines are really brought out. Variation 14 asks for a doubled bass line as well as the sweet and comely flute register of the Compenius organ positive. For the last part we, then return to the viols, who in turn give space to the cornett and

his virtuosic improvisation in the fashion of the time. The basis of this piece is the 6th verse of the choral arrangement of Vater Unser by **Jacob Praetorius (1586–1651)** from Hamburg, originally written for church organ. We hear in the cornett's ornamentation, improvisation techniques which are described in various treatises of the 16th and 17th century. Scales, tremoli, trillo's and cadenzas in Dalla Casa style with sextuplets, all resulting in a complete 'cadenza finale' by **Francesco Rognoni (1570-1626)**. It gives us a good sense of the typical diminution techniques of the day, which were brought from Italy by people like Michael Praetorius and Heinrich Schütz into the northern regions. Besides it is also pleasant to listen to.

QUEM PASTORES LAUDAVERE is also a very old Latin Christmas hymn which is mentioned for the first time in the Hohenfurth Manuscript (1410), kept in the Abbey of Hohenfurth in South Bohemia. Halfway through the 16th century it came into fashion in Germany, when it was translated into German and received a place in the services around Christmas (on Christmas Eve, in the Christmas vesper or in the mass on Christmas morning). It is very interesting that this hymn was and still is very popular under both Catholics and Lutherans. Until this day, the so-called "Quempas-singing" is a German and Bohemian Christmas custom of singing antiphons by children and adults, both in the church and on the street. The opening of the carol is a plain rhetorical set-up of a story, which is confirmed by the congregation. The harmonisation is by **Michael Praetorius**, and occurs in the collection *Musae Sionae*, published in 1607. That Praetorius could compose beautiful choral settings is proved by the amount of hymns that have become known and loved by many. Some carols particularly leap out, and one of the most famous examples is **ES IST EIN ROS ENTSPRUNGEN**, set simply and beautifully on an anonymous text from Isaiah 11. Lo, how a rose e'er blooming, set in this charming hymn full of symbolism and sung for you in all sobriety in the harmonisation by *Michael Praetorius*. **WIE SCHÖN LEUCHTET DER MORGENSTERN** is a also powerful hymn, full of symbolism with the morning star as a metaphor for Christ. The text was written by *Philipp Nicolai (1556-1608)*, while **Johann Herman Schein (1586-1630)** composed the setting for 4-voiced choir. The two verses of the chorale transition seamlessly into the arrangement that **Michael Praetorius** wrote of this carol. Soloists sound like angels and the choir appears in a fluent and energetic tripla with the (controversial) addition of the drum: a glorious rhetoric which sounds magnificent.

Martin Luther initially wrote the carol **VOM HIMMELHOCH DA KOMM ICH HER** for his children as contrafact on a profane song. Later, he also composed a new melody for it and it appeared in this version in the church. The text tells the Christmas story, and the song was sung during the nativity tradition of rocking the Christ Child which was very popular. The organ prelude is taken from a collection of arrangements by various composers found in Clausthal-Zellerfeld. It was anonymously registered, but in the meantime credited to **Heinrich Scheidemann (1595-1663)**. These are Verses III and IV, and in the fourth part little bells give an imitation of the in the 17th century commonly used Zymbelstern, which results in an extra festive effect. The prelude is followed by four verses in the harmonisation of **Hans Leo Hassler (1564-1612)**.

BONUS

That centuries-old melodies can still inspire people of today is apparent from the composition which **Frank Wakelkamp (1968-present)** wrote in 2017: **VENI, VENI EMMANUEL**. It is a combination of the early text *Libera Me* (9th century, for the first time registered in the *Missale Romanum* of 1570) and a Latin so-called O-antiphon (6th century, found in a collection of an hymnograph in 1610), which was paraphrased into *Veni, veni Emmanuel*. The interesting thing is that the melody of the much later known *O come O come Emmanuel* is based on the gregorian melody of the *Libera Me*. The connection between both of these melodies was only discovered in 1966. For our violist Frank Wakelkamp this was a very interesting discovery which immediately inspired him to write this composition. In a brilliant way, he combined the old 15th century version of the *Libera Me* with the later *Veni* variant. The 'Deliver me, o Lord' from the requiem mass is now set in the light of the modern text of the advent song. In this way the expectancy of the advent and nativity time is connected to the hope of Eternal Life, as it is

sung in the Requiem.

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