

CHRISTOPHORUS DEMANTIUS

(1567-1643)

Vêpres de Pentecoste

Trías Precum Vespertinarum, Nürnberg 1602

1. Deus in adiutorium à 5 (3'20)
2. Dixit Dominus à 6 (4'58)
3. Lauda Jerusalem Dominum à 6 (5'21)
4. Laudate Dominum à 6 (2'49)
5. Laudate pueri à 6 (4'30)
6. Hymnus : *Veni Sancte Spiritus* à 6 (3'03)
7. Magnificat à 3 & 5 (9'13)
8. Benedicamus Domino à 6 (2'24)

Threnodiae, Freybergk 1620

9. Lass mich o Christ à 5 (4'32)
10. Aus tieffer Noth à 5 (6'21)

Huelgas-Ensemble
dir. Paul Van Nevel



HMC 901705

DDD

TOTAL TIME: 46'47

HM 78

Le vrai-faux sosie de Monteverdi.

Né et mort les mêmes années que Monteverdi, le Bohémien Christophorus Demantius fut à la fois un prodigieux inventeur et un compositeur totalement à l'écart des mouvances de l'avant-garde italienne dont son contemporain était le héraut. C'est là le moindre de ses paradoxes que d'avoir, un peu à la manière de Gesualdo (mais de façon plus autonome encore), exploré avec une extraordinaire ingéniosité de nouvelles voies musicales tout en restant attaché au style polyphonique de la Renaissance. A cet égard, ces très festives "Vêpres de Pentecoste" s'inscrivent comme une somptueuse transition entre le contrepoint "ancien" d'un Lassus ou d'un Praetorius et les innovations imminentes de Schein et de Schütz.

Renaissance pageantry in Saxony.

An exact contemporary of Monteverdi (they were born and died in the same years), the Bohemian Christophorus Demantius was a prodigiously inventive composer totally outside the Italian avant-garde movement heralded by his transalpine 'twin'. And yet, paradoxically enough, not unlike Gesualdo (perhaps even more autonomously), he explored new musical avenues through extraordinary ingenuity while remaining attached to the polyphonic style of the Renaissance. In this respect these highly festive 'Whitsun Vespers' are something like a sumptuous transition from the 'old' counterpoint of Lassus and Praetorius to the imminent innovations of Schein and Schütz.

harmonia mundi s.a.

Mas de Vert, 13200 Arles © 2000
Made in Germany





HMC 901705 · © 2000
MADE IN GERMANY

LC 7045

Tous droits du producteur phonographique et du propriétaire de l'œuvre enregistrée réservés. Sauf autorisation la duplication, la location, le prêt, l'utilisation de ce disque pour exécution publique et radiodiffusion sont interdits.

AG 47

dir. Paul Van Nevel
Ensemble

diac
ich, o Christ
yfer Noth

Nœuds de Pentecoste

STOPHORUS DEMANTIUS



CHRISTOPHORUS
Demantius

**Vêpres de
Pentecoste**

Huelgas-Ensemble
Paul Van Nevel

HUELGAS-ENSEMBLE

Cantus Katelijne Van Laethem, Patricia Hardt, Nicola Wemyss, Ellen van Ham
Altus Steve Dugardin, Marnix de Cat
Tenores Christopher Kale, Marius Van Altena, Matthew Vine, Marcel Beekman
Bariton Lieven Termont
Bassus Stephan Macleod, Marc Busnel

Violon Renaissance An Van Laethem
Viòle de gambe Piet Stryckers
Viòle de gambe contrebasse Matthieu Lusson
Flûtes à bec Bart Coen, Peter De Clercq
Saqueboute alto Jean-Jacques Herbin
Saqueboute ténor Serge Guillou
Saqueboute ténor & basse Joost Swinkels
Basson Renaissance Mirella Ruigrok
Cornetto Marleen Leicher

Direction PAUL VAN NEVEL

CHRISTOPHORUS DEMANTIUS

Vêpres de Pentecoste

Trias Precum Vespertinarum, Nürnberg 1602

- | | | |
|--|--|------|
| 1 | Deus in adiutorium à 5 | 3'20 |
| 2 | Dixit Dominus à 6 | 4'58 |
| 3 | Lauda Jerusalem Dominum à 6 | 5'21 |
| 4 | Laudate Dominum à 6 | 2'49 |
| 5 | Antienne : <i>Sit nomem Domini benedictum in saecula</i>
Laudate pueri à 6 | 4'30 |
| 6 | Hymnus : <i>Veni Sancte Spiritus</i> à 6 | 3'03 |
| 7 | Antienne : <i>Non vos relinquam</i>
Magnificat à 3 & 5 | 9'13 |
| 8 | Benedicamus Domino à 6 | 2'24 |
| Threnodiae , Freybergk 1620 | | |
| Thrènes / <i>Threnodies</i> / Threnodien | | |
| 9 | Lass mich o Christ à 5 | 4'32 |
| 10 | Aus tieffer Noth à 5 | 6'21 |

Transcriptions Paul Van Nevel



**Christophorus Demantius (1567-1643):
a late Renaissance composer in Saxony**

It is remarkable what an extremely diversified, even controversio impression is given by European musical culture at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Probably the most striking example of this is the fact that the Bohemian Christoph Demant (Demuth) – he latinized his name to Demantius later in life – and Claudio Monteverdi were born and died in the same years.

And yet in their musical-philosophical backgrounds, compositional techniques and musical forms and styles these two exact contemporaries were leagues apart. Throughout his career the Italian was a progressive and experimental composer whose musical thought was rarely influenced by extra-musical restrictions. Christophorus Demantius, on the contrary, together with other Central European contemporaries (e.g. Lechner and Hassler), drew the building stones of his entire output out of the tradition of the Reformation, with its musical practice derived from Ratschule, Chorus Symphonicus and Chorus Musicus, in which musical training and practice were regarded as a part of a general humanistic education.

It would be all too easy to depict the Bohemian as a reactionary. But the quality of his music, his individuality and his versatility make his compositions fascinating witnesses to a flourishing musical culture, which, it is true, did not propagate the Italian innovations, but evinces an extraordinary ingenuity in producing arresting works of music with traditional means.

Moreover, we must take into account the fact that the rather ready accessibility of Demantius's music – to both listener and performer, now and then – has not always been propitious to the quality of its performance. Amateur performances have often had the disadvantage of reflecting a distorted image of the composer, although his techniques were by no means experimental.

Demantius's versatility and craftsmanship are beyond dispute. He left a very extensive output of secular and religious music, with a remarkably large number of occasional pieces (written for local christenings, marriages, etc.). At the same time it is striking that he used the "new" basso continuo practice in only one of his publications (*Triades Sioniae*, 1619).

And even here he typifies his individuality by adapting this technique to his own ideas: he called it "Nova bassi et cantus generalis sive continui conjunctio", which means that Demantius believed that an accompanist could really assess the nature of the harmonic and melodic process only by bearing the bass and cantus part in mind.

But as we have already implied, Demantius wrote his other works in a polyphonic idiom that was indebted to and reminiscent of late Lassus and his contemporaries, Michael Praetorius and Hans Leo Hassler. Demantius's style excels in its sumptuous sonority which makes extensive use of six-part writing. Harmonic richness is coupled with the expression of the deeper connotations of the text rather than perfunctory word painting.

His versatility is shown in the broad range of the genres he employed, both in the framework of his Protestant environment as well as in Catholic liturgical works. From his pen flowed gospel motets, arrangements of songs and hymns, masses and motets, villanelles, vespers, a German motet-passion (the last of its kind), war and victory songs (*Tympanum Militare*, 1600, reprinted in 1615 on the occasion of the victory over the Turks at Györg), canzonettas, German madrigals, instrumental dances, a very large collection of funeral songs, humanistic occasional pieces, psalms, etc. And he did not eschew arrangements, making a five-part version of a collection of three-part songs by Langius.

In spite of the fact that his polyphonic writing is still highly reminiscent of sixteenth century polyphony (especially in his Latin works), Demantius never used the *cantus firmus* technique. His notions of the music's individuality would not permit his counterpoint to be dependent on a slavish use of a particular melody. Exceptions to this rule are his funeral songs, which are homophonic arrangements of traditional chorales and songs, and his popular *Polnische Tänze*, harmonisations of well-known dance tunes.

Besides being a composer, Demantius was also a cantor (with its load of practical vexations and worries), a poet and a writer of musical treatises.

In the eighth edition of one of his theoretical works, *Isagoge artis Musicae* (1632), we find the first German alphabetic explanatory word-list. In this work he also expresses his admiration for Lassus, Langius and Lechner: "...Orlandus is much esteemed for his numerous songs of the time: Langius and Lechner are no less esteemed..."

Virtually nothing is known about Demantius's youth. He was born in the small Bohemian town of Reichenberg (now Liberec). From one of the prefaces it appears that he had been

a choirboy. In 1594, after a brief sojourn in Wittenberg, he moved to Leipzig where his first occasional piece was published (*Epithalamium Honori Nuptiarum Dn. Andreae Goldbeckii*).

Between 1597 and 1604 he occupied his first important official post. He was appointed cantor of the Johanneskirche and director of the "Singechorus" of the Gymnasium Johanneum (founded in 1586) at Zittau in Saxony.

Zittau already had a rich musical tradition behind it with a large choir and a municipal band that since the Reformation had been administered by the town. The *Kantorei* was responsible for the daily singing of the vespers and other services. Melchior Franck was a member of the choir and probably became a pupil of Demantius. It was in this context that Demantius composed his vespers which were published in Nuremberg in 1602 and are performed on this recording. We shall return to this.

In 1604 Christophorus Demantius was appointed cantor of the Cathedral of Freiberg (Saxony), which, after that of the Thomaskirche in Leipzig, was the most important cantorate in Saxony. By the second half of the fifteenth century Freiberg had become the largest town in Saxony. The remains of the library contain evidence that prior to Demantius's appointment works by Lechner, Utendal, Wert, Zanotti, Lassus and De Monte were performed by a well-appointed "chorus musicus" that, in conformance to a town regulation "...ihren Gesänge stille, langsam und so verrichten, dass ihnen lieblich zuzuhören, und dass sie bissweilen die deutschen Psalmen, wie sie aufs einfältigste mit vier Stimmen componiert oder andere kurtze geistliche Gesänge mit gleicher und nicht erhöhter Stimme singen würden..." ("would sing their songs quietly, slowly and in such a way that it was a pleasure to listen to them, and sometimes sing the German psalms composed in the simplest four parts, or other short spiritual songs in even and not raised voices").

Demantius introduced changes in this "simplest" four-part singing, as is borne out by the complaint in the town archives that he "...nur seine eigene Stücke und sonst new unbekannter Dinge singen lässt und nicht die alten Stücke, so der Bürgerschaft bekannt sind..." ("had only his own pieces and new, unknown things sung, and not the old pieces that were familiar to the people of the town")!

In spite of numerous reverses and conflicts with the authorities, Demantius remained active in Freiberg until his death. That a man of his enormous energy and stubborn

character would regularly be at loggerheads with his singers and choristers is sufficiently borne out by the report that he "...einmal in der Schulzucht einen Schüler beinahe umgebracht..." ("once in classroom discipline almost killed a pupil"). And his colleague Johann Schellenberg described his difficult character in unequivocal terms, calling "An inconsiderate man and a turbulent genius"! At the same time Demantius was not spared reverses of fortune: five of his children died during his lifetime, and he married four times. He composed far less during the last twenty years of his life surrounded as he was by anguish and distress. The Thirty Years War (1618-1648) did not leave Freiberg unscathed, and the plague brought about a dramatic reduction in the number of the singers in his *Kantorei*.

In view of the shortage of musicians, a municipal decree was deemed necessary to ensure the punctual attendance of the surviving singers: "...der chorus musicus derowegen nicht verlasset, sondern mit Fleiss besucht werde..." ("not to leave the chorus musicus on that account, but to attend it with zeal").

In spite of Demantius's intransigence he was already esteemed a great composer during his lifetime. Colleagues wrote about him in terms like "...berühmter und kunstreicher Musicus" and "excellens in sua arte homo".

When he died he was buried with full honours in the churchyard of Freiberg, "allwo sein abgeseelter Körper in seinem Ruhestädtlein eine fröhliche Auferstehung erwartet" ("where his soulless body in its little abode of rest awaits a joyful resurrection").

Christoph Demantius wrote his collection of vespers during his period in Zittau. The volume was published in Nuremberg in 1602 with the following title: *Trias precum vespertinarum, qua continentur: Canticum B. Mariae Virginis, intonationes cum psalmis, et clausulae in precibus vespertinis consuetae quas Benedicamus vocant. Et ad octo usitatos Tonos: & ad duodecim Modos Musicos, tam quaternis, quam Quinis & senis vocibus: eleganti Harmonia, & quibusvis instrumentorum musicorum generibus communi.*

The volume therefore contains all the ingredients for the musical ordering of the vespers, one of the daily duties of the "Singechorus" in Zittau. It is not surprising that the colophon should mention the use of instruments, since in Demantius's daily practice this was always

the case. Already in 1567 the municipal council had decided that the instrumentalists were to be present as "...Unterstützung des Singechores" ("support for the choir") during the liturgical services as well. Besides, the Johanneskirche possessed no fewer than three organs.

The contents of Demantius's vespers (which were still sung in Latin in Zittau) deviate slightly from the common protocol. He adds a classical salutation (*Dominus vobiscum*) to the *intonatio* (*Deus in adiutorium*); he limits the number of psalms to four, and before the *Magnificat* he offers a choice of no fewer than 28 different verses: in four and five parts in the eight traditional church tones, and in six parts in twelve modes (by adding the "modern" aeolian and ionian modes).

The four psalms are in six sections and structurally in complete keeping with the common practice. That is, he retains the alternating character of the psalms by strictly separating the even from the odd verses. This is also clear in the notation: each verse begins with a new time signature, or is divided from the previous one by a vertical bar line.

Moreover, as regards melodic unity, harmonic structure and cadential progression, each verse forms a separate unit.

The festive character of these Whitsun vespers (with the hymn "Veni Sancte Spiritus") evinces all of the characteristics of a 17th century composer who fulfilled the functions of the transition from the "old" counterpoint to the approaching innovations of Scheidt, Schein and Schütz.

This is borne out by the meticulous attention Demantius paid to harmonic structure to the detriment of contrapuntal elaboration.

In 1620 a very curious collection of pieces by Demantius was published in Freiberg: *Trenodiae Das ist: Ausserlesene Trostreiche Begräbniss Gesänge (...) mit 4. 5 auch 6 Stimmen...* This volume is quite simply the most comprehensive collection of 1-, 4-, 5- and 6-part songs dealing with dying and the rituals of the dead in the German language.

In the over 650 pages of the volume we find all the songs for 1, 4, 5 and 6 voices that have anything to do with death collected together and neatly classified according to categories, like "In Begleitung der Verstorbenen" (Accompanying the deceased), "Bey dem Begräbniss" (At the burial), "Für der Thür der Verstorbenen" (Before the doorway of the deceased), etc.

In addition, the collection contains pieces composed on the occasion of the death of illustrious dignitaries, like the Elector of Saxony: "*Sehnlich klaglied über den unzeitigen doch seligen Abschied herrn Christian II Churfürsten und hertzogen zu Sachsen à 6.*"

Demantius harmonised all these songs in an extremely simple homophonic style.

Two of these chorales have been recorded on this CD and are typical examples of the Protestant hymn arrangement as it was also abundantly practised by other contemporary composers (Praetorius, Vulpus).

PAUL VAN NEVEL

Translated by Derek Yeld