

PROGRAM NOTES



Why did the composers of Josquin Desprez's time write so many works that share not only the same text, but also the same melodies and other important characteristics? Couldn't they just compose their own original pieces? Since its publication in 1982, Howard Mayer Brown's seminal article 'Emulation, Competition, and Homage: [...] Theories of Imitation in the Renaissance' has initiated a lively

debate on the ideas of borrowing, allusion, and intertextuality in Renaissance music. Those composers were not less creative than their successors, they simply had a different idea of how to best use their inventiveness. Among the main reasons for such widespread use of borrowing and allusion were the classical ideal of rhetorical imitation, which uses emulation as both competition and homage, but also the pedagogical techniques of memorization, where the construction of a memorial archive — which also originates from classical rhetoric — was at the very base of the first few centuries of polyphonic compositional practices.

The most famous example of this repertory is the *L'homme armé* mass cycle tradition, which carries a strong element of competition. For this program we will concentrate on a more 'playful' use of imitation: that of 'Art-song reworkings,' where the elements of conscious interplay with other composers and intellectual play with the audience seem to be of utmost importance. In the first part of our program we perform works that inspired Josquin, as polyphonic models, followed by Josquin's reworkings of those models. The second part mirrors the first, but here original Josquin compositions are followed by later re-workings.

Of the many ways composers elaborated their models, adding extra voices was the most common, and this is true of every reworking on our program. Other techniques include combinative writing, as in Josquin's **Victime paschali**, where the composer combines the Easter sequence with literal quotations of two famous chansons. In the Kyrie **Fortuna desperata** Josquin uses the fairly conventional technique of quoting the song's tenor as cantus firmus and paraphrasing the other voices. The two following re-workings skillfully resort to canonic writing. Reworking Ockeghem's combinative chanson, Josquin loses the rondeau text (*S'elle m'amera*) and only keeps the popular song (**Petite camusette**), but he thickens Ockeghem's texture to six pervasively imitative voices and adds a canon at the unison in the two middle voices.

Similarly, Willaert plays with the canon already present in Josquin's **Faulte d'argent**

by cleverly shortening the gap between the two canonic voices. Despite the doubts existing over its authorship, **Mille regretz** is certainly Josquin's most famous song and as musicologist David Fallows puts it, it is 'as near as music comes to perfection.' Gombert's reworking adds two voices to the extremes of the original four: a soprano and a low bass. While widening the chanson's range and thickening its counterpoint, Gombert manages to stay faithful to the model in portraying 'the sorrow of leaving combined with the excitement of travel, the fear of loneliness with a sense of fresh fields to explore' (David Fallows).

Considered to be among his most perfect and impressive works, Josquin's **Preter rerum seriem** was widely copied and disseminated and was the model for no fewer than seven later masses. Rore's extraordinary mass adds one voice to the six of the model and — while paying tribute to his patron of the time, the duke of Ferrara — hints at another great work of Josquin, his *Missa Hercules Dux Ferrarie!*

– Program notes by Peter de Laurentiis