

M U S I C     D I V I N E

*Stephen Bonime, director*

**Final, Farewell concert**

4:00 Sunday, November 20, 2011

at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery

*Sicut cervus* (1584)

Giovanni da PALESTRINA (c.1525–1594)

*Ecco mormorar l'onde* (1590)

Claudio MONTEVERDI (1567–1643)

*Missa La mi la sol: Agnus Dei* (\*)

Heinrich ISAAC (c.1450–1517)

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*Une Mousse de Biscaye*: chanson (monophonic)    anon. 15<sup>th</sup> century

*Une Mousse de Biscaye*: 3-4 voice chanson (1503)    Josquin DESPREZ (c.1450–1521)

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*Missa Une Mousse de Biscaye* (1505)

Josquin DESPREZ

**Kyrie - Gloria**

\*

**Credo**

\*

**Sanctus - Benedictus**

\*

**Agnus Dei**

\* Individual years in parenthesis are original **print** dates; this mass is found only in manuscript.

## *Notes on the Program*

“Ma fin est mon commencement et mon commencement est ma fin”  
(My end is my beginning and my beginning is my end).

The text of that poem by Machaut, which actually describes his musical treatment of it, can be applied to Music Divine’s career, which ends today, as it began six years ago, with a performance of Josquin’s *Missa Une Mousse de Biscaye*. It is such a great musical work, and it is so little known—even among lovers of early music and particularly of Josquin, that I have made it a personal mission to make it known to as many people as possible. Forty years ago, while a grad student at Bryn Mawr, I first performed this mass with four members of the Bryn Mawr & Haverford College Renaissance Choir, singing from the earliest printed edition with no treble clefs. Our venue hosted folk singers on weekend nights and chamber music with Sunday brunch. Odetta, that week’s star performer, sat through both sets and said it “blew my mind.”

Music Divine performed two movements of it also at the 2007 New York Early Music Celebration, and just the Kyrie at the 2009 posthumous centennial birthday celebration of Harold Brown. Thanks to him and the Renaissance Chorus of New York, which he created in the 1950’s, and to Joel Meltz, one of his “disciples,” in 1962, I became aware—and soon addicted—to the beauty of the music composed between about 1450 and 1600, the dawn of European classical music. Their LP recording of this mass (two of which I’ve worn out) first made publicly available another dimension of Josquin’s genius. Today we hope to extend that legacy.

Before we get to Josquin, Music Divine will perform three smaller Renaissance gems.

**Palestrina’s** *Sicut cervus* is about as perfectly beautiful an example as one could find of imitative Renaissance polyphony—a style of musical composition already perfected by Josquin’s generation. (Since so many of our members knew it before joining, we often used it as an audition piece.) I was introduced to it by Alex Blachly, my Haverford classmate and co-founder and co-director of the Renaissance Choir, when we performed it at our first concert in 1963.

**Monteverdi’s** *Ecco mormorar l’onde*, the first piece I ever sang by him, in 1964, could be his loveliest old-style madrigal, before he helped invent the *seconda pratica*, or *stile moderno*, the birth of the baroque. This madrigal is pure lyricism, especially in the last two lines, beginning with “L’aura è tua messaggera.”

Our selection from Josquin’s contemporary, **Heinrich Isaac**, the *Agnus Dei* from his *Missa La Mi La Sol*, was the favorite of many who heard and sang our last “Pastoral” concert. The title refers to the four-note phrase, **A-E-A-G**, that is the germ of the entire mass. Here the bass sings the phrase, but in such long note-values that if you notice them, you’re not paying attention to what’s *really* going on: mainly a beautiful call and echo between the two middle voices (whom we’ve placed stereophonically at opposite ends). Since the *Agnus Dei* of the mass has three sections, and Isaac wrote only one setting, we will use his for the first and last, inserting between them the short plainchant *Agnus Dei II* from Mass XVI of the Roman liturgy.

**Sicut cervus** desiderat  
ad fontes aquarum:  
ita desiderat anima mea  
ad te, Deus.

As a deer longs  
for springs of water,  
so longs my soul  
for thee, O God.

Sitivit anima mea  
ad Deum fortem vivum:  
quando veniam et apparebo  
ante faciem Dei?

My soul has thirsted  
for the strong living God:  
when shall I come and appear  
before the face of God?

Fuerunt mihi lacrymae meae  
panes die ac nocte,  
dum dicitur mihi quotidie:  
Ubi est Deus túus?

My tears have been to me  
bread day and night,  
while it is said to me daily:  
Where is your God?

PSALM 41:1-3

**Ecco mormorar l'onde,**  
E tremolar le fronde  
A l'aura mattutina, e gli arboscelli,  
E sopra i verdi rami i vaghi augelli  
Cantar soavemente,  
E rider l'Oriente;  
Ecco già l'alba appare,  
E si specchia nel mare,  
E rasserena il cielo,  
E imperla il dolce gelo,  
E gli alti monti indora:  
O bella e vaga Aurora,  
L'aura è tua messaggera, e tu de l'aura  
Ch'ogni arso cor ristaura.

See how the waves murmur,  
And the leafy branches tremble  
In the gentle morning breeze, and also the shrubs,  
And on the green branches the lovely birds  
Sing exquisitely,  
And the east smiles;  
See how dawn already appears  
And mirrors herself in the sea,  
And clears up the sky,  
And impearls the gentle frost,  
And gilds the high mountains:  
O beautiful and delightful daybreak,  
The breeze is your messenger, and you the breeze's,  
Which restores every burned heart.

I. **Agnus Dei,**  
qui tollis peccata mundi,  
miserere nobis.  
II. *[Repeat]*  
III. **Agnus Dei,**  
qui tollis peccata mundi,  
dona nobis pacem.

Lamb of God,  
who takes away the sins of the world,  
have mercy upon us.  
*[Repeat]*  
Lamb of God,  
who takes away the sins of the world,  
grant us peace.

## *Une mousse de Biscaye*

For a composer from the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 16<sup>th</sup>, the closest equivalent to writing an orchestral symphony in the Classic-Romantic period was to compose vocal music for the entire Mass Ordinary—the part that is the same every day: Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus-Benedictus, and Agnus Dei. As one might expect, many Renaissance masses use liturgical plainchant melodies as their theme. But composers of the time were actually just as likely to use a popular song—even one that would be considered at least R-rated. This is certainly the case with the *Missa Une mousse de Biscaye*, based on the 15<sup>th</sup>-century French chanson of that name, which might be translated—unenlightenedly—as *A girl from Biscay*. It is a song about a French man and his attempt to woo an attractive Basque woman. He relates his progress in each verse, which always ends with her perplexing Basque response: "Soaz soaz ordonarequin," which may mean something like: "Easy, take your time." The melody, which sounds very simple on first hearing, has a sophisticated underlying structure. It inspired the composition of complete masses by Josquin and Isaac, and perhaps a third composer—there exists another anonymous mass based on the song.

Josquin also wrote a polyphonic setting of the chanson, with the melody—slightly altered—in the upper two voices. Only one of the two is notated, since the soprano is a canon, echoing the alto one measure later and four notes higher. The piece is preserved in three manuscripts and one of the earliest music prints, *Canti C*, published in Venice by Petrucci in 1503.

Before singing the mass, we will present the original chanson melody in three guises:

1. Unadorned, as it appears in a monophonic 15<sup>th</sup>-century songbook. However, we will take liberties with the original by having the men sing the Frenchman's text in a lower register, answered by the women, as the *mousse*, an octave higher than written.
2. Next we do Josquin's chanson setting *without* realizing the canon. This makes it a 3-voice piece, with the melody on top in the alto;
3. Finally we realize the canon by adding the soprano line, which echoes the alto, singing the melody a perfect fourth higher.

Josquin's secular treatment of the melody reflects the ambiguous tonality of the original. At least to modern ears, it sounds as though it is in F-major, cadencing on F three times, including the penultimate phrase. Then we are taken by surprise as the final phrase, sung by the *mousse*, lands us a fourth higher on B-flat. [Warning to anyone with perfect pitch: All references to keys indicate the original ones; we have transposed the chanson and the mass.]

Une mousse de Biscaye,  
L'autre jour près ung moulin,  
Vint à moi sans dire gaire,  
Moy hurtant sur mon chemin  
Blanche comme un parchemin  
Je la baisé à mon aise;  
Et me dist sans faire noise:  
"Soaz, ordona requin."

A maid of Biscaye  
The other day by a mill  
Came to me without a word,  
Running into me on my way.  
White as parchment,  
I kissed her at will.  
Without a fuss, she said to me:  
"Easy now, all in good time!"

In the last decade several musicologists have actually questioned Josquin's authorship of the mass, in spite of the fact that all three sources for this mass—two MSS and the Petrucci prints—starting in 1505—attribute it to him. One of the MSS is a beautiful presentation choirbook, probably made for the Hapsburg Emperor Maximilian I, containing seven masses, including another by Josquin—*Missa Faisant regretz*. Some base their argument on how different this mass is from other music believed to be by him. In my opinion, all great composers have written at least one great work (Händel's *Dixit Dominus* rushes to mind)—and perhaps some inferior pieces—containing features not found in any other of their works, without raising questions of authorship.

Unlike most pieces by Josquin, this mass contains virtually no exact imitation when only two voices are singing, nor exact imitation of two-voice counterpoint by the other two voices. The only exception occurs between the bass and alto for the passage near the beginning of the Gloria: *Laudamus te, Benedicimus te, Glorificamus te*. And the mass *never* exactly quotes the original melody; using it instead just as an inspiration for a free-form fantasia, Josquin alters the melody and rhythm in myriad ways from the Kyrie through the Sanctus. (The Agnus Dei repeats the music of the Kyrie.) The closest he ever comes to exact, recognizable quotation of the chanson is at the beginning of the second section of the Kyrie (Christe; repeated as Agnus Dei II), where the tenor proclaims merely the first four notes of the melody in the original rhythm.

However, this work does use throughout, starting with the first entrance of the bass in the Kyrie, what I hear as a Josquin signature use of cross-relation: as the soprano descends from G to E-natural, the bass goes from E-flat down to C. Works with similar occurrences include his *Praeter rerum seriem* and *Déploration* on the death of Ockeghem.

What I find most astounding from some Josquin-attribution-doubters is the contention that this *Missa Une mousse de Biscaye* is of too *poor* [sic] quality to be by him; I find it to be one of the most sublime compositions of the Renaissance and any period since. The mass exudes richness and poignancy from the first few measures of the **Kyrie**, where just the alto and soprano start transforming the chanson melody in divergent ways. Soon the tenor provides a third version, the final entrance by the bass a fifth lower leads to the first instance of the typically Josquin cross-relation referred to just above.

The **Gloria** has sweetness unlike the other movements, while possessing a rigorously structured tenor part: it is silent for a long time, then enters with an approximation of the chanson melody's first two phases. After another silence it repeats the line three times as fast. From the *Qui tollis* section on, the tenor rejoins the fabric of the other voices. The **Credo** has a dark feeling of mystery as the tenor once again stretches out the melody—this time inverted, going first down instead of up. Against one of these held notes, at *et propter nostram salutem*, the alto and bass sing a remarkable passage above it in parallel fourths. From *Et resurrexit* through *Amen*, the music drives to an ecstatic conclusion.

The opening of the **Sanctus** floats endlessly without cadence, first with just soprano and alto, then with bass added. Also, don't miss an unbelievable cadence on *gloria tua*, just before the first **Osanna**. Near the end of the **Benedictus** the soprano and tenor perform a lovely rising sequence. In an unusual move, Josquin assigns the music of the Kyrie to the final, similarly tripartite **Agnus Dei**.

**Singers:**

Deborah Dimasi, soprano '06  
Nitya Thomas, soprano '11  
Rita Udell, soprano '05  
Andrea Swenson, alto '10  
Elaine Tokunaga, alto '05  
Virginia Kaycoff, alto '09  
Stephen Bonime, tenor '05  
Andy Chang, tenor '10  
Joel Pattison, tenor '11  
John Hetland, bass '09  
Paul Geidel, bass '05  
Tod Mijanovich, bass '06

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and

**[www.facebook.com/musicdivine](https://www.facebook.com/musicdivine)**

We hope you will sign our guest book before leaving.

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for welcoming us into this divine musical space.

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**Rita Udell**, for her excellent, elegant manuscript score of the Josquin mass in modern clefs; and

**John Hetland**, for producing the greater part of Music Divine's music scores using the wonderful program he created, helping with translations and program notes, and recording our rehearsals and concerts.