

RenChorNY

presents

A Tudor Christmas

Founded 1954 as The Renaissance Chorus of New York,
RenChorNY returns to their 1975 centerpiece:
Robert Fayrfax: Missa “Tecum principium”

Puer natus est William Byrd (c.1540-1623)

Tecum principium Sarum chant

Missa Tecum principium Robert Fayrfax (1464-1521)
Gloria – Credo – Sanctus – Agnus Dei

Quid petis, o fili? Richard Pygott (c.1485-c.1552)

St Frances Cabrini Shrine
701 Ft. Washington Avenue
November 30, 2019

Hudson View Gardens Lounge
128 Pinehurst Avenue
December 14, 2019

Program Notes

Before Henry VIII's 1540 break with Rome and the dissolution and plundering of monasteries, he employed the great Robert Fayrfax as his court composer. Much Latin music was destroyed, but Fayrfax's florid festal Christmas mass "Tecum principium" miraculously survived the violence in four manuscript copies.

Today we present this masterpiece along with the seasonal Sarum chant that was the foundation of this mass; also Christmas music by the later composer William Byrd and by Fayrfax's younger contemporary Richard Pygott.

The *cantus firmus* technique — the use of a familiar sacred tune as the basis around which a polyphonic piece is composed — goes back to around 900 AD, though the term started being used in the early 1300s. The tenor part would sing this tune, often on long notes being held (Latin *tenere*, to hold). Fayrfax has based the mass on this Christmas chant:

I will be with thee from the beginning of the day
Té-cum prin-cí - - - pi - um in dí - e

of thy strength *among the splendor of the saints;*
vir - tú - tis - - - tú - ae, in splendó - - ri - bus san-ctó - rum,

for out of the womb *before the creation of the light* *have I begotten thee.*
ex - - - ú - te-ro án-te lu-cí - fe - rum - - - gé-nu - - - i te.

Fayrfax uses this chant in every section of his Mass, either entirely (Gloria, Credo, Agnus), or splitting it in two sections (Sanctus). You may hear the entire chant in the Gloria at *Gratias agimus* and again at *Qui sedes*; in the Credo at *Et in unum Dominum*, at *Genitum non factum*, and at *Et resurrexit*; and in the Agnus Dei at *Dona nobis pacem*. Portions of the chant appear at many other places throughout the mass.

When our composer doesn't use the chant, it's not to take a break from self-imposed constraints. He uses other patterns, often superimposed on themselves as canons or imitations. For example, in the Gloria at *Qui tollis peccata*, the alto is followed by the soprano with the same tune three bars later. At the beginning of the Agnus Dei, the tenor is followed by the alto two bars later with the same tune a sixth higher. Similar imitations and mini-canons occur all through the mass.

Besides these various motifs, Fayrfax seems to want to give extra unity to his masterpiece by having a specific downwards pattern occur in all parts of his mass, such as the beginning of the *Domine* section of the Gloria, where the basses make a long descent for an octave and a fourth on the final syllable of *Domine*. This writer can't help thinking of Machaut's *Messe Notre-Dame*, written one and a half centuries earlier, also using a downward descending motif as a unifying motif, and wonders if Fayrfax may have been influenced by his great French predecessor...

Text in italics is sung by small ensembles

Puer natus est William Byrd (c.1540-1623)

Puer natus est nobis,	A boy has been born for us,
Et filius datus est nobis,	And a son has been given to us,
Cujus imperium super humerum ejus,	Whose empire is upon his shoulder,
Et vocabitur nomen ejus	And his name shall be called
magni consilii Angelus.	Angel of the great council.

<i>Cantate Domino canticum novum,</i>	<i>Sing to the Lord a new song,</i>
<i>quia mirabilia fecit.</i>	<i>for he has done wondrous things.</i>
Gloria Patri, et Filio,	Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
et Spiritui Sancto,	and to the Holy Spirit,
Sicut erat in principio,	As it was in the beginning,
et nunc et semper,	is now and ever shall be,
et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.	and for ages of ages. Amen.

Tecum principium Sarum chant

Tecum principium	I will be with you from the beginning
in die virtutis tuae,	of the day of your strength
in splendoribus sanctorum,	among the splendor of the saints;
ex utero ante luciferum	from the womb before the creation of light
genui te.	I have begotten you.

Missa Tecum principium Robert Fayrfax (1464-1521)

Following the liturgy, Fayrfax writes a Gloria, a Credo, a Sanctus, and an Agnus Dei. Each of these movements has approximately the same duration, starting with a triple time followed by a dual time.

According to English habits of his time, Fayrfax uses a 5-part chorus. All sections use the midrange tenor voice. But far from always using the whole choir, he has a wide variety of combinations of three to five voices.

GLORIA

The Gloria begins with the words the angels proclaim to the shepherds at Christmas in Luke 2:14. Whatever the lyrics, Fayrfax seems to impose upon himself the same voice pattern succession at the beginning of each section (ATB, STB, SATBB) and at the end (TBB, SATBB). He also uses the contrast between the three upper voices (SAT) and the three lower ones (TBB) in all sections.

Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.
Laudamus te. Benedicimus te.
Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.
Gratias agimus tibi
propter magnam gloriam tuam.
Domine Deus, Rex caelestis,
Deus Pater omnipotens.

Glory to God in the highest.

And on earth peace to people of good will.
We praise you. We bless you.
We worship you. We glorify you.
We give thanks to you
for your great glory.
O Lord God, King of heaven,
God the Father almighty.

Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe.
Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris.

O Lord, the only-begotten son, Jesus Christ.
O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father.

Qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.
Qui tollis peccata mundi,
suscipe deprecationem nostram.
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,
miserere nobis. Quoniam tu solus sanctus
Tu solus Dominus. Tu solus altissimus,
Jesu Christe. Cum Sancto Spiritu,
in gloria Dei Patris. Amen.

Who take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.
Who take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer.
Who sit at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us. For you alone are holy,
You alone are Lord. You alone are the highest,
Jesus Christ. With the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

CREDO

The Nicene Creed is the statement of orthodox beliefs used in most Christian churches.

Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem, factorem caeli et terrae, visibilium omnium, et invisibilium. Et in unum Dominum Jesum Christum, Filium Dei unigenitum. Et ex Patre natum ante omnia saecula. Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine, Deum verum de Deo vero.

Genitum, non factum, consubstantialem Patri, per quem omnia facta sunt. Qui propter nos homines, et propter nostram salutem, descendit de caelis.

Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine: Et homo factus est.

Crucifixus etiam pro nobis: sub Pontio Pilato passus, et sepultus est. Et resurrexit tertia die, secundum Scripturas. Et ascendit in caelum: sedet ad dexteram Patris. Et iterum venturus est cum gloria, iudicare vivos et mortuos: cujus regni non erit finis. Amen.

I believe in one God, The Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten son of God. And he was born of the father before all worlds. God from God, light from light, True God from true God.

Begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who for us humans, and for our salvation, came down from heaven.

And he was made flesh by the Holy Spirit from the Virgin Mary: And was made human.

He was even crucified for us: under Pontius Pilate he suffered, and was buried. And he rose again on the third day, according to the Scriptures. And he ascended into heaven: he sits at the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory, to judge the living and the dead: of his kingdom there shall be no end. Amen.

SANCTUS

The Sanctus, from Isaiah 6:3 and Matthew 21:9, recalls the prophet's vision of angels calling out at the throne of God, and Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Composers historically have made the liturgically compulsory repeat of the Sanctus "Osanna" a repeat of the music setting of this segment. Fayrfax chooses to clearly differentiate them, including changing the meter from 3 to 2, using both times the whole chorus.

Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus
Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua.
Osanna in excelsis.
*Benedictus qui venit
in nomine Domini.*
Osanna in excelsis.

Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God of hosts.
Heaven and earth are filled with your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
*Blessed is he who comes
in the name of the Lord.*
Hosanna in the highest.

AGNUS DEI

The final movement of the Ordinary is a plea for mercy and peace.

Agnus Dei,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.

Lamb of God,
who take away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.

Agnus Dei,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.

Lamb of God,
who take away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.

*Agnus Dei,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
dona nobis pacem.*

*Lamb of God,
who take away the sins of the world,
grant us peace.*

Quid petis, o fili? Richard Pygott (c.1485-c.1552)

Quid petis O fili?
mater dulcissima ba ba.
O pater O fili,
mihi plausus oscula da da.

What do you want, O son?
sweetest mother, ba ba.
O father O son,
give me fond kisses, da da.

*The mother full mannerly and meekly as a maid
looking on her little son, so laughing in lap laid,
so prettily, so pertly, so passingly well apayd,
full softly and full soberly unto her sweet son she said:*

Quid petis...

*I mean this by Mary, our maker's mother of might,
full lovely looking on our Lord, the lantern of light,
thus saying to our savior, this saw I in my sight,
this reason that I read you now, I read it full right.*

Quid petis...

*Musing on her manners so my mard was my main,
save it pleased me so passingly that passed was my pain,
yet softly to her sweet son methought I heard her sayn:
Now gracious God and good sweet babe, yet once this game again.*

Quid petis...

Conductor's Biography

Claude Lévy, choral conductor and former "agrégé" music teacher, founded La Cantarela, an award-winning chorus, in his hometown of Béziers, France. A versatile conductor, he chose a repertoire ranging from the Renaissance chanson to 21st-century premieres, focusing on major oratorio works like Mozart's *Requiem*, Beethoven's *Mass in C* or Rossini's *Stabat Mater*.

Making New York his home since 2013, Mr. Lévy has sung with / been an assistant conductor for / led sectionals of / accompanied / subbed for / conducted: The Canby Singers; Essential Voices USA; The Cecilia Chorus of New York; The Friday Night Sight Singing Group; The Barnard-Columbia Chorus; The Renaissance Street Singers. He is currently the Artistic Director of the Renaissance Chorus Association, for which he conducted "Music ABOUT Music and Musicians" in 2017 and, this season, "A Tudor Christmas."

His interest in 21st-century music encouraged him to sign up for the 2016 world premiere of David Lang's "the public domain", commissioned by the Mostly Mozart Festival, where he became one of Dr. Deborah Simpkin King's "Group Leaders." This led her to choose him as her Associate Conductor for "In The Name of The Earth," the 2018 Mostly Mozart commission by composer John Luther Adams, which was premiered on August 11, 2018.

His familiarity with David Lang's choral music naturally led to his interest in taking part in another David Lang world premiere, "The Mile-Long Opera" on The High Line, a project for which he created his own CantaNYC, a tribute to both La Cantarela and the hospitality and musicianship of New York City.

Mr. Lévy was initially trained as a pianist by a former student of Alfred Cortot, and also enjoys playing various instruments, such as the recorder and the cello.

He is proud of having been mentor to his former student Antoine Miannay and commissioned him with "Human Rights," which he premiered in France in 2012 and in New York in June, 2019. He will conduct again this jazz-inspired secular oratorio for an Amnesty International fundraiser on December 8th, 2019.

RenChorNY Members

Soprano: Lee Ann Beauchamp, Paige Cutrona, Sally Elliott, Kate Ellis, Andrea Reiter, Iris Young.

Alto: Ann Berkhausen, Maribeth Dunajski, Virginia Kaycoff, Fran Morton, Dorrie Rosen, Jaylan Turkan, Holly Weiss.

Tenor: Steve Bonime, Ross French, Richard Leibowitz, Bruce Rickenbacher, Robert Thorpe, Bill Van Steveninck.

Bass: Tom Frenkel, Paul Geidel, Ezra Halleck, Chisom James Maduakor, Jonathan Miller, Erik-Peter Mortensen, Sig Rosen, Brian Michael Wong.

Acknowledgements

Our deepest gratitude to Claude Lévy, our artistic director and conductor, for his outstanding professionalism, technical skills, and artistic and personal commitment in managing our complex projects.

Thanks to the RenChorNY singers, everyone in the audience, and the many alumni and friends of this long-running group. We are ever grateful to Harold Brown and the legacy he began in founding the Renaissance Chorus Association of New York in 1960 as a non-profit organization. We continue to honor his work and thank his family for their support.

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Our thanks to John Hetland, conductor of The Renaissance Street Singers, who provided editions of Missa Tecum principium (Fayrfax), Puer Natus Est Nobis (Byrd), and Quid Petis O Fili (Pygott), and helped produce this program.

Thanks are due to Sig and Dorrie Rosen, whose energy, enthusiasm and focus brought all of us together to perform these works.

Sincere gratitude to George Gilliland for the exquisite design of our concert flyer. The image used is the Gloria from Missa tecum principium of Fayrfax, provided courtesy of DIAMM (Digital Image Archive of Medieval Music) with the kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, UK.

We thank Hudson View Gardens for providing space for weekly rehearsals and performance, and Cherie Sprosty and the Sisters of St. Frances X. Cabrini Shrine, and The Tank, for performance spaces.

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and the Renaissance Chorus Association of New York,
visit our website:

www.RenaissanceChorus.org