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LAMENTS OF THE QUEEN OF CARTHAGE

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LAMENTS OF THE QUEEN OF CARTHAGE

I

Dulces exuviæ · Adrian Willaert (c. 1490-1562)

II

Dulces exuviæ · Anonymous
Dulces exuviæ · Marbriano de Orto (c. 1460-1529)

III

Fama malum · Josquin des Prez (c. 1455-1521)
Dulces exuviæ · ? Josquin
Dulces exuviæ · Jean Mouton (1459-1522)

IV

Malheur me bat · variously ascribed to Malcort,
Martini, and Ockeghem
Dulces exuviæ · Anonymous
Kyrie & Gloria, *Missa Malheur me bat* · Josquin

V

Dulces exuviæ · Jacobus Vaet (c. 1529-67)
At trepida et cœptis immanibus effera Dido
Jacques Arcadelt (1505-68)
Dulces exuviæ · Willaert

Saturday, June 17, 2005 · 11:30 a.m.
Church of St. John the Evangelist
35 Bowdoin Street, Boston

TEXTS

Dulces exuviæ, dum fata deusque sinebat,*
accipite hanc animam meque his exolvite curis.
Vixi et quem dederat cursum fortuna peregi
et nunc magna mei sub terras ibit imago.
Urbem præclaram statui, mea mœnia vidi,
ulta virum pœnas inimico a fratre recepi:
felix, heu nimium felix, si litora tantum
nunquam Dardaniæ tetigissent nostra carinæ.

Aeneid IV: 651-8

Fama, malum qua non aliud velocius ullum:
mobilitate viget virisque adquirit eundo,
parva metu primo, mox sese attollit in auras
ingrediturque solo et caput inter nubila condit.

Aeneid IV: 174-7

At trepida et cœptis immanibus effera Dido,
sanguineam volvens aciem, maculisque tremantis
interfusa genas, et pallida morte futura,
interiora domus irrumpit limina, et altos
conscendit furibunda rogos, ensemque recludit
Dardanium, non hos quæsitum munus in usus.
Hic, postquam Iliacas vestis notumque cubile
conspexit, paulum lacrimis et mente morata
incubuitque toro dixitque novissima verba:
Dulces exuviæ, dum fata deusque sinebat,
accipite hanc animam meque his exolvite curis.
Vixi et quem dederat cursum fortuna peregi
et nunc magna mei sub terras ibit imago.

Aeneid IV: 642-54

*Sources of Virgil and music alike vary between
sinebat and sinebant.

& TRANSLATIONS

*O relics once dear, while Fate and God allowed,
take this spirit and release me from my woes!
I have lived, I have finished the course that Fortune gave,
and now in majesty my shade shall pass beneath the earth.
A noble city have I built; I have seen my own walls;
avenging my husband, I have punished my brother and foe:
happy, ah! too happy, had but the Dardan keels
never touched our shores!*

*Rumor, of all evils the swiftest:
speed lends her strength, and she wins vigor as she goes;
small at first through fear, soon she mounts up to heaven
and walks the ground with head hidden in the clouds.*

*But Dido, trembling and frenzied with her awful purpose,
rolling her bloodshot eyes, her quivering cheeks flecked
with burning spots, and pale at the coming of death,
bursts into the inner courts of the house, mounts
in madness the high pyre and unsheathes
the Dardan sword, a gift besought for no such end!
Then, as she saw the Trojan garb and the familiar bed,
pausing awhile in tearful thought
she threw herself on the couch and spoke her last words:
O relics once dear, while Fate and God allowed,
take this spirit and release me from my woes!
I have lived, I have finished the course that Fortune gave,
and now in majesty my shade shall pass beneath the earth.*

—All translations from the Aeneid by H. R. Fairclough
(Loeb Classical Library).

NOTES

Sometimes I wonder whether the best way to present new music—or, as in this case, old music that most of us are likely to be encountering for the first time—would be for the second half of a program simply to repeat the first. Although an audience member recently suggested to me that he, too, would appreciate such a tactic, I suppose that most of you will be relieved that this is not that program. It does feature a considerable amount of redundancy in the texts you will hear, however, and the Kyrie and Gloria of Josquin's *Missa Malheur me bat* show the composer expanding the three voices of the original chanson into a four-voice mass, rather obsessively reworking and recombining the song's melodies into what has been described as a sort of fantasia on the original. And we do indulge in a few minutes of wholesale repetition, for the program opens and closes with Adrian Willaert's profoundly moving setting of Dido's last words from the *Aeneid*, in which the heartbroken queen summarizes her life's accomplishments as she prepares to commit suicide. I hope that hearing Willaert's motet for a second time, after listening to the same poetry set by several other composers, will reveal how the meaning of a piece can shift and deepen depending on context.

Elissa was a princess of Tyre in Phoenicia. Sailing across the Mediterranean in order to escape the treachery of her brother, Pygmalion, who had murdered her husband, Sychaeus, she made land on the shores of northern Africa in what is now Tunisia. Here she struck a deal with the local sovereign that she might have as much land as could be enclosed within the hide of a bull. By cutting the hide into a long and narrow strip she claimed enough territory to found the city of Carthage—Qart Hadasht or "New City"—and she became its queen, having changed her name to Dido or "wanderer." While the city was still being built, Aeneas, a Trojan (or Dardan) prince fleeing the sack of Troy (or Ilium) with his followers, was wrecked on the coast, blown far off course by storms sent against him by the wrathful Juno.

Juno's hatred of the Trojans derived from the incident known as the Judgement of Paris, in which Paris, son of King Priam of Troy, judged Venus fairer than Juno or Minerva. As a reward Venus promised him for his wife Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world. But Helen was already married to Menelaus, king of Sparta, and her elopement with Paris sparked off the long and bloody Trojan War and eventually brought about the destruction of Troy. Intent on finishing the job by drowning Troy's survivors, Juno was opposed by Venus, who, besides favoring Trojans in general on account of Paris, was Aeneas' mother. Venus managed to get the storm-weary Trojans to Carthage, whereupon she sent her other son, Cupid, to sink his fateful arrow in Dido's breast and cause the proud widow to fall hopelessly in love with Aeneas. Dido and Aeneas soon became lovers. Jupiter, however, intended that Aeneas continue to Italy to found the Roman empire. Peremptorily recalled to his divine mission by Mercury, Aeneas abandoned Dido, who stabbed herself with his sword after mounting a funeral pyre on which were heaped gifts brought her by the Trojan prince.

The story of Dido, as related by Virgil in the fourth book of the *Aeneid*, was particularly attractive to composers as they began to turn to classical texts relatively late in the humanist Renaissance. Sixteen settings of Dido's last words, beginning with the line "Dulces exuvia, dum fata deusque sinebat," are known from the sixteenth century. The earliest are a group of six connected to the court in Brussels and Mechelen (Malines) of Marguerite of Austria, Regent of the Netherlands and sister of the Habsburg Emperor Maximilian I. Five are in a manuscript prepared in the scriptorium of Petrus Alamire for presentation to Henry VIII, king of England, and his wife of the moment, Catherine of Aragon, probably between 1516 and 1522; this is now preserved in the British Library as MS Royal 8 G.vii. None of the settings of *Dulces exuvia* is ascribed in the manuscript, but other sources attribute one to Johannes Ghiselin, one to Jean Mouton, and one to Josquin des Prez, although the latter two ascriptions are

in a German anthology from 1559 and are perhaps of questionable reliability. MS Royal 8 G.vii also contains a work by Josquin on another text from the *Aeneid*, *Fama malum*.

One of the anonymous *Dulces exuvia* settings from Royal 8 G.vii, another by Marbriano de Orto, and a second, anonymous *Fama malum*, are found in a second manuscript from the same scriptorium, now known as Brussels, Bibliothèque royale MS 228. This is a chansonnier for Marguerite herself which was copied at around the same time as the collection for Henry and Catherine. Marguerite, who had been exploited virtually from birth as a political pawn in the dynastic games of the Habsburgs and saw two husbands and her brother die prematurely, was a highly cultured, politically savvy, and famously melancholy lady who took as her motto “Fortune infortune fort une”: Fortune makes one very unhappy. Very likely she identified herself with Dido, noble, crafty, strong-willed, battered by fate, destroyed in the end by the machinations of the gods and her own overwhelmingly passionate nature.

After the initial cluster of compositions connected to Marguerite’s court, there are a handful of settings of *Dulces exuvia* scattered across the rest of the century: an anonymous frottola from 1519 and a few German works, followed by Willaert in 1545, Jacques Arcadelt and Orlando di Lasso in 1556, Jacobus Vaet in 1562, Derick Gerarde sometime in the third quarter of the century, and finally Jacob Handl around 1590. There is also a madrigal by Giaches de Wert from 1561 on an Italian translation of Dido’s words, *Dolci spoglie*.

Today we perform six works from the Netherlands court manuscripts of the 1510s, along with the settings by Willaert, Arcadelt, and Vaet. We begin with Willaert, whose scrupulous attention to declamation ensures that each syllable of Virgil’s poetry is given just the proper weight and length. The music largely eschews imitation and pauses at logical and dramatic moments in the poetry, creating the effect of a tragic chorus

reciting. Willaert’s textual clarity may help to fix the poetry in your mind before we turn to the considerably less direct connection between language and melody found in some of the other composers’ music. In the highly melismatic, mostly non-imitative polyphony of the anonymous work in our second set, the relationship of words to music is quite obscure, although the music is generally very expressive of Dido’s nobility and grief. Next comes an equally affecting work by Marbriano de Orto, in which the challenge of text underlay is slightly less daunting. You may notice that these settings seem to comment upon one other, sharing fragments of melody and certain gestures like the final dissonance, and a similar dissonance concludes the works by Josquin and Mouton. Although the latter two otherwise may seem quite different, their cantus parts are, in fact, identical throughout, aside from the final note of the Josquin. As to who borrowed whose cantus, the sources are silent.

Fama malum sets four lines from earlier in the fourth book of the *Aeneid*. In this passage Virgil describes Rumor, “of all evils the swiftest,” carrying abroad the scandal of Dido’s dalliance with Aeneas, and Josquin’s work is as much a marvel of precise dramatic characterization as Virgil’s. It begins with a worrying, obsessive ostinato figure on the words “Fama, malum” which returns at twice the speed for the word “velocius.” The top parts sing a duo on the words “parva metu primo” (small at first through fear), interrupted by a duo in the lower parts at “mox sese attolit in auras” (soon she mounts up to heaven); the next entry of the superius creates a jarring false relation with the tenor. The effect of the whole work is threatening and unsettling, foreshadowing the tragic events to follow.

Next we explore works derived from the three-voice chanson *Malheur me bat*—at least, it seems to be a chanson, although no words apart from the incipit survive in any source. Although this may appear at first sight to be a digression from the theme of Dido’s lament, the connection will be made clear by the anony-

mous *Dulces exuvia* which follows, whose first melodic gestures in all four parts are borrowed from those of the song. As for Josquin's mass, it uses all three voices of the chanson, distributed from voice to voice in the mass, recombined and repeated, as if viewed through a wonderful musical kaleidoscope. Rather typically for Josquin, his use of the original material can seem a bit obsessive when examined closely, but the musical result marvellously transcends the mechanical structure. The Kyrie begins with a duet in the upper voices, the superius singing the tenor of the chanson while the alto quotes three times the first notes of the chanson contratenor before proceeding to a new countermelody. When these voices reach a cadence, the tenor and bass enter, repeating note for note the superius-alto duet against new material in the upper voices; this new material is itself characterized by repeated phrases. The *Christe* is structured similarly. In the opening duet the alto takes up the chanson tenor melody while the superius worries away at another short melodic fragment, singing it six times before proceeding. When the tenor enters it repeats what the alto has just sung of the chanson tenor, and in the second Kyrie it pursues the original melody to its conclusion. In the Gloria the tenor again quotes the chanson tenor in its entirety, but regularly skips back a phrase or two to repeat itself before moving ahead: in this ratchetlike fashion it sings every note of the original tune twice. (Things get even more complicated in the Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus dei.)

It is awkward enough to describe these procedures in coherent prose. How much more challenging it is to account for Josquin's captivating music, which bewitches us where it might simply amaze with technical virtuosity. He starts with a beautiful song, and with his repeats and restructurings and new countermelodies contrives to make it astonishingly more beautiful. I leave it to you to discover the many pleasures of this music, but would like to point out how some of the most magical moments of song and mass alike depend on the tonal flexibility of the Phrygian mode (the natural scale beginning on the note E, more or less) with its tendency

towards harmonic centers on C and A as well as on E: this is most obvious towards the end of the Gloria, where measures of music featuring glorious major harmonies on C suddenly give way to the mysterious E sonorities of the Phrygian mode. The conclusion of the Kyrie is further colored by startling Bbs in the bass, at once a long way from the mode's E final and a borrowing from the same mode transposed to A.

Returning to *Dulces exuvia*, we leap several generations forward to the middle of the sixteenth century for music by Vaet and Arcadelt. Vaet's setting is restrained and traditional in style. The six voices lend great breadth to the music, and the treatment of "Felix, heu nimium felix" is all the more effective for being unprepared by what has come before. Arcadelt's motet is almost entirely homophonic, with a very few melismas here and there and a bit of counterpoint to conclude; the work relies for its effect on the color and motion of the harmonies. The composer first sets several lines describing Dido's frenzied rush to the funeral pyre. She unsheathes Aeneas's sword and then, beholding her lover's garments and the bed they shared, sinks down in tears to speak her last words. These words are as proud and dignified as they are grief-stricken: "I have lived, and have fulfilled the course that Fortune gave me, and now my mighty shade shall pass beneath the earth." Dido's nobility is most evident in Willaert's motet, which continues beyond "sub terras ibit imago," where other settings conclude, to Dido's listing her greatest accomplishments, including the founding of a city, that powerful symbol and locus of Renaissance civilization. Passionate in love and regal in death, Dido captured the Renaissance imagination in a way Aeneas, despite his heroic wanderings and perseverance through twelve chapters of trial and battle, never managed.

—Scott Metcalfe

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Formed in 1987 and incorporated in 1990, CONVIVIUM MUSICUM has been praised by the *Boston Globe* for “the almost dancing lift given to the rhythms, both musical and verbal.” Convivium’s adventurous programming ranges from Josquin and Mouton to Sweelinck and Le Jeune, from Peñalosa to Victoria, from the Song of Songs to Dido’s lament, and from Europe to New Spain, including masterworks by Byrd, Guerrero, Praetorius, and many other lesser-known composers. Convivium Musicum is proud to be a corporation run by its singers, who serve on the Board of Directors, manage the group’s business affairs, design its programs and publicity materials, and seek out opportunities to perform Renaissance polyphony for new audiences.

A violinist and conductor with a repertoire extending from the fifteenth century through the eighteenth, SCOTT METCALFE has been music director of Convivium Musicum since 1996. He also directs the vocal ensemble Blue Heron, and he is concertmaster of the Trinity Consort in Portland, Oregon, under Eric Milnes. He was a founding member of La Luna and of The King’s Noyse, played in every Boston Early Music Festival orchestra from 1993 through 2003, and appears on recordings on harmonia mundi, ATMA, Dorian, Wildboar, and elsewhere. He holds a bachelor’s degree from Brown University, where he majored in biology, and is currently completing a master’s in music at Harvard, as well as learning to play the vielle and Irish fiddle.

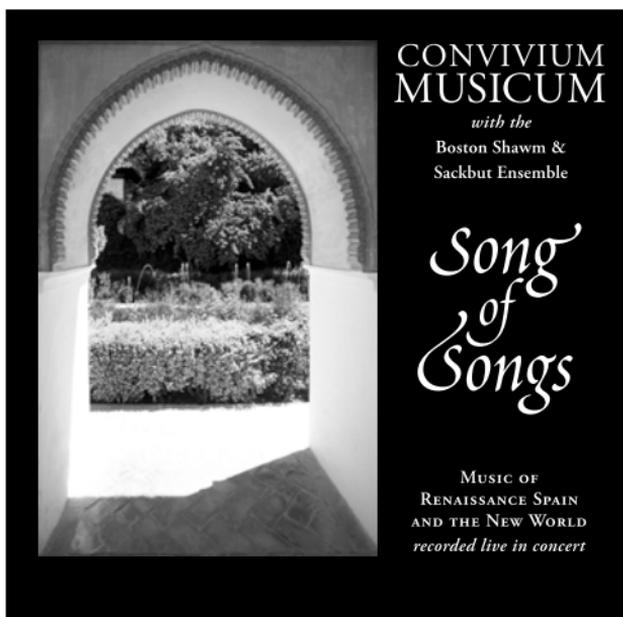
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