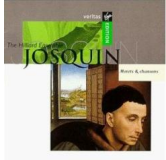


Josquin Desprez – Motets et Chansons (Hilliard) [1997]

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 22 October 2009 12:46 - Last Updated Sunday, 27 October 2013 13:01

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1. Motet: Ave Maria (a 4) 2. Motet: Absalon, fili mi (a 4) 3. Motet: Veni, sancte Spiritus (a 6)
4. Motet: De profundis clamavi (a 4) 5. Frottola: Scaramella (a 4) (w/ setting by Compere) 6.
Chanson: In te Domine speravi (a 4) 7. Frottola: El grillo (a 4) 8. Chanson: Milles regretz (a 4)
9. Chanson: Petite camusette (a 6) 10. Chanson: Je me plains (a 5) 11. Chanson: En
l'ombre d'ung buissonet (a 3) 12. Chanson: Je ne me puis tenir d'aimer (a 5) 13.
Motet-chanson: La deploration sur la mort de Ockeghem (a 5) Hilliard Ensemble David
James (counter-tenor), Paul Elliott (tenor), Leigh Nixon (tenor) Rogers Covey-Crump (tenor),
Paul Hillier (bass), Michael George (bass)

When compared to late Medieval and early Renaissance composers, Josquin's style is unique since it preserves the Church's tradition of textual clarity while emphasizing varied vocal texture and human emotion. The first piece on the album, Ave Maria, Gratia Plena, is a motet that encompasses these characteristics and others that make up Josquin's style. Josquin begins Ave Maria, Gratia Plena using all four voices to declare the text by beginning with the soprano and using points of imitation to slowly move the text through the other voices. By using imitation, Josquin emphasizes the text through repetition and creates seamless polyphony, a compositional technique that creates fluid vocal movement from resulting harmonies. Because Josquin's use of imitation is very effective, he does not over use this technique, but instead chooses to vary the vocal textures in the piece by using a mixture of polyphony and homophony, and at certain moments, opting to leave out a voice. It is clear through Josquin's compositional techniques that his intentions are to use a variety of textures to above all, support the text. Though these are technical examples of Josquin's style in Ave Maria, Gratia Plena, the listener experiences nothing of the sort. Josquin artfully blends his techniques so his music does not sound technical, but captures the listener through beautiful colors and varied textures.

Though the title of the album suggests the recording contains exclusively motets and chansons, the Hilliard Ensemble chose to surprise the listener by including a Josquin frottola, El Grillo. The frottola was an Italian song style typically composed using four, treble-dominated voices set

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homophonically. The texts in frottola were also set syllabically and were distinguishable by a rhyme scheme of short and long syllables (short, short, long, short, long, short, long, long).

Contrasting the somber character of Ave Maria, Gratia Plena, the song, El Grillo is a playful tune about a cricket. In this song, Josquin depicts the characteristics of a cricket, using a high vocal range to imitate cricket chirps and rhythmic complexity to portray the springy nature of a cricket. Since El Grillo is largely homophonic, there are frequent cadence points that give the piece a forward motion that depicts the constant, yet intermittent character of a cricket (Sherr 428). After listening to the more serious works on Motets et Chansons, El Grillo almost seemed out of place. Though it was different than the other works on the album, El Grillo was a humorous change of pace that demonstrated Josquin's versatile compositional abilities.

Listening to the Hilliard Ensemble's album, Motets et Chansons, was an enlightening experience as I have not listened to much vocal music during my life as a musician. The talents of the Hilliard Ensemble performed Josquin's music with a passion and energy that was evident during slowest and darkest of songs. The fluidity and vocal perfection in each song showed the listener the careful thought the Hilliard Ensemble put in placing each note and coloring each texture. Experiencing the virtuosity of Josquin Des Prez in combination with the amazing talents of the Hilliard Ensemble has positively changed my attitude towards vocal music, and has redefined my view of voice, labeling it as one of the most beautiful instruments.

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