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THE DEATH OF THE VIRGIN

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MARC-ANTOINE CHARPENTIER

Mass and Symphony

“Assumpta Est Maria”

SOLOISTS—CHOIR OF JEUNESSES MUSICALES DE FRANCE

ORCHESTRA DIRECTED BY LOUIS MARTINI—HENRIETTE ROGET, ORGAN



MARC-ANTOINE CHARPENTIER

MASS AND SYMPHONY "ASSUMPTA EST MARIA"

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MARC-ANTOINE CHARPENTIER: MASS AND SYMPHONY "ASSUMPTA EST MARIA"

Until recently the music of the greatest French composer of the Seventeenth Century, Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1634-1704) has been obscured by the fame of his bitter rival, Jean-Baptiste Lully. What is ironic is that Lully was born in Italy; he came to France, and he became more French than the French. Marc-Antoine Charpentier was born in France; he acquired the major part of his musical training under the Italian master of the oratorio, Carissimi, and he was accused of being too Italian. The plain facts are that Charpentier came into his own only after the death of Lully in 1687. His beautiful opera, *MEDEE*, dates from the last years of his life, as does the magnificent Mass, *ASSUMPTA EST MARIA*.

If today the music of Marc-Antoine Charpentier is beginning to reach wide audiences, it is mostly due to the devoted efforts of Guy Lambert who founded the Friends of Marc-Antoine Charpentier in Paris (aided in America by The Charpentier Society with headquarters in Boston). This recording made under his supervision is one of the many major projects which he and the Society are preparing at the present time. Charpentier is the author of about 500 compositions—including 12 masses, 24 oratorios, 67 psalms for soli, chorus and orchestra, operas, cantatas, pastorales. Successively *Musicien du Théâtre Français*, *Directeur de la Musique de la Princesse de Guise*, *Maître de Musique des Jésuites*, *Professeur de Philippe d'Orléans*, and finally *Maître de Musique de la Sainte Chapelle*, Charpentier exerted a profound influence on the development of French vocal music. The lasting qualities of his music show him to have been a remarkable bridge between the relatively static quality of the Renaissance Italian masters and the dynamic compositions of such Baroque successors as Bach and Handel.

ASSUMPTA EST MARIA is the last and most impressive of Charpentier's twelve works in this form. It was performed first in 1699 at the Sainte-Chapelle. Like the other Charpentier masses, this work is an unusual document in Seventeenth Century French church music, coming at an epoch when the composition of masses accompanied by instruments was rare in French. The musical style represents a fusion of Italian methods of scoring and construction and harmonic expressiveness with the principles of the French "grand motet." The performance forces required are unusual. A chorus of six parts (first and second soprano, haute-contre, tenor, baritone and bass) is accompanied by a "symphonie" of four parts: strings, flutes and figured bass including organ. Since the French haute-contre is a high tenor voice no longer cultivated, in this recording the part is sung by contraltos.

According to the manuscript we learn that Charpentier planned this work as part of a great ceremony for the Feast of the Assumption. In addition to the five parts of the Ordinary of the Mass here recorded, the composer indicated an *Elevation* was to be performed between the *Sanctus* and the *Agnus Dei*. A *Domine Salvum* was composed to go after the Mass, and space is left in the manuscript for a "Motet de Sortie" which was never written.

The Mass begins with a four-voiced "symphonie" in the key of D minor, the prevailing key of the entire work. The theme of the ensuing *Kyrie* is presented by the four parts which enter imitatively in a style reminiscent of the motet technique of the Sixteenth Century. The *Kyrie* is constructed on the Da Capo principle. After the six part chorus and "symphonie" present the opening in a very sober, contrapuntal style, the organ plays a couplet. The *Christe* is scored for two tenors and bass soloists accompanied only by figured bass. Finally, the prelude and first *Kyrie* are recapitulated.

Following liturgical practice the celebrant (here represented by a soloist) intones the Gregorian chant, "Gloria in excelsis Deo." The chorus enters quietly on the words, "Et in terra pax." There is an abrupt change of tempo and dynamics at the text, "Laudamus te." A solo section begins at "Domine Deus." In the ensuing choral passages the expressive treatment of the words. "Miserere nobis" is remarkable for its sensitivity. The closing "Cum Sancto Spirito" is akin to the style later adopted by Bach in his B minor Mass both from the standpoint of rhythm and fugal writing. An impressive cadence on "Amen" ends this monumental movement.

In its architectural importance and the contrasts of tutti and soli, the *Credo* is a worthy partner of the *Gloria*. Again the soloist intones the chant, with the motto "Credo in unum Deum." The entrance of the chorus ("Patrem omnipotentem") in the major tonality is like a burst of light. The "Et Incarnatus" section is on a lofty plane of spiritual inspiration. After a silence the three soloists have passionate outcries on "Crucifixus etiam pro nobis." The words "Et resurrexit" are appropriately rendered with upward vocalises. Massive chordal writing for chorus and instruments is resumed at "Et in Spiritum Sanctum." Particularly admirable is the triumphant final fugue on "Et vitam venturi" and the majestic cadence on "Amen."

A short "symphonie" before the *Sanctus* re-establishes the dark mood of the Mass. The material is taken up by the voices. In the *Benedictus* words are omitted, and this section is allotted to the organ.

Charpentier now provides for a short *Elevation*, but fails to include it in the score.

The editor, Guy Lambert, very wisely places here the beautiful antiphon, "In odorem", for soprano, two flutes and figured bass, which Charpentier composed for the Vespers of the Assumption.

The prelude for flutes and the final *Agnus Dei* represent one of the crowning achievements of Charpentier's maturity. In the key of F major, both the prelude and the *Agnus Dei* are pervaded by an atmosphere of wonderful calm. The triple form required for this movement by the liturgy is supplied by a reprise of the prelude after the vocal section. Harmonic touches reminiscent of Lotti color this conclusion so evocative of the mystical and richly stained glass windows of the Sainte Chapelle.

Notes by CLARENCE H. BARBER and BAIRD HASTINGS

KYRIE

Kyrie eleison,
Christe eleison,
Kyrie eleison.

Lord, have mercy upon us,
Christ have mercy upon us,
Lord have mercy upon us.

GLORIA

Gloria in excelsis Deo Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.

Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, good will towards men. We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee, for Thy great glory, O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty.

Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te; gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam: Domine Deus, Rex coelestis, Deus pater omnipotens.

O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ; O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Thou that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Thou that takest away the sins of the world, receive our prayer. Thou that sittest at the right hand of God the Father, have mercy upon us.

Domine fili unigenite Jesu Christe; Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris;

For Thou only art holy; Thou only art the Lord; Thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost, art most high in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis: Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram: qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere nobis.

CREDO

Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem, factorem coeli et terrae, visibilium omnium et invisibilium;

I believe in one God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, And of all things visible and invisible:

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 Patris per quem omnia facta sunt.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made: Who for us men, and for our salvation came down from Heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary. And was made man. And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures;

Qui propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem descendit de caelis, Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine, et homo factus est;

And ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead: Whose kingdom shall have no end.

Crucifixus etiam pro nobis, sub Pontio Pilato passus et sepultus est:

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spake by the Prophets,

Et resurrexit tertia die secundum Scripturas: Et ascendit in coelum: sedet ad dexteram Patris, et iterum venturus est cum gloria judicare vivos et mortuos, cujus regni non erit finis:

And I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

Et in unum, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam.

I confess one baptism of sins. And I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Confiteor unum baptismum in remissionem peccatorum, et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum, Et vitam venturi saeculi Amen.

SANCTUS

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus
Dominus Deus Sabaoth!
Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua.
Hosanna in excelsis.

Holy, Holy, Holy,
Lord God of hosts.
Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.
Hosanna in the highest.

ELEVATION

(For the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin)

In odorem unguentorum tuorum currius: adolescentulae dilexerunt te nimis.

We delight in the odor of your perfumes. The young maidens esteem thee beyond measure

AGNUS DEI

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.

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

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