

VOX

Christopher Wolverton, Artistic Director

Extreme Singing

La Rue Requiem and other Low Masterpieces of the Renaissance

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Early music ensemble

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Vox Early Music Ensemble is a professional *a cappella* ensemble dedicated to the performance of early (primarily Medieval and Renaissance) vocal music. Founded in 2000 by Executive Director Whitnie Crown Wolverton, the Ann Arbor based ensemble has been under the artistic direction of Christopher Wolverton since its inception. Members of Vox have sung professionally as soloists and ensemble artists with some of the most prestigious vocal music programs, including Chanticleer, St. Paul's Cathedral (London), The Rose Ensemble, *Conspirare*, St. Martin's Chamber Choir, and the Santa Fe Desert Chorale. Presenting full concert seasons of early music, Vox has quickly garnered a reputation for excellence: In 2002, Vox was presented with a Professional Development Award from Early Music America, one of only two awards given nationally to early music vocal ensembles. In conjunction with this award, the ensemble was featured on the nationally-syndicated radio program, *Harmonia*. Vox is in residence at St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church in Ann Arbor, and has performed by invitation on numerous concert series throughout Michigan and Ohio. Vox was recently voted "Best Classical Artist – 2005" in Washtenaw County by the readers of Current Magazine.

Program

Stabat Mater

Gaspar van Weerbeke (c. 1440-c.1518)

For Maximilian, upon the death of Philip I the Fair in 1506

Absalon, fili mi

Pierre de la Rue?

Two works for the death of Anne of Brittany in 1514

Fiere Atropos

Pierre Moulu (c. 1480-90 - c.1550)

Quis dabit oculis

Jean Mouton (c. 1459-1522)

For the death of Johannes Ockeghem in 1497

Plorer, crier/Requiem

Pierre de la Rue

Intermission

Possibly written for the death of Philip I the Fair in 1506

Missa Pro Defunctis (Requiem)

Pierre de la Rue (c.1460-1518)

Introit: Requiem Aeternam

Kyrie

Tract: Sicut Cervus

Offertory: Domine Jesu Christe

Sanctus/Benedictus

Agnus Dei

Communion: Lux Aeterna

Extreme Singing

La Rue Requiem and other Low Masterpieces of the Renaissance

Notes by Honey Meconi

In the last half of the fifteenth century, musicians began to treat texts of mourning in ways they had never done before. Laments had previously been sung as a single line only, but composers began to set these texts polyphonically. Three, four, or even more voice parts evolved to generate a rich, full sound. Contemporary writers tell us, too, of an expected association between sorrowful words and deep ranges, and composers obliged by exploring depths never before attempted in written music. And they were evidently inspired by the moving sentiments of the words, for many of these works are among the most beautiful of all pieces from the Renaissance.

In today's performance Vox presents six works of mourning of different kinds. The concert opens with Gaspar van Weerbeke's *Stabat mater*. Though largely unknown to modern audiences, Weerbeke is now being discovered as one of the overlooked masters of the Renaissance. He worked for a while for the Archduke Philip the Fair, one of the most important rulers of the late fifteenth century, and one whose court chapel seems to have specialized in pieces for low voices. Weerbeke's composition, a work of sacred mourning (*Stabat mater* describes the grieving Mary, mother of Christ) heads down to a note not that common then or now: low E. Readers may remember the rising lines of the bass staff as G B D F A, or "good boys do fine always;" Weerbeke uses the E *below* that low G. He also expands the choir to five separate voice parts—again, beyond the four-voice norm of the time.

Low though Weerbeke's E is, it pales in comparison to the pitches used in *Absalon fili mi*. This is one of the most famous works of the Renaissance; in fact, notorious might be a better adjective to describe it. We don't know for sure who wrote it. In its earliest manuscript it is anonymous, in later prints it is given to Josquin Desprez. The style, though, is unlike that of Josquin and much more like that of his equally gifted contemporary Pierre de la Rue. Many scholars now cautiously accept an attribution to the latter composer, especially since the work quotes two of La Rue's own compositions. The piece uses a combination of Biblical texts in which David laments the loss of his son Absalon, and it may have been written for the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian in 1506 on the death of his son, Philip the Fair (the employer of La Rue, incidentally, but not of Josquin). This stunningly beautiful work is striking for two highly unusual attributes. First, it uses not just B-flat and E-flat, which are normal for the time, but also A-flat, D-flat, and even G-flat. Second, its final pitch is a staggeringly low B-flat below the staff, making this one of only four compositions in the entire Renaissance to use that pitch.

And yet there is one work that goes even lower than this: Pierre Moulu's *Fiere atropos*. Moulu's composition is another five-part work of mourning, this one written on the death of Anne of Brittany, Queen of France, in 1514. The composition is a type of work known as a motet-chanson. Four of the voice parts sing a French text, while the tenors take over the Latin text and melody of a plainchant from the Good Friday liturgy, *Anxiatus est in me*. The lowest bass voice includes the A that is almost an octave below the G of the bass staff—the lowest pitch ever written for voices. This note is so low that the composition has never been recorded, and in fact, no modern performance of this work is known. Yet the work holds no terrors for the exceptional voices of Vox, and today's audience is privileged to take part in an historic occasion as this work comes to life again.

Anne of Brittany's death prompted multiple remembrances, and Jean Mouton's *Quis dabit oculis nostris* was another work that mourned her passing. Mouton, a leading composer at the French court, has written a work that stays within normal bounds of the time: four voices, no flats, standard ranges. Yet it is still beautiful, alternating between the favorite imitative texture of the time and more homophonic sections. In the latter it is especially easy to follow the text: be on the lookout for the multiple occasions when the singers call out the name of the departed, "Anna, Anna."

The first half of the concert closes with another motet-chanson, Pierre de la Rue's *Plorer, gemir, crier*, which weds the chant *Requiem aeternam* from the Latin Mass for the Dead with a grieving French text. This French text breaks off half-way through the song in the only manuscript that transmits the work, so additional text has been reconstructed for performance. It is highly likely that La Rue intended his work as a memorial to the composer Johannes Ockeghem, a composer he admired and emulated, and the reconstructed text calls out Ockeghem's name again and again in cascading lines.

The second half of the concert is devoted to La Rue's Requiem mass. It is one of the earliest surviving polyphonic settings of the Mass for the Dead, preceded by that of Dufay (now lost) and Ockeghem (existing today with only five movements). La Rue's piece was the most highly disseminated of all early Requiem masses, and it influenced in turn the Requiem masses of Brumel, Prioris, and most especially Févin. The work is highly unusual in employing a different combination of voices for almost every movement, in expanding the texture from four to five voices in the Kyrie, Offertory, Sanctus, and Agnus, and in providing striking contrasts between movements that are pitched high (Tract, Offertory, and Communion) and those that are pitched low (everything else). Once again, the lowest voice descends to low B-flat, with the second lowest voice itself going to C. No other composition of this or any time includes not just one but two such deep voices.

Not surprisingly, this unique work has become La Rue's best-known sacred composition, and it has already generated ten separate recordings and countless performances. But modern

choirs pale before the demands it presents and have effected compromises in facing the challenges of turning the notated pitches into sound, either transposing the whole work upwards or moving the low movements up and the high movements down, thus destroying the registral contrasts La Rue carefully wrote into the music. Not so Vox! Their performance unerringly matches La Rue's written pitch. Although we cannot return to the musical world of 500 years ago, Vox beautifully recreates its sound for us today.

Texts and Translations

Stabat Mater

Gaspar van Weerbeke (c. 1440-c.1518)

Stabat mater dolorosa, juxta Crucem lacrimosa, dum pendebat Filius.	The grieving Mother stood weeping beside the cross where her S was hanging
Cuius animam gementem, contristatam et dolentem, pertransivit gladius.	Through her weeping soul, compassionate and grieving, a sword passed.
O quam tristis et afflicta, fuit illa benedicta Mater Unigeniti.	O how sad and afflicted was that blessed Mother of the Only- begotten!
Quae moerebat et dolebat, (Pia Mater) dum videbat, Nati poenas incliti.	Who mourned and grieved, the pious Mother, looking at the torment of her glorious Child
Quis est homo qui non fleret, Christi Matrem si videret, in tanto supplicio?	Who is the person who would not weep seeing the Mother of Christ in such agony?
Quis non posset contristari, (Christi) Matrem contemplari, dolentem cum Filio?	Who would not be able to feel compassion on beholding Christ's Mother suffering with her Son?
Pro peccatis suae gentis, vidit Jesum in tormentis, et flagellis subditum.	For the sins of his people she saw Jesus in torment and subjected to the scourge.
Vidit suum dulcem natum, morientem desolatum, cum emisit spiritum.	She saw her sweet offspring dying, forsaken, while He gave up his spirit
Eia Mater, fons amoris, me sentire vim doloris, fac, ut tecum lugeam.	O Mother, fountain of love, make me feel the power of sorrow, th I may grieve with you
Fac ut ardeat cor meum, in amando Christum Deum, ut sibi complaceam.	Grant that my heart may burn in the love of Christ my Lord, that I may greatly please Him
Sancta Mater, istud agas, crucifixi fige plagas cordi meo valide	Holy Mother, this I pray, drive the wounds of the Crucified deep into my heart.
Tui nati vulnerari iam dignaris Vim amoris imprime	That of your wounded Son, and sealed with love.
Fac me vere tecum flere crucifixo condolere donec ego vixero	Let me sincerely weep with you, bemoan the Crucified, for as long as I live
Iuxta crucem tecum stare te libenter sociare in planctu desidero	To stand beside the cross with you, and to join you in your weeping, this I desire
Virgo virginum praeclara mihi iam	O Virgin, most exalted among virgins,

non sis amara fac me tecum plangere

be not bitter towards me, let me weep with you

Fac ut portem Christi mortem passionis eius
sortem et plagas recolere

Make me to bear the weight of Christ's death,
join in his Passion and venerate his wounds.

Fac me plagis vulnerari
cruce hac inebriari ob amorem filii

Let me be wounded with his wounds,
let me be inebriated by the cross and your Son's blood

Inflammatum et accensum, per te, Virgo,
sim defensum in die iudicii

Lest I burn, set afire by flames, Virgin,
may I be defended by you, on the day of judgement

Fac me cruce custodiri morte Christi
praemuniri confoveri gratia

Let me be guarded by the cross, armed by Christ's death
and His grace cherish me

Quando corpus morietur
fac ut animae donetur paradisi gloria. Amen

When my body dies,
may my soul be granted the glory of paradise. Amen

Absalon, fili mi

Pierre de la Rue?

Absalon fili mi,
quis det ut moriar pro te, Absalon?
Non vivam ultra,
sed descendam in infernum plorans.

*Absalom my son,
if only I had died instead of you, Absalom
I shall live no more,
but go down to hell, weeping.*

Fiere Atropos

Pierre Moulu (c. 1480-90 - c.1550)

Fiere attropos, maudicte et inhumaine,
Grant ennemye de toute vie humaine,
Tu nous as mis en grant perplecite
Quant par envye as en tes pletz cite
Nostre maistresse et dame souveraine.

Cruel Death, accursed and inhumane,
Great energy of all human life,
You have placed us in great distress
When, out of spite, you have summoned to your court
Our mistress and sovereign lady.

Que te nuysoit en ce siecle et demaine,
La noble dame dont France grant deul maine
Comme prive de sa felicite.
Fiere attropos!

What harm did she to you, in this day and tomorrow,
The noble lady for whom France mourns greatly,
As if deprived of all its happiness.
Cruel Death!

Anxiatus est in me spiritus meus,
In me turbatum est cor meum.

My spirit is faint within me,
My heart within me is appalled.

Quis dabit oculis

Quis dabit oculis nostris fonem lachrymarum?
Et plorabimus die ac nocte, coram Domino?
Britannia, quid ploras? Musica, cur siles?
Francia, cur indula lugubri veste,
moerore consumeris?
Heu nobis, Domine, defecit Anna.
Gaudium cordis nostri,
Conversus est in luctum chorus noster,
Cecidit corona capitis nostri.
Ergo, ejulate pueri, plorate sacerdotes,
Ululate senes, lugete cantores,
Plangite nobiles, et dicite:
Anna requiescat in pace. Amen.

Jean Mouton (c. 1459-1522)

Who will change our eyes into a fountain of tears?
And are we to weep, day and night, before the Lord?
Brittany, what do you lament? Music, why are you silent?
France, why are you so sad,
in garments of mourning?
Alas, Lord God, Queen Anne has left us.
She who was the joy of our hearts;
Our song has become sorrow,
And the crown has fallen from our heads.
Therefore, children cry out in anguish and weep you priests;
Weep, you old men, Singers, weep in tears,
Noblemen, lament, saying:
May Queen Anne rest in peace. Amen.

Plorer, crier, gemir/Requiem

Plorer, gemir, crier et braire
Me commant grant desplaisir
Quant la mort...
[a vostre Ockeghem attrappé en sa trappe]*

Requiem eternam dona eis domine.

* Text reconstructed by Dr. Honey Meconi

Pierre de la Rue

To cry, to moan, to scream and to blubber
A great anguish commands me
When death....
[has your Ockeghem trapped in his trap]

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord.

Missa Pro Defunctis (Requiem)

Introit

*Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.
Te decet hymnus Deus, in Sion,
et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem:
exaudi orationem meam,
ad te omnis caro veniet.*

Kyrie

Kyrie, eleison. Christe, eleison. Kyrie, eleison

Tract

*Sicut cervus desiderat ad fontes aquarum,
Ita desiderat anima mea ad te Deus.
Sitiivit anima mea ad Deum fortem vivum*

Pierre de la Rue (c.1460-1518)

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord,
and let light perpetual shine on them.
A hymn, O God, becometh Thee in Sion,
and a vow shall be paid to Thee in Jerusalem:
O hear my prayer,
all flesh shall come to Thee.

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

As the deer longs for the water-brooks,
So longs my soul for you, O God.

*quando veniam et parebo ante faciem Dei?
Fuerunt mihi lacrimae meae panis die ac nocte
dum dicitur mihi cotidie ubi est Deus tuus?*

Offertory

*Domine, Jesu Christe, Rex gloriae,
libera animas omnium fidelium defunctorum
de poenis inferni, et de profundo lacu.
Libera eas de ore leonis,
ne absorbeat eas tartarus,
ne cadant in obscurum:
sed signifer sanctus Michael
repraesentet eas in lucem sanctam:
Quam olim Abrahae promisisti et semini eius.
Verse: Hostias et preces tibi Domine offerimus
Tu suscipe pro animabus illis,
Quarum hodie memoriam agimus:
Fac eas Domine, de morte transire ad vitam.
Ut mereamur ultra sine fine
in requiem sempiternam gaudere*

Sanctus/Benedictus

*Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus
Domine Deus Sabaoth
Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua.
Hosanna in excelsis.
Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
Hosanna in excelsis.*

Agnus Dei I/II/III

*Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi:
dona eis requiem.
Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi:
dona eis requiem.
Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi:
dona eis requiem sempiternam.*

Communion

*Lux aeterna luceat eis, Domine:
Cum Sanctis tuis in aeternum, quia pius es.
Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine:
et lux perpetua luceat eis.
Cum Sanctis tuis in aeternum, quia pius es.*

My soul hath thirsted after the strong living God;
when shall I come and appear before the face of God?
My tears have been any bread day and night,
whilst it is said to me daily: Where is thy God?

Lord Jesus Christ, King of Glory,
deliver the souls of all the faithful departed
from the pains of hell and from the deep pit.
Deliver them from the lion's mouth,
that hell may not swallow them up,
and may they not fall into darkness;
but may the holy standard-bearer, Michael,
lead them into the holy light:
which Thou didst promise to Abraham and to his seed.
Verse: To Thee, O Lord, we make our offerings of prayer and
praise:
Accept them on behalf of those souls whom we remember today
Grant O Lord that they may pass from death to eternal life.
That we may be worthy hereafter
to enjoy eternal rest without end.

Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:
grant them rest.
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:
grant them rest.
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:
grant them eternal rest.

May light eternal shine upon them, O Lord:
With Thy Saints for ever, for Thou art merciful.
Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord:
and let light perpetual shine on them.
With Thy Saints for ever, for Thou art merciful.