

## SPANISH MASTERS

But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.

Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.

So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.

And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

*Matthew 19:30-20:16*

The parable of the laborers in the vineyard, like any good story, lends itself to a variety of readings, but for me the story is about grace, abundant and freely given to all, no matter when we answer the call into the vineyard. I imagine that Francisco Guerrero understood the parable in somewhat the same way, for his motet *Simile est regnum caelorum* overflows with joy and assurance. It opens with a striking gesture in the cantus, leaping a fifth upwards; the figure is answered by a melody in the altus that first works its way down a fifth, then leaps an octave. The duet is repeated an octave lower by the tenor and bass while the cantus and altus continue with new material on “homini patrifamilias”; this phrase, too, is echoed by tenor and bass. The motet’s sense of exuberance is heightened by the way so many of its melodies seem to gather momentum as they go, finally spilling out into waves of melisma. The most arresting passage occurs when the text describes the workers standing about idle (“stantes in foro otiosos”). Here Guerrero groups the rhythms into triple time in the midst of the prevailing duple, colors the harmony with chromatic notes, and finally deploys an extraordinarily archaic cadence with a double leading tone (a device that had pretty much disappeared before the composer was born), coming to rest for the briefest of moments on the *subfinalis*, the scale degree one step below the

final or home tonality of the piece. The next phrase gathers itself together quickly and rises to exultant climax at the words “Ite et vos in vineam meam” (“Go ye also into my vineyard”). The music generates such energy that the end of the piece feels nothing like a conclusion, but rather like the expectation of more to come—as indeed there is, for the motet sets only the beginning of the parable. And Alonso Lobo has provided us with a musical sequel as well, for Guerrero’s marvelous motet is the parent of an equally radiant musical child, Lobo’s *Missa Simile est regnum caelorum*.

A skilled composer can easily see that a short motet containing such a wealth of invention does not, indeed cannot begin to exhaust the compositional possibilities inherent in its musical material, and perhaps it is due to this realisation that so many of the huge number of motets written in the sixteenth century bore further fruit in so-called parody or imitation masses. As Pietro Cerone explained in *El melopeo y maestro* (published in 1613), “The invention of the motet should be newly invented...the workmanship in motets should be new throughout and in all respects,” but in composing a mass one may borrow the inventions of a motet or some other piece. The composer of such a mass took the melodies and harmonies of his model and explored and reworked them over the course of the longer form of the mass, teasing out every possible contrapuntal permutation, melodic paraphrase, and harmonic variation that his imagination could discover.

As a choirboy at Seville Cathedral, Lobo presumably studied with Guerrero, the greatest Spanish composer of the generation before, and Guerrero’s influence was lifelong. Guerrero was quite prolific, composing a page of music for every day of his life (according to F. Pacheco, Velásquez’s father-in-law, in the 1599 *Libro de descripción de verdaderos retratos de illustres y memorables varones*): his extant works include 18 masses and some 150 other sacred works as well as a large number of secular songs. Lobo, in contrast, published just one collection, the 1602 *Liber primus missarum*, containing six masses and seven motets. All but one of the masses are based on motets by Guerrero. The *Missa Simile est regnum caelorum* conforms in most respects to the precepts Cerone’s *El melopeo y maestro* lays out for an imitation mass. It presents the

motet's motives in constantly varying contrapuntal textures, explores a range of consonances or harmonic possibilities, makes increasing use of the model's internal motives as the mass proceeds, casts the Sanctus and Agnus Dei movements in "long, elaborate, less familiar, and less closely woven" form than the Gloria and Credo, sets the words "Jesu Christe," "Et incarnatus est," and "Crucifixus" with especial reverence and decorum, and so forth. But this recipe of compositional stratagems does far from sufficient justice to Lobo's mass, which fulfills the glowing promise of the motet (and its text) in abundance, unfolding in an endlessly captivating series of variations on Guerrero's inventions. Like grace, the generosity of this music is infinite. Or, to use another simile, singing this mass is like going for repeated walks in a familiar landscape, in different seasons and in different weather, sometimes following a new path. We see (we hear) the same things again and again, but each time they appear in a new guise.

By the time we reach the Sanctus, the familiar head-motive of a rising fifth no longer leads off the movement, but rather sounds in answer to a stepwise motive taken from the middle of the motet ("Conventione autem facta"). In the Osanna it disappears entirely, replaced by a swirl of dancing triplets whose melody is derived from the same stepwise figure. The Benedictus is scored for a reduced ensemble of three voices (as Cerone recommends), and here the motet seems to recede even farther from view. All the more marvelous, then, is the first Agnus Dei, in which the cantus quotes the motet's opening melody, alto and bass enter with the characteristic fifth leap inverted, and the tenor sings the entire first phrase of the motet as a *cantus firmus obstinatus*, stating it four times at two different pitch levels, to the words "Simile est regnum caelorum."

This sets the stage for what is to come next. As Cerone notes, "To conclude their work with greater harmony and greater sonority, composers usually write the last Agnus Dei for more voices, adding one or two parts to the regular parts of the composition." Lobo not only expands the choir from four voices to six, adding a second cantus and second bass, but he sets the tenor and second cantus in canon, and the melody of the canon paraphrases the cantus melody of the original motet. As the movement gets underway the texture is saturated with allusions to the "Simile est" melody. In a wonderful touch of

musical and textual exegesis, the two bass parts sing their first invocation of “Agnus Dei” to a figure that not only presents that melody’s fifth leap in inversion, but also turns out to be a quotation of the motet’s melody for the words “Dabo vobis” (“I will give you”). At the words “Dona nobis pacem” a series of suspensions and dissonances ensues, the harmonic tension giving real urgency to the plea for peace. As the clouds lift, the “Dabo vobis” figure returns in the basses, sung now to the words “Dona nobis pacem”: the prayer is answered just as it becomes clear that the work’s musical journey is nearly over. All is finally released into joyous affirmation on the final “pacem,” which, exactly like the conclusion of the motet, is a promise more than an ending.

Lobo’s five-voice motet *Ave regina coelorum* offers another sample of Lobo’s skill at writing canons. Lobo, Guerrero, and other Spanish composers seem to have inherited their predilection for the device from earlier Franco-Flemish composers like Josquin. *Ave regina coelorum* sets its Marian text in a canon at the unison in two upper parts above three independent parts and features some surprising major harmonies at the words “Gaude gloriosa.”

The rest of this springtime concert is made up of secular music. Hundreds and hundreds of Spanish songs survive from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; you may expect Blue Heron to explore this repertoire in more depth in future seasons. For now, we offer a small sample. Guerrero’s sweet *Fresco y claro arroyuelo* transports us from sacred vineyard to the pastoral world of human love. Of course, things do not always go well in *amores*. The shepherdess the poet loves is absent, but alas, in *Un dolor tengo en el alma* the memory of her lingers in his heart. (The song comes from the printed collection *Villancicos de diversos autores*, often called the Cancionero de Upsala, not because of any original connection to Sweden but because the sole surviving copy resides in a library there.) Absence is no cure for lovesickness; on the contrary, it aggravates it, according to the vaguely Petrarchan sonnet *Quien dize quel Ausencia causa Olvido*. In *Quien amores tiene*, the constant reiteration of one phrase of melody neatly illustrates the lover’s inability to forget the object of his love, who is unfortunately married to another; the obsession causes him to lose sleep.

It is, perhaps, a question of your taste or mood whether the text of *Navego en hondo mar* is tragic or so melodramatically desperate that it veers into comedy. (The seas are high! The wind is blowing! The boat is breaking apart! Lady Luck is against me and she always been! Everything always goes from bad to worse!) But *Ya no les pienso pedir* sounds a note of real pathos, the lover admonishing his heart to suffer since a cure is impossible. Interspersed with the songs you will hear assorted instrumental works, including dances from a manuscript (“Lerma MS DK 1”) which was copied in the late sixteenth century for musicians at the court of the Duke of Lerma, chief minister to King Philip III and a great patron of the arts who seems to have introduced the violin family to Spain.

—Scott Metcalfe

Some of these notes were printed, in slightly different form, in a program for a concert by Convivium Musicum in the spring of 2007. I am grateful to the singers of Convivium for granting permission for me to reuse them here, as well as for the opportunity to learn Lobo’s wonderful Mass with them. Thanks, too, to Douglas Kirk, the “DK” of “Lerma MS DK 1,” for his editions of the anonymous dances and of Blas de Castro’s *Ya no les pienso pedir*, all of which Blue Heron first performed on a concert in April 2008.