

Music Notes 2018 – The Third Sunday of Lent

The mass setting this Sunday at the Solemn Eucharist is the *Missa Miserere mihi Domine* by the Portuguese composer and organist Manuel Cardoso (1566–1650). He was both a musician and a member of the Carmelite order. In a particularly lucky break, he later joined the household of the Duke of Barcelos (or Braganza, if you prefer) (1604–1656), who was also a composer and later, in 1640, became King John IV. Indeed, the King is credited – with some controversy surrounding the attribution – as the composer of the setting of *Crux fidelis* that we and many other churches use on Good Friday. Both as Duke and King, John was a great patron of the arts and a warm friend to fellow musicians. Cardoso benefited on a number of occasions from the King's willingness to fund the publication of his music

Cardoso's music was indisputably old-fashioned even by the standards of his day, a characteristic he might be said to share with Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750). Cardoso died 56 years after Palestrina (1525–1594), and yet his later works could be described as a refined stylistic tribute to the school of the Roman master and seem untouched by the new, so-called Baroque style that was flourishing in neighbouring countries. Indeed, Bach was born a bare 35 years after he died, so if Bach was old-fashioned, Cardoso was well and truly behind the times for his day. Of course, we hear nothing of this, for it all sounds simply like Renaissance music to us, and in truth this matters very little. Moreover, it is a sad fact is that we only have a modest amount of Cardoso's output, the majority having been destroyed in the terrible 1755 Lisbon earthquake and the associated fire.

Cardoso's devotion to reflection of Palestrina style is not just a matter of stylistic imitation. Five of his masses are parodies (i.e. works using quotations of another piece as a jumping off point for inspiration) of Palestrina motets. In the case of the setting this Sunday, he is even more conservative, since he employs *cantus firmus* as its compositional method, a procedure that Palestrina used increasingly sparingly and loosely as time went by. This expression, which translates as "fixed melody" or "fixed song", if you like, means that a piece of plainchant is threaded through the composition with the other voices woven around it. This makes it, in effect, a form of harmonized, accompanied chant. Although his hero, Palestrina, eschewed this more and more, Cardoso applies the technique surprisingly strictly in this case by having the plainchant, which is the antiphon to Compline, sung in long notes throughout the setting. Sometimes it is in one voice, sometimes in another, sometimes at the original pitch, sometimes a fifth removed, but it never varies from its melodic shape nor truncated. Lest this sound as though the setting is dull, nothing could be further from the truth. It is a marvellous example of late Renaissance style. Indeed, this is a characteristic of the whole Portuguese school, which really took what had been going on in, say, Rome and, refusing to yield too quickly to the new prevalent style

outside, deepened and enhanced the tradition, taking it to an extremely high standard of elegance.

One curious aspect of the choice of this *cantus firmus* is that the antiphon itself is in truth a remarkably dull bit of chant. Apart from one jump up of a third and two jumps down of the same interval, out of its sum total of 24 notes, the same note occurs consecutively on three occasions, and on one occasion it occurs three times in a row. All the rest of the notes are merely adjacent to each other. There is considerably more melodic variety in *Three blind mice*. Cardoso surmounts this challenge remarkably well.

The motet at the Offertory, *O Lord, increase my faith* is the cause of some confusion. For many years it was attributed to Orlando Gibbons (1583–1625), but we know now that it was written by Henry Loosemore (1600–1670). He was organist of King's College, Cambridge for an impressive 43 years from 1627. He lost this and another anthem to Gibbons for so many years because of the work of Thomas Tudway (c.1650–1726), Loosemore's successor at King's College, who included them in a collection he copied out (now in the British Museum), in which he attributes both anthems to Gibbons. We just don't know why he made this mistake. Thanks to some clever detective work by Professor John Morehen, a recent Pastmaster of the Worshipful Company of Musicians, we know that the copy of this anthem – found in the archives of King's College Cambridge – is in Loosemore's own hand, and the other contemporaneous copy that probably came from the King's source, firmly declares that this is the work of "H.L.". There are, anyway, many harmonic touches that make it unlikely to be the work of Gibbons. Incidentally, the other Loosemore work attributed to Gibbons is frightfully dull – Loosemore was a rather uneven composer – and would be most unworthy of the greater composer. Meantime, *O Lord, increase my faith* is a very effective piece with some beautiful word-painting. This includes, for example, the elongated notes at *Strengthen me*, which seem to picture the supplicant stretching the sinews of faith to make them feel stronger, a simple little falling figure to illustrate *charity*, and a briefly stretched out cadence to illustrate *patience*.

The canticles at Evensong are a setting by Kenneth Leighton (1929–1988) and are known as his *Second Service* – his first being the set written for *Collegium Magdalenæ Oxoniense* (*Magdalen College, Oxford*), and known by that name. Just the mention of the *Second Service* can fill organists with fear and alarm, because the way they work requires the organist to stick very strictly in time and almost ignore what the choir is doing. Lest this give you the impression that it might be rather tough to listen to, that really isn't the case. It is actually very exciting, but just written in such a way that, although the choir and accompaniment do work well together, they risk the possibility of putting each other off rhythmically the whole time. The work was

commissioned by the Cathedral Organists' Association and completed in 1971. It is dedicated in memory of Brian Runnett, who had been Organist and Master of the Choristers at Norwich Cathedral, but tragically died in a car accident in 1970, while driving home after giving an organ recital in Westminster Abbey.

Leighton was an extraordinary composer of a great deal of varied and fascinating music. Hailing originally from Yorkshire, he eventually settled in Edinburgh, where he was Reid Professor of Music at the University of Edinburgh from 1970 until 1988. Some of his music has gone into our collective awareness over the past few years: for example, his *Coventry Carol*, which has a completely original melody, has now become one of the most regularly performed settings of those familiar words around Christmas, frequently played at that time of the year on Classic FM, and released on CD by just about every professional choir. He has his own language, rather as Herbert Howells (1892–1983) has and his work exemplifies a distinctly English approach to choral composition. These canticles are fantastic music, and if you do not know them already, it would certainly be worth your while to experience this thrilling example of this composer's output.

The anthem is *Bring us, O Lord God* by William Harris (1883–1973). He was a British organist and composer, who was variously organist of Lichfield Cathedral, New College, and then Christ Church Cathedral, both in Oxford, and finally St George's Chapel, Windsor. Somewhere along the line, he picked up the nickname "Doc H", by which he was always known to his choristers wherever he went. This anthem is seen as a sibling work to *Faire is the Heaven*, which is easily his most famous anthem and also scored for double four-voice choirs. However, *Faire is the heaven* dates from 1925, when Harris was at New College, whereas *Bring us, O Lord God* is from 1959, shortly before his retirement from St George's Chapel, Windsor. Nevertheless, the musical language had remained constant, and one would not have thought that so many other composers were involved in mining rich seams or modernism all around him. (The late John Birch, who was organist of Chichester Cathedral at the time that Dean Hussey commissioned the canticles, used to refer to modernist – or, to use another unflattering term, "squeaky gate" – music rather disparagingly just as "the latest works".)

The text of the anthem is taken from a sermon by John Donne (1572–1631), preached in Whitehall on 29th February 1627, and adapted into a prayer by Eric Milner-White, Dean of King's College, Cambridge, in the middle of the twentieth century. (Milner-White, incidentally, is famous for introducing the *Service of Nine Lessons and Carols* at King's.) Donne was a very complicated man, with an extraordinary personal history that began in a recusant Catholic family, and ended with King James I more or less browbeating him into becoming an Anglican priest for the last sixteen years of his life. In between came a great deal of incident, a wife, Anne Donne (famous from his sign-off in a letter to her after hearing that the marriage had cost him his job: *John*

Donne, Anne Donne, Un-Done), who bore him twelve children, but expired shortly after the last, his tenure of the post of Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, and, of course, many years of writing some of the greatest poetry in the English language. The words of this prayer are well-known: *Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening into the house and gate of heaven, to enter into that gate and dwell in that house, where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light, no noise nor silence, but one equal music, no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession, no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity; in the habitations of thy majesty and thy glory, world without end. Amen.*