

MUSIC FOR THE HOLY ROMAN EMPEROR MAXIMILIAN I (1459-1519) AND FOR HIS DAUGHTER, MARGUERITE OF AUSTRIA (1480-1530)

BLUE HERON RENAISSANCE CHOIR

Scott Metcalfe, director

Noël Bisson
Lydia Knutson
Carol Schlaikjer
Daniela Tošić
Martin Near
Allen Combs
Kyle Masterson
Jason McStoots
Aaron Sheehan
Mark Sprinkle
Glenn Billingsley
Paul Guttry
Darrick Yee

Mack Ramsey, trombone

PROGRAM

Josquin des Prez (c. 1455–1521)

Inviolata, integra et casta es, Maria

Ludwig Senfl (c. 1486–1542/3)

Beati omnes

Anonymous (La Rue?)

Je ne scay plus

Martin Near, Jason McStoots, and Paul Guttry

Pierre de la Rue (c. 1452–1518)

Mijn hert altijd heeft verlanghen

Lydia Knutson, Daniela Tošić, Mark Sprinkle, and Glenn Billingsley

Heinrich Isaac (c. 1450–1517)

O Maria, mater Christi

Anonymous (La Rue?)

Coeurs desolez / Dies illa

Carol Schlaikjer, Aaron Sheehan, Allen Combs, Glenn Billingsley, and Paul Guttry

Isaac

Virgo prudentissima

presented at the

Boston Early Music Festival

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NOTES

Tonight's program celebrates the musical legacy of two of the foremost patrons of a dynasty of patrons, the Habsburg Emperor Maximilian I and his daughter, Marguerite of Austria, as it is preserved in two rather special documents of the early sixteenth century. The first is the *Liber selectarum cantionum*, a print of 1520 that transmits the most highly esteemed sacred repertory of Maximilian's imperial chapel. The second is a manuscript now in the Bibliothèque Royale in Brussels, MS 228, a chansonnier containing mostly secular music which was prepared for Marguerite in Malines (Mechelen) in the Netherlands between 1516 and 1523. Through his marriage to Mary, the only child of Charles the Bold, duke of Burgundy, Maximilian captured the brilliant political and cultural inheritance of the Burgundian court for the central European Habsburgs. (His grandson, the future Charles V, would extend the family's reach all the way to the Iberian peninsula, joining his Austrian grandfather's dominions to those of his maternal grandparents, Ferdinand and Isabella of Aragon and Castile.) The Burgundian heritage, in turn, transformed Maximilian and the Habsburgs. While MS 228 paints an intimate portrait of the musical tastes of a child of Burgundy on her own fertile native ground, the *Liber selectarum* bears witness to the hegemony of Franco-Flemish music and musicians across the European continent in the first decades of the 1500s.

Habsburgs and Burgundians

By the late thirteenth century the Habsburg family had secured the title of King of the Romans. This was an elected office conferred, despite the name, upon the sovereign among German nobles; election as King traditionally led to papal anointment as Holy Roman Emperor. When Maximilian was born in 1459 in the provincial outpost of Wiener Neustadt, the fortunes of the imperial family looked rather bleak, but by the 1470s their prospects were growing brighter again. Maximilian's father, Friedrich III, had for years staved off political challenges from Burgundy and the efforts of the Burgundian dukes to have themselves crowned King of the Romans, thus extending Burgundian sovereignty into central Europe. At Neuss in 1475 Friedrich's troops clashed with the Burgundian army led by Charles the Bold. The battle ended without a victory for either side, and the ensuing negotiations, rather than making Charles King of the Romans as he had hoped, instead saw his only child Mary betrothed to Friedrich's son Maximilian. Scarcely two years later, in January

of 1477, Charles was killed on the battlefield at Nancy, and the aspirations of the Burgundians perished with him. Mary and Maximilian were married at Ghent the following August, and the Burgundian inheritance passed into the Habsburg line.

Arriving at the glittering court of Burgundy at age eighteen, Maximilian embraced wholeheartedly the life of cultural sophistication he found there. Later he would look to the Burgundian court chapel, whose members included Antoine Busnoys and Pierre de la Rue, for an example in founding his own *Hofcapelle*. His marriage to Mary was exceptionally happy, and for the next few years Maximilian lived content in Bruges, despite the political turmoil seething around him following the collapse of Burgundian power and the abrupt ascension of the foreign Habsburgs. A son, Philip the Fair, was born in 1478, and Marguerite in 1480. These rosy days were fated to end all too soon, however, for Mary died in 1482 after a hunting accident, and Maximilian soon embarked on a life of itinerancy, wandering back and forth across his loosely-amalgamated lands and across the Alps into Italy.

Marguerite, at age two, was betrothed to the dauphin of France and sent off to be raised at the French court, a pawn in the dynastic games of the European nobility. Marguerite's long engagement was broken off in 1491 after Maximilian violated the original agreement. She was later married off to Juan, son of Ferdinand and Isabella (while her brother Philip the Fair wed their daughter, Juana), but he died suddenly within months of the wedding. In 1501 she married Philibert II, duke of Savoy; he too died unexpectedly young, in 1504. Marguerite ruled as duchess of Savoy for a few more years, but after her brother Philip died in Spain in 1506, leaving the Burgundian court in disarray once again, the Estates of the Netherlands offered their regency to Maximilian, who in turn assigned it to Marguerite. She returned to the Low Countries and established her court in Malines, where she ruled as Regent of the Netherlands until her death in 1530, a highly cultured, politically savvy, and famously melancholy lady who took as her motto "Fortune infortune fortune": Fortune makes one very unhappy.

Performance practices

Maximilian, although almost constantly on the move and frequently at war, did not lack a substantial and varied musical establishment. He simply brought it along with him, as was the habit of all the peripatetic courts of Europe. His musical entourage included trumpeters and drummers, fifers and pipers,

lutenists and fiddle players, and an organist. On the road his vocal forces comprised a choir of eight for liturgical services, a chamber ensemble of three or four singers, including women, and a special solo singer. Passing through Italy in 1492, Maximilian engaged the Flemish composer Heinrich Isaac for his chapel. Isaac became court composer in 1497 and was associated with the imperial court until his death, although he preferred to live primarily in Italy. In 1498 Maximilian refounded the imperial chapel in Vienna under the direction of Jorg Slatkonia or Georg Slatkonia, a humanist, poet, composer, and eventually Bishop of Vienna. Slatkonia's choir, along with Maximilian's entire court—knights, officers, soldiers, fencers, jesters, fools, jousters, hunters, and many musicians—is memorialized in an epic series of 137 woodcuts depicting an enormous triumphal procession, *The Triumph of Maximilian I*. Maximilian himself specified the layout of the *Triumph* and composed verses which were to be engraved on the plaques carried in the procession.

The illustration of the *Musica Canterey* pictures the choir borne in a low cart decorated with the figures of Apollo and the nine Muses. Clustered behind a large lectern and reading from the choirbook set upon it are sixteen singers (nine boys and seven men), as well as a cornettist and a trombonist. Slatkonia is seated on a throne at the rear; his bishop's mitre rests nearby. The verse on the adjacent woodcut, showing the bison which draw the cart, has Slatkonia describing how he, with the emperor's encouragement, trained and improved the choir, while the plaque born on the cart was to read:

Posaun vnd Zinckhen han wir gestelt
zu dem Gesang, wie dann gefelt
der Kaiserlichen Mayestat
dardurch sich oft erlustigt hat
aufs frölichst mit rechtem grundt
wie wir desselben hetten kundt.

*Trombones and cornetts have we placed
with the singers, as it pleased
his Imperial Majesty,
who has often enjoyed this
with great pleasure, and rightly so,
as we have had cause to know.*

Although the *Triumph* is without doubt propaganda designed to perpetuate the emperor's glorious memory and thus presents an idealized vision of his court, this illustration points to several aspects of choral performance practice in the 1510s which are confirmed by documentary evidence. First is the size of the

choir, here sixteen singers, somewhat exaggerating the forces Maximilian normally employed, which in the years from the late 1480s onwards seem to have fluctuated between eight and twelve or more, perhaps reflecting the state of the emperor's purse. (Tonight our choir for the sacred works ranges from ten to thirteen, depending on the number of parts in a piece, while the secular music is sung one to a part, as was the norm.) Second is the use of boys together with mature men. (Unconstrained by ecclesiastical strictures on the sex of those singing in church, we are happy to have grown women.) Third and perhaps most interesting is the placement of a trombonist and cornettist among the singers. The players are named in Maximilian's text: they are Hans Stewdlin and Augustein Schubinger.

A generation or so ago it was not unusual to hear Renaissance polyphony performed by colorfully heterogeneous ensembles combining voices and instruments in ways that now seem historically implausible. In subsequent years instrumental participation in vocal music came to be regarded with considerable suspicion, even distaste, crumhorns and shawms and their kin were banished from sacred repertoire, and we have grown accustomed to strictly *a cappella* renditions of every sort of polyphonic music. Recently, however, the pendulum has begun to swing back towards a more nuanced view, with considerably enhanced geographical and temporal focus. In the case of Burgundian and German choirs there is, in fact, a great deal of evidence for the use of instruments with voices in liturgical settings. Between about 1480 and 1520 such instrumental participation usually took the form of a single player within the vocal ensemble. For example, at a Mass in Toledo in 1502, "The singers of the King [Ferdinand] sang one part of the Mass, the singers of monseigneur [Philip the Fair] the other part; master Augustin played the cornet with the singers of monseigneur, which was good to hear with the singers" (from the chronicle of Antoine de Lalaing). This Augustin is Augustein Schubinger again, a virtuoso from an Augsburg family of wind players, who spent a large part of his career in service to the Habsburgs. His performances with the singers of Philip and Maximilian are documented at masses in the Netherlands, France, and Spain, as well as in German lands. We don't know exactly what these single wind players may have played in a vocal ensemble, though, so our choices must be informed guesses. Tonight our trombone player, Mack Ramsey, will double the cantus firmus tenor in the Josquin motet, and the bass in Isaac's *Virgo prudentissima*.

The *Liber selectarum cantionum*

The Swiss composer Ludwig Senfl entered the Vienna *Hofcapelle* as a choirboy in 1496, may have studied with Isaac, and succeeded him as court composer in 1517. Three years after Isaac's death and one year after Maximilian's, Senfl oversaw the publication of the *Liber selectarum cantionum* (Book of Select Songs). A large and magnificent choirbook, the Liber contains "musical compositions...of that serious kind and in a style worthy in particular of the ears of ruling men, compositions which are called motets by the more customary name, edited by the most laborious and very expensive work by the famous cultivator of that very art itself, Ludwig Senfl, that well-known Swiss who made famous the music of the chapel of Emperor Maximilian after the departure of his illustrious teacher, Isaac, the German Orpheus" (from the preface, translated by Kenneth Roberts). There are twenty-four motets, for four, five, and six voices, by Josquin, Isaac, Senfl, La Rue, Obrecht, Mouton, and one or more anonymous composers. Dedicated to the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg, the collection is also clearly a tribute to Maximilian, who is named in several works within, and to his chapel. Our program presents a small selection of these select songs: a motet by the most famous musician of the time, Josquin des Prez, two works by Isaac, and a psalm-setting by the volume's editor himself, Senfl.

We open with Josquin's *Inviolata, integra et casta es, Maria*, a work whose serene beauty rests on a structure provided by the plainchant melody in the tenor (the fourth voice to enter, here doubled by trombone), followed in canon a fifth above by the alto. The canonic imitation draws nearer in time as the work proceeds, the delay decreasing from three breves in the first part to two in the second and one in the third, lending a wonderful sense of propulsion to the motet. In the beginnings of the first and second parts the freely-composed voices anticipate the chant melody, disguising the canonic underpinning. As so often with Josquin, the music conveys at every moment the emotions of the text; Marguerite's court historiographer, the poet Jean Lemaire, wrote fittingly in a poem of 1511 of "de Josquin les verbes coulourez" (the colored words of Josquin). Particularly striking here is the ecstatic repetition of music for the three-fold exclamations of the final couplet, above the three-fold repetition of a bit of melody in the plainchant.

Senfl's *Beati omnes* sets the complete text of Psalm 127, quoting the psalm-tone reciting formula in the first several bars of the tenor. The motet reveals Senfl to be a worthy heir to the Franco-

Flemish tradition, for it is a small masterpiece of formal control harnessed to expressive purpose, as it moves easily between syllabic declamation and flowing melisma, deploys dissonance in the most finely-judged manner (caressing, for example, the words "Uxor tua," your wife), and creates dramatic effects by means of harmonic motion (listen for the amazing series of harmonies related by a third that rises through "Et videas filios filiorum," as if unfolding from generation to generation), all leading to fulfillment at the words "pacem super Israel."

The two works by Isaac, a composer highly esteemed in his own day but relatively little-heard in our own, evoke different moods. Where the six-voice *Virgo prudentissima* is monumental and unmistakably imperial in effect, the profound and engaging *O Maria, mater Christi*, set in a rich E mode for four low voices, feels intimate and personal despite its length. It is kin to Senfl's *Beati omnes* in employing a wide diversity of textures, harmonies, mensurations, and varieties of melodic motion.

Elected King of the Romans in 1486 and Holy Roman Emperor in 1493, Maximilian never managed to get to Rome for the requisite papal coronation. Isaac's *Virgo prudentissima* was likely composed in 1507-08 when Maximilian was preparing yet another futile attempt at the journey. The scaffolding for the motet is the plainchant cantus firmus, sung in long notes by the tenor, and the virtuosic duets which open the work derive their opening phrases from the chant melody. The florid counterpoint of the duets and trios contrasts dramatically with the majestic, slow-moving harmonies of the sections for full choir undergirded by cantus firmus, which portray the awesome grandeur of the Queen of Heaven, surrounded by archangels and angels, holy legions, fiery cherubim and seraphim, streaming sparkling light; Maximilian basks in her reflected glory. The text is an elaborate gloss on the cantus firmus antiphon by the Swiss humanist Vadian, and the "Georgius" who receives a special plug in the *secunda pars* is none other than Georg Slatkonja.

Marguerite's songbook, MS 228

MS 228 was copied contemporaneously with the publication of the *Liber selectarum cantionum*. It contains 58 works, mostly secular chansons. Only one piece is ascribed in the manuscript, *Plus nulz regretz* to Josquin, but concordant sources allow us to identify the composers of 33 other works. Fifteen are by Pierre de la Rue, a composer associated throughout his career with the Burgundian court, and a favorite of Marguerite's. It is very likely that many of the compositions that remain anonymous are also

La Rue's, including both the sardonic *Je ne scay plus* and *Mijn hert altijd heeft verlanghen*. The latter is the only Flemish song in the collection and may be based on a popular tune.

Cueurs desolez / Dies illa is a motet-chanson, that is, a song with a French secular text in all the voices but one and a sacred Latin text in that one, usually sung to a chant cantus firmus. The genre experienced a brief flowering between the late 1490s and the 1510s, nearly exclusively among composers associated with the Habsburg-Burgundian or French royal courts or with both. It was often used for laments, the most famous examples being Ockeghem's *Mort, tu as navré de ton dart / Miserere* for Binchois, and Josquin's *Nymphes des bois / Requiem* for Ockeghem. *Cueurs desolez / Dies illa* sets an eloquent rondeau (one of the traditional *formes fixes* of French poetry) speaking of desolate hearts, tears, and grief against a tenor that chants a Latin responsory from the burial service evoking the bitter misery and calamity of the day of judgement. The French and Latin texts comment on the same event from different viewpoints; the contrast of personal, overtly emotional lamentation with the ritual mourning of the liturgy is dramatized by the contrast between the two languages. As Honey Meconi remarks in her discussion of motet-chansons, this may be connected to the different ways in which women and men were permitted to express grief, for "The language of the vernacular is the language of women; Latin, the language of the motet and the mass, is for the educated, for men."

—Scott Metcalfe

These notes have relied primarily on the following sources:

Cuyler, Louise. *The emperor Maximilian I and music*. London, 1973.

Meconi, Honey. "Ockeghem and the motet-chanson in fifteenth-century France." Philippe Vendrix, ed., *Johannes Ockeghem*. Paris, 1998: 381-402.

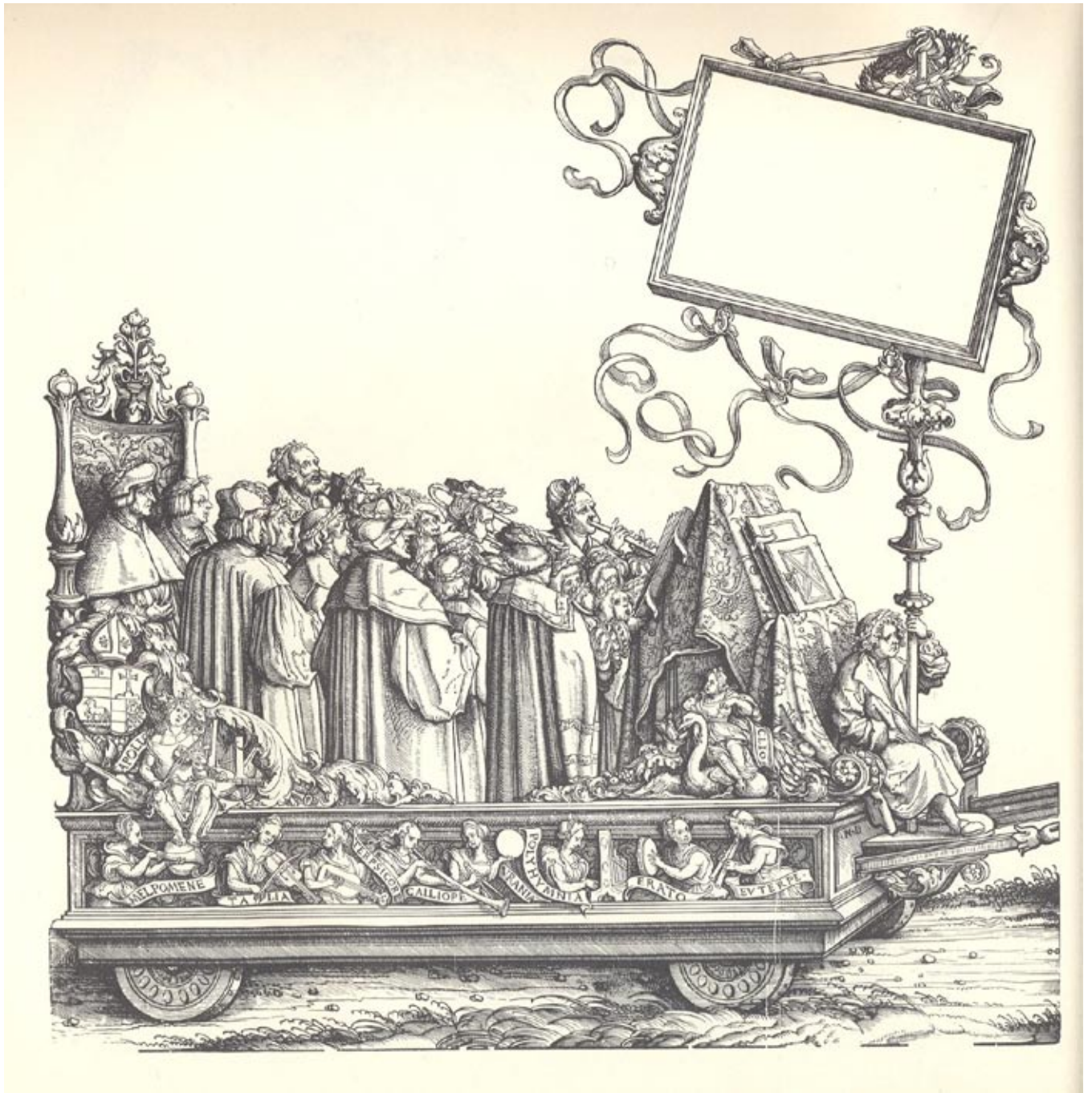
Picker, Martin. *The chanson albums of Marguerite of Austria*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1965.

Polk, Keith. *German instrumental music of the late middle ages*. Cambridge, 1992. (See also many articles by the same author cited within.)

Roberts, Kenneth. *The music of Ludwig Senfl*. PhD. diss., University of Michigan, 1965.

A reproduction of the complete *Triumph*, with English translations of Maximilian's captions, may be found in a Dover book edited by Stanley Appelbaum.

Special thanks to the Houghton Library at Harvard University, where I was able to consult an original copy of the *Liber selectarum cantionum*, and also to Harvard's Loeb Music Library and Isham Memorial Library, where may be found microfilms and facsimile reproductions of both the *Liber* and MS 228.



Musica Canterey, from *The Triumph of Maximilian I.*