

Gesualdo: Tenebrae Responsories for Maundy Thursday

The King's Singers

David Hurley
Robin Tyson
Paul Phoenix
Philip Lawson
Gabriel Crouch
Stephen Connolly

"... searingly intense, with the singers' clear, steady sound, beautifully judged changes of pace and dynamics ..."

Daily Telegraph

"The King's Singers are always a treat to hear, ... as with everything this inimitable, impeccably-tuned and balanced, stylish male sextet does, the chant is expertly accomplished, and the following multi-part responsories are sincerely felt and warmly resonant"

David Vernier, Classictoday.com

"... their reputation for after-dinner smoothness, the King's Singers all-male line-up makes those grinding climaxes all the more tense and penetrating, and the attention given to word-painting is exemplary"

Ivan Hewitt, The Times

"... a no holds barred, immaculately sung performance from the King's Singers. Unmissable"

Classic FM Magazine

Programme

As the performance of early music in the last few decades has increased considerably in frequency, it seems possible to assess a composer like Gesualdo, not as the odd man out as he used to be, but as a genuine and active part of music history. History books tell us that Gesualdo was just an amateur composer, as revealed by his jerky and fragmented writing. They suggest that the musical path he chose to follow was a dead end, that his music was of no consequence for the future, and that the wild gesticulation and abrupt starts and stops in the fabric of his music were futile and desperate gestures from a composer who did not know how to compose properly.

This, surely, has turned out to be completely wrong. But it took the entire 20th century with all its strange and individual composers like Partch, Satie, Webern, Langgaard and Cage, to make Gesualdo fit into the picture of his own time. Viewing Gesualdo as a musical eccentric is further disturbed by the relatively recent discovery that he is only part of a larger movement, a Neapolitan school of composers writing more or less the same kind of extremely expressive and sensual music, composers like Nenna, Macque and Lacorcia, but not quite with the spark of Gesualdo himself.

When Glenn Watkins' groundbreaking biography appeared in 1973, it had a glowing preface written by Stravinsky in 1968.

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	<i>Nocturn I</i>	
1	Lectio 1	[4:40]
2	In Monte Oliveti	[4:39]
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10	Eram quasi agnus innocens	[5:11]
11	Una hora non potuistis	[3:28]
12	Seniores populi consilium	[6:23]
13	Benedictus	[7:46]
14	Christus factus est	[0:55]

Total running time: [60:08]

This very history-conscious Russian composer had written several works in later years based on Gesualdo material, and the aged master's enthusiasm for the older composer triggered a virtual Gesualdo-renaissance underpinned by Watkins' sound and thoroughly researched writing.

What kind of man was Gesualdo? We have to realise that he moved in the very highest circles in Italy, his uncle Cardinal Borromeo being one of the most powerful and influential persons in the country. The family was extremely wealthy and this put Gesualdo in a completely different situation from all his composer-colleagues. From his early youth he was something of a musical nerd, having learnt both the lute and the keyboard to virtuoso level and having his earliest compositions printed before he was twenty. His family position ensured that as a composer he had the rare privilege of being able to write exactly what he pleased. His tempestuous and capricious moodiness and his leanings towards sado-masochistic sexuality reveal that he allowed himself to follow any inclination he might have had—and this was also the case in his compositions.

What fascinates us so much in his music, 400 years after it was written, is exactly this incredibly naked honesty we hear in it. And what we hear is a desperate and wretched, but also passionate and loving person who is mad about writing music 'further out' than anyone else. His music is in fact so startling that it maintains the element of surprise even on many repeated hearings, much the same way as the music of that other half-mad avant-garde genius, Berlioz.

The exact year of Gesualdo's birth is not known, but for many years it was assumed that he was born around 1560. When the revised version of Watkins' book appeared in 1991, he brought forth quite conclusive evidence that he was born as late as 1566. This is still not unanimously accepted, but if it is true it would mean that there was quite an age gap between Gesualdo and his wife. This may have contributed to tensions which ultimately led Gesualdo to kill his wife with his own hands and to have her lover murdered at the same time. It was certainly not unusual that princes had people killed, but normally it would be undertaken by hired assassins. When the political marriage between Gesualdo and Maria d'Avalos was arranged, the young prince-cum-musician would have been a young, inexperienced 19-year-old. Twice widowed at the age of 25, with children by both husbands, Maria was generally considered the most attractive woman in the higher circles in Naples, being a celebrated and adored figure. In the beginning the newly weds seemed to have had a genuine fondness for each other, but Maria's rich social life soon took over again, and one can easily see how a profound constant jealousy took possession of our young and highly sensitive composer. After four years of this he had had enough and he hired professional murderers to assist him in killing wife and lover while they were in bed together. The detailed medical report tells us that she had been victim to 53 dagger blows, most of them in the lower regions of the body. Gesualdo's rage must have been Homeric: afterwards he single-handedly felled a considerable piece of woodland at his estate. Four years later he married Leonora d'Este of the celebrated Ferrara dynasty. Both his wives bore him children but they all died young, his last surviving son dying a few months before Gesualdo himself died in 1613, alone and completely desolate at his castle near Naples.

What moved him to compose church music must have been, to quote Bach, *Bus' und Reu'*. After the murder of his first wife he suffered from severe and increasing feelings of guilt. Penitence never left him and the whole atmosphere of counterreformational blackness permeates his church music. His choice of texts are characteristic. As with his preferred madrigal texts, these biblical words are full of suffering and self-reproach. Rarely, if ever, do we encounter a renaissance composer whose life and work are so closely interrelated.

Bo Holten, January 2004

The programme of this CD represents only part of the liturgy for the Matins Offices on the final three days of Holy Week, the *Triduum Sacrum*. At this most solemn time of year, the Office

liturgy is reduced to its simplest form, taking on a structure more akin to that used in the early Church without later medieval accretions. [John Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy from the Tenth to the Eighteenth Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 140-1]. Items absent from Matins on Maundy Thursday include introductory versicles, the Venite, and the Lesser Doxology to the psalms (Gloria Patri). Despite this abbreviation, the full liturgy for Matins would substantially exceed the length of a single CD, containing, in addition to the pieces sung here, nine psalms each with an antiphon, and a further six lessons: each of Gesualdo's responsories is intended to follow a lesson from Scripture. The selection of music for this disc, and its order, requires some explanation, therefore.

Each of the Matins services of the *Triduum Sacrum*, or *Tenebrae*, as they are known after the first word of one of the Good Friday responsories, is divided into three nocturns, each containing psalmody, three lessons and three responsories. In the first nocturn, the three lessons are taken from the *Lamentations of Jeremiah*, with each verse of scripture preceded by a Hebrew letter. It is these lessons that are sung at the beginning of each set of three of Gesualdo's responsories on this disc. The decision to take the lessons out of order was an aesthetic one: those from the Lamentations are provided with their own plainchant tones, whereas the remaining six are simply to be sung on a monotone with occasional inflexions. The Lamentation lessons are therefore of much greater musical interest than the others, and it was felt that their inclusion, spaced between the three sets of responsories, would give something of the flavour of the liturgy despite the impossibility of including all the chant for Maundy Thursday.

The Lamentation chants used are taken from *Cantus Ecclesiasticus Officii Maioris Hebdomadae* (Rome: A. Phaeus, 1619). Although this publication slightly postdates Gesualdo's lifetime, its very clear word accentuation is closely in line with the type of expression for which the composer strives—if significantly less histrionic in degree.

The final part of the service begins with the canticle of Zacharias, *Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel*, preceded and followed by its antiphon, *Traditor autem*. Gesualdo sets the canticle in *alternatim* style, and the antiphon and even-numbered verses are therefore also taken from Phaeus's publication. After the repetition of the antiphon, the versicle *Christus factus est* is sung; on subsequent days of the Triduum, more words are added until on Holy Saturday the entire text (as later set by Anton Bruckner) is heard. This concludes the sung part of the Office.

Stephen Rice, January 2004

The album cover combines two themes which make Gesualdo's *Tenebrae Responsories* so powerful: his own life, which deteriorated dramatically once it became mired in murderous blood; and the devotion to religion which followed the events of October 1590. The candles represent the *Tenebrae Hearse*, a triangular candlestick dating back to at least the seventh century. During the service around which the album is based, the candles are extinguished one at a time on alternate sides of the candlestick starting at the bottom. Since there are nine psalms in the Matins and five in the Lauds, the highest candle is left burning. In each of the last six verses of the *Benedictus*, the six altar candles are also extinguished, leaving just the one candle alight in the church. The symbolism of the hearse is explained in different ways. The most popular suggests the Triangle represents the Holy Trinity, fourteen of the candles represent the eleven Apostles and three Maries, with the top candle representing Christ. An alternate explanation has the Blessed Virgin, whose faith never wavered, as the lit candle, while the gradual extinction of the others represents the abandonment of the Disciples and Apostles.

The King's Singers, February 2004

Texts and Translations

1. Lectio I

Incipit lamentationem Hieremiae prophetae.

Aleph

Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo; facta est quasi vidua domina gentium: princeps provinciarum facta est sub tributo.

Beth

Plorans ploravit in nocte, et lacrimae eius in maxillis eius: non est qui consoletur eam, ex omnibus caris eius. Omnes amici eius spreverunt eam, et facti sunt ei inimici.

Gimel

Migravit Iudas propter afflictionem, et multitudinem servitutis, habitavit inter gentes, nec invenit requiem. Omnes persecutores eius apprehenderunt eam inter angustias.

Daleth

Viae Sion lugent; eo quod non sint, qui veniant ad solemnitatem. Omnes portae eius destructae: sacerdotes eius gementes, virgines eius squalidae, et ipsa oppressa amaritudine.

He

Facti sunt hostes eius in capite, inimici eius locupletati sunt: quia Dominus locutus est super eam, propter multitudinem iniquitatem eius. Parvuli eius ducti sunt in captivitatem, ante faciem tribulantis.

Hierusalem, Hierusalem, convertere ad dominum Deum tuum.

The beginning of the lamentations of Jeremiah.

Aleph

How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! How is she become as a widow! She that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary.

Beth

She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks: among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies.

Gimel

Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude: she dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest: all her persecutors overtook her between the straits.

Daleth

The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate: her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness.

He

Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper; for the Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her children are gone into captivity before the enemy.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return unto the Lord thy God.

2. In Monte Oliveti

Responsory

In monte Oliveti oravit ad Patrem: Pater, si fieri potest, transeat a me calix iste: Spiritus quidem promptus est, caro autem infirma, fiat voluntas tua.

Verse

Vigilate, et orate, ut non intretis in tentationem.

Responsory

On mount Olivet he prayed to his father: Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: the spirit indeed is ready, but the flesh weak.

Verse

Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.

3. Tristis est anima

Responsory

Tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem: sustinete hic, et vigilate mecum: nunc videbitis turbam, quae circumdabit me: Vos fugam capietis, et ego vadam immolari pro vobis.

Verse

Ecce appropinquat hora, et filius hominis tradetur in manus peccatorum.

Responsory

My soul is sorrowful even unto death: stay here and watch with me: now shall ye see the crowd that shall surround me: ye shall take flight, and I shall go to be offered up for you.

Verse

Behold the time draweth nigh, and the son of man shall be delivered into the hands of sinners.

4. Ecce vidimus

Responsory

Ecce vidimus eum non habentem speciem, neque decorem: aspectus ejus in eo non est: hic peccata nostra portavit, et pro nobis dolet: ipse autem vulneratus est propter iniquitates nostras: cujus livore sanati sumus.

Verse

Vere languores nostros ipse tulit, et dolores nostros ipse portavit.

Responsory

Lo, we have seen him without comeliness or beauty: His look is gone from him: he hath borne our sins and suffered for us: He was wounded for our iniquities: by his stripes are we healed.

Verse

Truly he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows.

5. lectio II

Vau

Et egressus est a filia Sion omnis decus eius: facti sunt principes eius velut arietes non inveniunt pascua, et abierunt absque fortitudine: ante faciem subsequenteris.

Zain

Recordata est Hierusalem dierum afflictionis suae, et praeavicationis, omnium desiderabilium suorum, quae habuerat a diebus antiquis, cum caderet populus eius in manu hostili, et non esset auxiliator. Viderunt eam hostes, et deriserunt Sabbatha eius.

Heth

Peccatum peccavit Hierusalem, propterea instabilis facta est. Omnes qui glorificabant eam, spreverunt illam: quia viderunt ignominiam eius. Ipsa autem gemens, conversa est retrorsum.

Teth

Sordes eius in pedibus eius, nec recordata est finis sui. Deposita est vehementer, non habens consolatorem. Vide Domine afflictionem meam, quoniam erectus est inimicus.

Hierusalem, Hierusalem, convertere ad dominum Deum tuum.

Vau

And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed: her princes are become like harts that find no pasture, and they are gone without strength before the pursuer.

Zain

Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old, when her people fell into the hand of the enemy, and none did help her: the adversaries saw her, and did mock at her Sabbaths.

Heth

Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed: all that honoured her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness: yea, she sigheth, and turneth backward.

Teth

Her filthiness is in her skirts; she remembereth not her last end; therefore she came down wonderfully: she had no comforter. O Lord, behold my affliction: for the enemy hath magnified himself.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return unto the Lord your God.

6. Amicus meus

Responsory

Amicus meus osculi me tradidit signo: quem osculatus fuero, ipse est, tenete eum: hoc malum fecit signum, qui per osculum adimplevit homicidium: Infelix praetermisit pretium sanguinis, et in fine laqueo se suspendit.

Verse

Bonum erat ei, si natus non fuisset homo ille.

Responsory

My friend betrayed me by the token of a kiss: whom I shall kiss, that is he, hold him fast: that was the wicked token which he gave, who by a kiss accomplished murder: unhappy man, he relinquished the price of blood, and in the end hanged himself.

Verse

It had been good for that man, if he had never been born.

7. Judas mercator

Responsory

Judas mercator pessimus osculo petiit Dominum: ille ut agnus innocens non negavit Judae osculum: denariorum numero Christum Judaeis tradidit.

Verse

Melius illi erat, si natus non fuisset.

Responsory

Judas, worst of the traffickers, approached the Lord with a kiss: he like an innocent lamb refused not the kiss of Judas: for a few pence he delivered Christ to the Jews.

Verse

It had been better for him if he had never been born.

8. Unus ex discipulis

Responsory

Unus ex discipulis meis tradet me hodie: vae illi per quem tradar ego: melius illi erat, si natus non fuisset.

Verse

Qui intingit mecum manum in paropside, hic me traditurus est in manus peccatorum.

Responsory

One of my disciples will this day betray me: woe to him by whom I am betrayed: it had been better for him if he had not been born.

Verse

He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, he it is that will deliver me into the hands of sinners.

9 Lectio III

Iod

Manum suam misit hostis ad omnia desiderabilia eius: quia vidit gentes ingressas sanctuarium suum, de quibus praeceperas, ne intrarent in Ecclesiam tuam.

Caph

Omnis populus eius gemens, et quaerens panem, dederunt praetiosa quaeque pro cibo ad refocillandam animam. Vide, Domine, et considera; quoniam facta sum vilis.

Lamed

O vos omnes, qui transitis per viam, attendite, et videte, si est dolor sicut dolor meus: quoniam vindemiavit me, ut locutus est dominus in die irae furoris sui.

Mem

De excelso misit ignem in ossibus meis, et erudit me: expandit rete pedibus meis, convertit me retrorsum. Posuit me

desolatum, tota die moerore confectam.

Nun

Vigilavit iugum iniquitatum mearum: in manu eius convolutae sunt, et impositae collo meo: infirmata est virtus mea, dedit me dominus in manum, de qua non potero surgere.

Hierusalem, Hierusalem, convertere ad dominum Deum tuum.

Iod

The adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things: for she hath seen that the heathen entered into her sanctuary, whom thou didst command that they should not enter into thy congregation.

Caph

All her people sigh, they seek bread: they have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul: see, O Lord, and consider: for I am become vile.

Lamed

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.

Mem

From above hath he sent fire into my bones, and it prevaieth against them: he hath spread a net for my feet, he hath turned me back: he hath made me desolate and faint all the day.

Nun

The yoke of my transgressions is bound by his hand: they are wreathed, and come up upon my neck: he hath made my strength to fall, the Lord hath delivered me into their hands, from whom I am not able to rise up.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return unto the Lord your God.

10. Eram quasi

Responsory

Eram quasi agnus innocens: ductus sum ad immolandum, et nesciebam: consilium fecerunt inimici mei adversum me, dicentes: venite, mittamus lignum in panem ejus, et eradamus eum de terra viventium.

Verse

Omnes inimici mei adversum me cogitabant mala mihi: verbum iniquum mandaverunt adversum me, dicentes:

Responsory

I was like an innocent lamb: I was led to the sacrifice and I knew it not: my enemies conspired against me, saying: come, let us put wood into his bread, and root him out of the land of the living

Verse

All my enemies contrived mischief against me: they uttered a wicked speech against me, saying:

11. Una hora non potuistis

Responsory

Una hora non potuistis vigilare mecum, qui exhortabamini mori pro me? Vel Judam non videtis, quomodo non dormit, sed festinat tradere me Judaeis?

Verse

Quid dormitis? Surgite, et orate, ne intretis in tentationem.

Responsory

Could ye not watch one hour with me, ye that were ready to die for me? Or see ye not Judas, how he maketh haste to betray me to the Jews?

Verse

Why sleep ye? Arise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.

12. Seniores populi consilium

Responsory

Seniores populi consilium fecerunt: ut Jesum dolo tenerent, et occiderent: cum gladiis et fustibus exierunt tamquam ad

latronem.

Verse

Collegerunt pontifices et pharisaei concilium.

Responsory

The Elders of the people consulted together: how they might by craft apprehend Jesus and slay him: with swords and clubs they went forth as to a thief.

Verse

The priests and the pharisees held a council.

13. Benedictus

Antiphon

Traditor autem dedit eis signum dicens: quem osculatus fuero, ipse est, tenete eum.

- 1. Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel: quia visitavit, et fecit redemptionem plebis suae.*
- 2. Et erexit cornu salutis nobis: in domo David, pueri sui.*
- 3. Sicut locutus est per os sanctorum: quia saeculo sunt prophetarum eius.*
- 4. Salutem ex inimicis nostris: et de manu omnium qui oderunt nos.*
- 5. Ad faciendam misericordiam cum patribus nostris: et memorari testamenti sui sancti.*
- 6. Jusjurandum, quod juravit ad Abraham, patrem nostram: daturum se nobis.*
- 7. Ut sine timore: de manu inimicorum nostrorum liberati, serviamus illi.*
- 8. In sanctitate, et justitia coram ipso: omnibus diebus nostris.*
- 9. Et tu, puer, Propheta Altissimi vocaberis: praeibis enim ante faciem Domini parare vias ejus.*
- 10. Ad dandam scientiam salutis plebi eius: in remissionem peccatorum eorum.*
- 11. Per viscera misericordiae Dei nostri: in quibus visitavit nos, oriens ex alto.*
- 12. Illuminare his, qui in tenebris, et in umbra mortis sedent: ad dirigendos pedes nostros in viam pacis.*

Antiphon

Traditor autem dedit eis signum dicens: quem osculatus fuero, ipse est, tenete eum.

Antiphon

And he that betrayed him had given them a token saying: whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he, take him.

- 1. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel: because He hath visited and wrought the redemption of His people.*
- 2. And he hath raised up the horn of salvation to us: in the house of David His servant.*
- 3. As he spoke by the mouth of His holy Prophets: who are from the beginning.*
- 4. Salvation from our enemies: and from the hand of all that hate us.*
- 5. To work mercy with our fathers: and remember his holy testament.*
- 6. The oath which he swore to Abraham our Father: that he would grant us.*
- 7. That being delivered from the hand of our enemies: we may serve him without fear.*
- 8. In holiness and justice before him: all our days.*
- 9. And thou, child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.*
- 10. To give the knowledge of salvation to his people: unto the remission of their sins.*
- 11. Through the bowels of the mercy of our God: in which the orient from on High hath visited us.*
- 12. To enlighten them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death: to direct our feet in the way of peace.*

Antiphon

And he that betrayed him had given them a token saying: whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he, take him.

14. Christus factus est

Christus factus est pro nobis obediens, usque ad mortem.

Christ was made obedient for us, even unto death.

