



MISSA CONCEPTIO TUA

Medieval and
Renaissance
Music for Advent

Schola Antiqua
of Chicago



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Advent is the four-week season of expectation that precedes the annual celebration of Jesus' nativity feast – Christmas Day. In the late Middle Ages and Renaissance there was abundant music to commemorate Advent, expressed in a number of genres and styles. This collection of works for the Advent season provides a glimpse of the pre-modern soundscape in the days of anticipation and hope leading up to Christmas.

The recording begins with a set of related plainchants more than 1200 years old, which are appropriate for this time of Christian expectation. The seven *O Antiphons* ①-⑦ each begin with the vocative “O” (*O Sapientia, O Radix Jesse, etc.*), summoning Christ by different titles (Wisdom, Root of Jesse, etc.) and pleading with him to come (*veni*) and save his people. Historically, only one *O Antiphon* would be sung each day for the seven days leading up to Christmas Eve. It has been noticed that the first letters of the seven antiphons (after the “O”) – when read in reverse order – form the acrostic ERO CRAS (Latin: Tomorrow I will be present), thus playing on the theme of Jesus’ imminent arrival. The daily *O Antiphon* frames the recitation of Mary’s canticle (the *Magnificat*) at Vespers, in many ways the pinnacle of evening service. The formulaic tone of the *Magnificat* is heard only once on this recording ①. The *O Antiphons* presented here come from a version found in a twelfth-century liturgical book from the Abbey of St Denis, best known as the burial site for French kings.

Another melody called an antiphon – but neither paired with a *Magnificat* nor a psalm tone recitation – is the plainchant *Alma Redemptoris Mater* ⑩. The oldest of the four so-called Marian antiphons, *Alma Redemptoris Mater* is one of the most important melodies heard during Advent, sung daily at the service of Compline. Though there were countless melodic variants of *Alma Redemptoris Mater* (this version is from a fourteenth-century Portuguese manuscript), most contain an exhilarating ascent through an octave in the opening phrase.

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception is a special

commemoration of the Virgin Mary that occurs in the midst of the Advent season. Proclaimed as dogma in 1854, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception has a complicated history that is centred on the question of Mary’s sinlessness at the moment of her conception in the womb of St Anne, the name of Jesus’ apocryphal grandmother. The teaching about the conception holds that Mary was uniquely and miraculously conceived in sinlessness and not sanctified *in utero*, as was the belief of “maculists”. Disagreement on this doctrine continued in the early modern period, even after Pope Sixtus IV established the annual feast day of the Immaculate Conception on 8th December in 1477. It was not long after this time that Pierre de la Rue (?1452-1518) penned a full Mass expressly on the subject of the Immaculate Conception.

Having joined the chapel of the Habsburg-Burgundian court in 1492, La Rue spent his professional life serving some of the most influential rulers of that time, including the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, his son Philip the Fair, and Philip’s sister Margaret of Austria, the regent of the Netherlands. La Rue’s music became widely circulated in manuscripts, courtesy of the court’s illustrious workshop for manuscript compilation headed by Petrus Alamire. The composer’s reputation was further enhanced when his noble patrons brought the court chapel on its travels, performing his works for political allies. La Rue’s compositions were deservedly emblematic of Habsburg-Burgundian prestige and authority.

Dating from around the early 1510s, La Rue’s Mass for the Immaculate Conception (*Missa Conceptio tua*) was written for five voice parts and survives in seven manuscripts, all books prepared at the Alamire scriptorium. No Mass by La Rue was copied more than seven times in Alamire’s workshop, making the *Missa Conceptio tua* one of the most widely disseminated Masses of its time. Two of the seven manuscripts that preserve the *Missa Conceptio tua* were destined for the

court of Frederick the Wise, the Elector of Saxony and famous protector of Martin Luther.

One can imagine that no recordings of the *Missa Conceptio tua* ⑧-⑫ have appeared because of the exceptionally low range of the piece. The Bass II voice generally hovers around the D below the bass clef with some regularity, including at many cadences. Although one cannot claim with complete confidence that La Rue’s works were sung at the written pitch, the composer seems to have been deliberate with his choice of clefs to specify a circumscribed range of notes. Much of his Mass music in fact lies in a low range, which suggests that La Rue probably had access to unusually low bass voices at the Habsburg-Burgundian chapel.

The musical underpinnings of most of La Rue’s Masses are obscured through what are called “paraphrasing” techniques, but his *Missa Conceptio tua* is a welcome exception. The entire Mass is known to be based on the antiphon *Conceptio tua*, a plainchant sung with the Vespers Magnificat on the feast of the Conception. The antiphon translates: “Your conception, O Virgin Mother of God, announces joy to the whole world: out of you has arisen indeed the sun of justice, Christ our God.” La Rue went to great lengths to emphasize the melody of this plainchant in the polyphonic fabric. One can hear a paraphrase of the melody at the head of each Mass section (*Kyrie, Gloria, etc.*) and often at the beginning of major subsections. The first tenor part, placed in the middle of the five-voice texture, further declaims the melody in long notes for a good portion of the Mass, only to bequeath it to the highest voice for a dramatic effect in the final section of the *Agnus Dei*. At every turn it seems, La Rue reminds the informed listener to remain attuned to the plainchant *Conceptio tua* from the feast of the Conception.

For all of its musical emphasis in the Mass, the governing antiphon of La Rue’s *Missa Conceptio tua* curiously says nothing about the exact nature of the Virgin’s conception in the womb of her mother St Anne

(the root of the doctrinal polemic). Instead, there are extra-musical factors that guide La Rue’s *Mass for the Conception* toward an immaculist position. The intricate illuminations accompanying the Mass in some of the sources provide an unambiguous apology for the Immaculate Conception, as musicologist Bonnie Blackburn has demonstrated. Two manuscripts in fact feature miniatures remarkably depicting individual defenders of the doctrine (from the thirteenth-century philosopher Duns Scotus to Pope Sixtus IV), each accompanied by a hearty theological quotation for reinforcement. The Alamire workshop left no uncertainty about the stance taken by the Habsburg-Burgundian court when it came to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

This album of early music for the Advent season concludes with three anonymous English carols ⑬-⑯, surviving in various fifteenth-century manuscripts. All centre on the Virgin Mary’s birth of the Christ child. Carols from the late Middle Ages were not properly liturgical and were distinctive because of their musical form. They alternate between a refrain (called a “burden”) and verses, presumably sung by single voices. The carol *There is no rose of swych vertu* ⑯ may be the most familiar carol in this set. The final carol *Nova, Nova* ⑯ mixes English with snippets of popular church Latin. These carols reflect a time when the “Great Vowel Shift” was beginning to transform Middle English into the modern English language; hence, modern ears may have some trouble understanding the period pronunciation.

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Michael Alan Anderson

O Antiphons

1 O Sapientia (with Magnificat)

– Antiphon I, for December 17

O Sapientia,
quae ex ore altissimi prodisti,
attingenens a fine usque ad finem fortiter,
sauviter disponensque omnia:
veni ad docendum nos
viam prudentie.

Magnificat
anima mea Dominum.
Et exsultavit spiritus meus
in Deo salutari meo.
Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae sue:
ecce enim ex hoc
beatam me dicent omnes generationes.
Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est:
et sanctum nomen eius.
Et misericordia eius a progenie in progenies
timentibus eum.
Fecit potentiam in brachio suo:
dispersit superbos mente cordis sui.
Deposit potentes de sede,
et exaltavit humiles.
Esurientes implevit bonis:
et divites dimisit inanes.
Suscepit Israel puerum suum,
recordatus misericordiae suea.
Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros,
Abraham et semini eius in saecula.
Gloria Patri, et Filio,
et Spiritui Sancto.
Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper,
et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

O Wisdom, you who
emerge from the mouth of the most high,
reaching out with strength from pole to pole
and ordering all things with beauty:
O come to teach us
the path of understanding.

My soul
glorifies the Lord.
My spirit rejoices
in God, in my salvation.
For he has looked on his servant in her lowliness,
behold henceforth all generations
will call me blessed.
For he who is powerful has done great things
for me, and his name is sacred.
And his mercy endures from generation
to generation for those who fear him.
He has shown strength with his arm,
he has dismissed the proud in the conceit of their hearts.
He has put down the mighty from their seat,
and lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has protected Israel, his servant,
mindful of his mercy,
Just as he promised to our fathers,
Abraham and his seed forever.
Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now,
and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

2 O Adonai – Antiphon II, for December 18

O Adonai,
et dux domus Israel,
qui Moysi in igne flamme rubi apparuisti,
et ei in Sina legem dedisti:
veni ad redimendum nos
in brachio extento.

O Adonai,
and leader of the house of Israel,
you who appeared to Moses in the flaming bush
and gave him the law on Sinai:
O come to deliver us
with your arm spread wide.

3 O Radix Iesse – Antiphon III, for December 19

O Radix Iesse,
qui stas in signum populorum,
super quem continebunt reges os suum,
quem gentes deprecabuntur:
veni ad liberandum nos,
iam noli tardare.

O Root of Jesse,
you who stand as a symbol for all people,
before whom kings remain silent in awe,
you to whom all races offer supplication:
O come to set us free,
delay no longer.

4 O Clavis David – Antiphon IV, for December 20

O Clavis David,
et sceptrum domus Israel,
qui aperis et nemo claudit,
claudis et nemo aperit:
veni et educ vincatum de domo carceris,
sedentem in tenebris et umbra mortis.

O Key of David,
and sceptre of the house of Israel,
you who opens – and no one closes,
you who closes – and no one opens:
O come and lead the captive from chains,
the one sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death.

⑤ O Oriens – Antiphon V, for December 21

O Oriens,
splendor lucis eterne
et sol iustitiae:
veni et inlumina
sedentem in tenebris
et umbra mortis.

O Rising Star,
splendour of eternal light
and sun of justice:
O come and give light
to the one sitting in darkness
and in the shadow of death.

⑥ O Rex Gentium – Antiphon VI, for December 22

O Rex Gentium,
et desideratus earum,
lapiske angularis,
qui facis utraque unum:
veni, salva hominem,
quem de limo formasti.

O King of the Nations,
and the one desired by them,
the cornerstone,
you who bring all into one:
O come save humankind,
the one you formed from dust.

⑦ O Emmanuel – Antiphon VII, for December 23

O Emmanuel,
rex et legifer noster,
expectatio gentium,
et salvator earum:
veni ad salvandum nos,
Domine Deus noster.

O Emmanuel.
our king and ruler,
the one awaited by the nations
and their saviour:
O come to save us,
O Lord, our God.

Pierre de la Rue: Missa Conceptio tua

⑧ Kyrie eleison.
Christe eleison.
Kyrie eleison.

⑨ Gloria in excelsis Deo,
et in terra pax hominibus bona voluntatis.
Laudamus te, benedicimus te,
adoramus te, glorificamus te.
Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam.
Domine Deus, Rex caelestis,
Deus Pater omnipotens,
Domine, Fili unigenite, Iesu Christe.
Domine Deus. Agnus Dei. Filius Patris.
Qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis; suscipe deprecationem nostram.
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,
miserere nobis.
Quoniam tu solus sanctus,
tu solus Dominus,
tu solus altissimus, Iesu Christe,
cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris.
Amen.

Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christ have mercy upon us.
Lord, have mercy upon us.

Glory be to God on high,
and peace on earth to men of good will.
We praise You, we bless You,
we adore You, we glorify You,
we give You thanks for Your great glory.
Lord God, heavenly King,
God, the Father Almighty.
Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
You, who takest away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us; receive our prayer.
O You, who sittest at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.
For You alone art holy,
You alone art Lord,
You alone art most high, Jesus Christ.
Together with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

¶ Credo in unum Deum,
patrem omnipotentem,
factorem caeli et terrae
visibilium omnium et invisibilium.
Credo in unum Dominum Iesum Christum,
Filium Dei unigenitum;
et ex Patre natum ante omnia saecula.
Deum de Deo, Lumen de Lumine:
Deum verum de Deo vero;
Genitum, non factum;
consubstantiale Patri,
per quem omnia facta sunt;
Qui propter nos homines,
et propter nostram salutem,
descendit de caelis,
Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine,
et homo factus est.
Crucifixus etiam pro nobis;
sub Pontio Pilato passus et sepultus est,
Et resurrexit tertia die, secundum Scripturas.
Et ascendit in caelum,
sedet ad dexteram Patris.
Et iterum venturus est cum gloria
judicare vivos et mortuos;
Cuius regni non erit finis.
Credo in Spiritum Sanctum,
Dominum et vivificantem,
qui ex Patre Filioque procedit;
qui cum Patre et Filio simul
adoratur et conglorificatur;
qui locutus est per prophetas.
Credo in unam sanctam catholicam
et apostolicam Ecclesiam.
Confiteor unum Baptisma in remissionem peccatorum.
Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum,
et vitam venturi saeculi.
Amen.

I believe in one God,
the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God;
and born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God of true God;
begotten, not made;
consubstantial with the Father,
through Whom all things were made;
Who for us men
and for our salvation,
came down from heaven,
and became incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
He was crucified also for us;
suffered under Pontius Pilate and was buried,
And the third day He arose again according to the Scriptures.
And ascended into heaven,
and sitteth at the right hand of the Father.
And He is to come again, with glory,
to judge both the living and the dead;
Of whose kingdom there shall be no end.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord and Giver of life,
Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son;
Who, together with the Father and the Son,
is adored and glorified;
Who has spoken through the prophets.
I believe in one holy catholic
and apostolic Church.
I confess one baptism for the remission of sins.
And I expect the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

¶ Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua.
Osanna in excelsis.
Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
Osanna in excelsis.

¶ Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
dona nobis pacem.

¶ 13 Alma Redemptoris Mater

Alma redemptoris mater,
que pervia celi
Porta nanes et stella maris,
succurre cadenti
Surgere qui curat populo,
Tu que genuisti,
Natura mirante,
tuum sanctum genitorem,
Virgo prius ac posterius,
Gabrielis ab ore
Sumens illud Ave,
peccatorum miserere.

Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth.
Heaven and earth are full of Your glory
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.
Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world,
grant us peace.

Life-giving mother of the redeemer,
you who remain
the open portal of heaven and star of the sea,
succour the fallen people
who struggle to rise.
You who bore –
with nature marvelling –
your own blessed creator,
O Virgin before and after birth,
who receives from Gabriel's mouth
that "Ave,"
look with mercy on sinners.

Late Medieval English Carols

[14] There is no rose of swych vertu

Burden (refrain): There is no rose of swych vertu
As is the rose that bare Jesu;

There is no rose of swych vertu
As is the rose that bare Jesu,
Alleluia.

For in this rose conteinēd was
Heaven and earth in little space;
Res miranda. [A marvellous thing.]

By that rose we may well see
There be one God in persons three,
Pares forma. [In equal form.]

The angels sungen the shepherds to:

Gloria in excelsis deo:
Gaudeamus. [Glory to God in the highest; let us rejoice.]

Leave we all this worldly mirth,
And follow we this joyful birth;
Transeamus. [Let us go across.]

[15] Hail Mary, full of grace

Burden (refrain): Hail Mary, full of grace,
Mother in virginity.

The Holy Ghost is to thee sent
From the Father omnipotent,
Now is God within thee went,
When the angel said "Ave."

When the angel Ave began,
Flesh and blood together ran;
Mary bore both God and man,
Through vertu and pure dignity.

So saith the gospel of Saint John:
God and man is made but one,
In flesh and blood, body and bone,
One God in personēs three.

And the Prophet Jeremy
Told in his prophecy
That the Son of Mary
Should die for us on roodē tree.

Muchē joy to us was grant
And in the earthē peace y-plant,
When that born was this Infant
In the land of Galilee.

Mary grant to us thy bliss
There thy Sonnēs woning is;
Of that we han done amiss
Pray for us pour charitē.

[16] Nova, nova!

Burden (refrain): Nova, nova! Ave fit ex Eva.
[News, news! Ave (Mary) is made from Eve.]

Gabriel of high degree,
He came down from Trinity
From Nazareth to Galilee.

I met a maiden in a place;
I kneelēd down afore her face;
And said: "Hail, Mary, full of grace!"

When the maiden heard tell this,
She was full sore abashed, y-wis,
And weened that she had done amiss.

Then said the angel: "Dread not thou,
For ye be conceivēd with great vertu
Whose name shall be callēd Jesu."

It is not yet six weeks agone
Sin Elizabeth conceivēd John,
As it was prophesied beforne.

Then said the maiden: "Verily,
I am your servant right truly,
Ecce ancilla Domini."
[Behold the handmaiden of the Lord.]

Soprano: Laura Lynch, Stephanie Sheffield

Tenor: Matthew Dean, Andrew Fredel, Keith Murphy, Frank Villella

Baritone: William Chin, Luciano Laurentiu, A. Peter Olson Jr.

Bass: Jack Parton, Wilbur Pauley

Director: Michael Alan Anderson

Schola Antiqua of Chicago



Photo: Frank Yan

Schola Antiqua of Chicago is a professional vocal ensemble dedicated exclusively to the performance of music from before the year 1600. Under the direction of Michael Alan Anderson (Eastman School of Music), the group won the 2012 Noah Greenberg Award from the American Musicological Society for outstanding contributions to historical performing practices. An ensemble that executes the pre-modern repertory with "sensitivity and style" (*Early Music America*), Schola Antiqua was founded in 2000 under the artistic leadership of Calvin M. Bower (University of Notre Dame) and was Artist in Residence at the University of Chicago in 2006-2007. The group has served in a similar capacity for the Lumen Christi Institute since 2009. The ensemble has recorded three albums on the Discantus label (including first recordings of music by Léonin, Du Fay, Guerrero, and Lassus). Schola Antiqua's music has aired on the syndicated broadcasts of *With Heart and Voice*, *Millennium of Music*, and *Harmonia* and has received reviews in *Early Music America*, *Fanfare*, the *Journal of Plainsong and Medieval Music*, and *Notes* (Music Library Association).

This collection of early music for the Advent season provides a glimpse into the days of anticipation and hope leading up to Christmas during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Pierre de La Rue spent his professional life serving some of the most influential rulers of that time, and the glorious polyphony of his *Missa Conceptio tua* celebrates the Immaculate Conception in a manner appropriate to the extravagant liturgy of the Habsburg-Burgundian court. The seven *O Antiphons* focus on the theme of Jesus's imminent arrival, while the concluding English carols centre on the Virgin Mary's birth of the Christ child.

MISSA CONCEPTIO TUA

Medieval and Renaissance Music for Advent

O Antiphons

1	O Sapientia (with Magnificat)	11:32
2	O Adonai	5:27
3	O Radix Iesse	1:05
4	O Clavis David	1:04
5	O Oriens	1:13
6	O Rex Gentium	0:51
7	O Emmanuel	0:55
	Pierre de la Rue (c.1452-1518): Missa Conceptio tua*	0:57

Pierre de la Rue (c.1452-1518): Missa Conceptio tua* 31:02

8	Kyrie	3:30
9	Gloria	5:45
10	Credo	8:54
11	Sanctus	8:40
12	Agnus Dei	4:13
13	Alma Redemptoris Mater	2:21
	Late Medieval English Carols	12:34
14	There is no rose of swych vertu	5:21
15	Hail Mary, full of grace	5:14
16	Nova, nova!	1:59

*WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDING

Schola Antiqua of Chicago
Michael Alan Anderson, Director

The sung texts and translations can be found inside the booklet,
and may also be accessed at www.naxos.com/libretti/573260.htm

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