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CLASSICS

Sibylla

Gallicantus

Gabriel Crouch
director



SIBYLLA

Prophetiae Sibyllarum

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2 **O Pastor animarum** Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179) [1.27]

Prophetiae Sibyllarum

Orlandus Lassus

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Prophetiae Sibyllarum

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Prophetiae Sibyllarum

Orlandus Lassus

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GALLICANTUS
GABRIEL CROUCH DIRECTOR

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INTRODUCTION

Lassus's *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* is discussed far more than it is performed. It eludes conventional categorization and confounds simple analysis, and we linger so long on its peculiarities that we tend to forget just how ravishing it is. This project began as graduate class at Princeton University, where students were introduced to the Lassus work and its riddles, before being asked to compose their own responses to it. Gallicantus performed these eight student works on Princeton's campus in October 2015, alongside larger responses to the piece by Professors Dmitri Tymoczko and Dan Trueman. This recording represents a partial account of all this work, with Dmitri Tymoczko's 'Prophetiae Sibyllarum' heard alongside offerings from the 'Sibyl of the Rhine', Hildegard von Bingen, and of course the Lassus work itself. Just as the words of the ancient sibyls were manipulated to support a Christian narrative in the 15th and 16th Centuries, Tymoczko's work sets poems by Jeff Dolven which recast the sibyls' role: this time to the teller of grim truths of present life in post-industrial America. As an epilogue we have included the final

movement of the suite *Visions*, composed by one of the students on the course, Elliot Cole. 'I saw you under the fig tree', a simple 4-part setting beneath an extraordinary countertenor *glissando*, is Jesus Christ's response to Nathaniel and is held as an affirmation of Christ's omniscience.

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PROPHETIAE SIBYLLARUM

In this age of modern technology and instant media we hardly have need of soothsayers and prophets, and since the colourful setting by Orlandus Lassus in his early output there has been a dearth of musical settings of the sayings of the sibyl. Yet in the 5th century BC, the Greek writer Heraclitus refers to 'The sibyl, with frenzied mouth uttering things not to be laughed at, unadorned and unperfumed, yet reaches to a thousand years with her voice by aid of the god'. There appears to be some supernatural influence in the predictions of these female oracles, each given a name according to the location of their prophesies: *Delphi*, *Tiburtina*, *Phrygia* and so on.

The received wisdom in the Greek sources is that the sibyls relayed their message in song – and this might have served as an inspiration for composers, although the take-up of the invitation has been disappointing. By medieval times, the Latin term *sibylla* had taken on the generalized meaning of 'prophetess' with perhaps less of the pagan connotation, and a stronger association with the prophecies of the Old Testament. It is certainly plausible that Lassus had

already seen the representation of five sibyls in the Sistine Chapel, and maybe other examples in Italy. The very presence of these images in the Borgia apartments of the Vatican is a hint that folklore, and even blatant myth, could coexist beside the official doctrine of the Church. Shakespeare includes references to sibyls in *Othello*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Troilus and Cressida*. This last play was reincarnated in operatic form by William Walton in 1954, and Berlioz's treatment of *Cassandra* in *The Trojans* (1858) casts her clearly in the mould of a sibyl without too much embroidery. Yet it was a long time prior to these adoptions into art and literature that Christ was referred to as: '...He, whom seer and sibyl sang in ages long gone by...'. (Prudentius, 4th Century AD).

Carmina chromatico, the title of Lassus's introductory section, is a phrase which on its own might suggest music with lots of chromatic writing as we define it with our knowledge of the terms: diatonic, chromatic and enharmonic. Yet the two words do not belong together in the manner that we might expect in a language such as English. The 'chromatico' refers in the explanatory text of the prologue to the *tenor* – the voice which holds on to the longest

notes in the choral texture. However this line is simply diatonic and it might be that the description, set to music in the Prologue, alludes to the overall colourful alchemy which Lassus brings to his outlandish sounds. This harmony, unparalleled in contemporary practice and the subject of intense analysis over the years, is certainly arresting to the listener. How thoughtful of Lassus to provide in song a description of what was about to happen in aural terms – a warning clause. Yes, if examined from either viewpoint of tonality or atonality, the remarkable modulations appear incongruous. The composer appears to want to be forward-thinking in creating a New Music, as was evidenced by heated argument with other musicians at the time. If the listener is tempted to think that the astonishing shifts of harmonic context (NB: not modulation as we know it) are simply gratuitous, then be assured that harmonic analysis suggests convincingly that the composer's aim is simply to avoid the close occurrence in the vocal lines of the dreaded tritone or diminished fifth. In addition, when the voice-parts are examined horizontally, there is no sense of the singer having to perform acrobatics or negotiate baffling intervals, except where the disposition of

chordal writing is adjusted to avoid classic, parallel flaws. It is possibly an attempt to set the unique texts of the twelve sibyls as if from a world unbound by the constraints of rules and conventions.

Examining the texts from the point of view of the composer, it is remarkable that the prophecies were supposedly written by twelve different sibyls and yet conform to a structure of six-line poems in dactylic hexameter. The concordant message of the prophecies shows some of the imagery of, for example, the Book of Revelation, with its flavour of apocalyptic warning, and clear prediction of Christ's incarnation and the purpose of his mission. Why therefore is this renowned setting a solitary example of such a remarkable set of texts? Were later composers overawed by Lassus's prototype – had he said it all? The present-day setting by Tymoczko combines a comprehensive use of vocal and ensemble techniques with a hint of homage to Lassus. The inspiration of prophecy and impending catastrophe from different eras is shared in the text, and there is a nod to the sonorities and shapes of the earlier work. The modern work makes advanced use of arithmetical complexities in rhythm, but it is the harmonic

colour-shifts which might be said to show the strongest connection between the two works.

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) may have dampened enthusiasm for employing these sibylline texts in choral works, as such material might be deemed heretical by ecclesiastical authorities. On the one hand, the tradition of using the prophecies was alive and well in such examples as the *Song of the Sibyl*, performed on Christmas Eve throughout Europe (especially in Spain), an inclusion in the sequence *Dies Irae* (Teste David cum Sybilla), and even references by St Thomas Aquinas (in his *Summa*, referring to the Incarnation of Christ) and St Augustine (on the foretelling of the end of the world). Yet in the end, it was the Fathers of that Council who relegated the writings to the grey area of folk tradition, a colourful example of a traditional tale possessing the status of fact when it appears to have been doctored at various points after the very events it purported to predict – most notably the birth of Christ. In general terms its position is now akin to being among the Apocrypha, but it is not officially listed as such. There is also the likelihood that the sibyls, being mere women, faced a certain discrimination

by the powerful, male figures in the Church. Any inspiration in writings or teachings which appeared to emanate from mystical sources might have been viewed with suspicion and suppressed at the earliest opportunity, as was suffered by Hildegard of Bingen, the multi-talented abbess, known popularly as the Sibyl of the Rhine, who was dealt with so harshly by the local hierarchy on the flimsiest of grounds. Since most composers of liturgical material relied on the patrimony of the Church for a performance platform, there would be reluctance to proffer settings of material which had been effectively proscribed. It was not only in England that composers paid dearly for showing very tangible connections with material deemed to be contrary to doctrine. Selecting acceptable texts was at the least a wise business choice.

The groupings of the settings owe more to musical features than any textual considerations. It is rarely straightforward to make pronouncements on the actual pitches that centuries-old, unaccompanied vocal music was sung at, and there are existing disagreements about presumed transpositions of some of the movements of the Prophetiae. That aside, allowing the Prologue to be classed as

precisely that, the twelve movements of the work can be paired in to groupings which offer contrasts in the range of the voices and, to a certain extent, by the appearance of what could be loosely termed ‘key changes’. Pairs 1, 3 and 6 are for conventional four-part grouping (SATB), 2 and 4 for slightly higher pitches and 5 for lower voices. Such aural relief is a common feature of the Renaissance and can be heard for example in Tomas Luis de Victoria’s *Tenebrae Responsories* where the meaning of the text is partly illuminated by similar treatment. In the Lassus, pairs 2, 3 and 6 have flats at the clefs, although given the accidental-rich nature of the writing, this is not so significant for the listener.

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Tymoczko’s *Prophetiae Sibyllarum*

Jeff Dolven’s poems propose statistics as the modern analogue of prophecy. The modern sibyl teaches that one in five Baltimore children will develop asthma, that one in sixteen hundred Chicago children is homeless — giving us the kind of ambiguous foreknowledge familiar from myth. Like the ancient sibyls, Jeff’s are associated with a specific city; unlike their predecessors, these newfangled sibyls articulate solid statistical facts. This mixture of scientific and prophetic language was particularly meaningful to me both on an intellectual level and as the father of two small children. (I never realized how much anxiety is associated with parenting.) The end of the piece, which alternately includes and omits the words “barely,” gestures toward an acceptance of the pain inherent in life.

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Prophetiae Sibyllarum Orlandus Lassus

1 Prologue: *Carmina chromatica*

Carmina chromatico quae audis modulata tenore,
Haec sunt illa quibus nostrae olim arcana salutis
Bis senae intrepido cecinerunt ore Sibyllae.

2 **O Pastor animarum** Hildegard von Bingen

O Pastor animarum et O prima vox
per quam omnes creati sumus,
nunc tibi, tibi placeat ut digneris nos
liberare de miseris
et languoribus nostris.

3-6 **Prophetiae Sibyllarum** Orlandus Lassus

I. Sibylla Persica

Virgine matre satus, pando residebit asello,
lucundus princeps, unus qui ferre salutem
Rite queat lapsis: tamen illis forte diebus
Multi multa ferent immensi fata laboris.
Solo sed satis est oracula prodero verbo:
Ille Deus casta nascetur virgine magnus.

II. Sibylla Libyca

Ecce dies venient, quo aeternus tempore princeps,
Irradians sata laeta, viris sua crimina tollet,
Lumine clarescet cuius synagoga recenti:
Sordida qui solus reserabit labra reorum,
Aequus erit cunctis, gremio rex membra reclinet
Reginae mundi, sanctus, per saecula vivus.

*The modulating songs with a chromatic tenor which you hear,
these are the ones in which the sixfold twin Sibyls
sang the secrets of salvation with intrepid mouth.*

*O Shepherd of our souls, O primal voice,
whose call created all of us:
Now hear our plea to thee, to thee, and deign
to free us from our miseries
and feebleness.*

*Born of a virgin mother, he will sit on a shambling ass,
the charming prince, the one who is properly able to bring
salvation to the fallen: however in those days by chance
many will make many utterances of great toil.
But it is enough for the oracles to offer up one saying:
God himself will be born great of a chaste virgin.*

*Behold, the days will come, at which time the eternal prince,
showering fertile seed, will take from men their crimes,
and whose synagoga will gleam with fresh light:
who alone will open the sordid lips of the accused,
he will be just to all, in the lap of the queen of the world
may the king rest his legs, holy, forever living.*

III. Sibylla Delphica

Non tarde veniet, tacita sed mente tenendum
Hoc opus. Hoc memori semper qui corde reponet,
Huius pertentant cur gaudia magna prophetae
Eximii, qui virginea conceptus ab alvo
Prohibet, sine contactu maris. Omnia vincit
Hoc naturae opera: at fecit, qui cuncta gubernat.

IV. Sibylla Cimmerica

In teneris annis facie praesignis, honore
Militiae aeternae regem sacra virgo cibabit
Lacte suo: per quem gaudebunt pectore summo
Omnia, et Eo lucebit sidus ab orbe
Mirificum: sua dona Magi cum laude ferentes
Obiicient puero myrrham, aurum, thura Sabaea.

*He will not come slowly, though in a quiet mind should be held
this act. This he will always place in a mindful heart,
whose power his prophets attest in great joy,
who conceived in a virginal womb
will emerge without touch of man. All works
of nature this conquers; moreover he who does it rules
all things.*

*Of tender years, preeminent in looks, in honour
the holy virgin will nourish the king of the eternal army
with her milk: through whom shall rejoice with full heart
all things, and from the dawn of the world will shine
a wondrous star: wise men bearing their gifts with praise
will offer to the child myrrh, gold, Sabaeen incense.*

Sibylla Baltimoris

Unto us a child is born
 One of twenty-eight
 Of any hundred here
 Whose breath comes too hard.
 I read the news in leaves of glass
 Fond fathers pull from rearview mirrors.

Sibylla Clevelandiae

Lo let a glass be raised
 To greet the one in any eight
 Whose blood will turn
 From salt to sweet:
 Spilt sugar spells this fate on the tabletops.

Sibylla Chicagonis

Behold the day is nigh:
 The flight paths up above converge
 Over one of sixteen hundred
 To sleep in the street.
 The windows shaking in their frames
 Look to the life to come.

Sibylla Washingtonii

May a place be set
 For one of ten by ten by two
 Who will live behind a lock
 Without a key.
 So the vigilant sirens cry to me.
 So may a place be kept.

Sibylla Philadelphiae

Let the starry host proclaim:
 This child is of the point oh one
 Who'll die for love
 Or other highs.
 The needle on the midnight sidewalk
 Points to his door.

Carmina Chromatico quae audis modulata tenore...
(see track 1 for full text and translation)*Sibylla Camdenis*

Hark how the choir of angels sings:
 The child is born
 Who will not stay:
 The overpass shadows the oh point nine
 Who lingers with us barely
 Long enough to count.

V. Sibylla Samia

Ecce dies nigras quae tollet laeta tenebras,
 Mox veniet, solvens nodosa volumina vatum
 Gentis Judaeae, referent ut carmina plebis.
 Hunc poterunt clarum vivorum tangere regem,
 Humano quem virgo sinu inviolata fovebit.
 Annuit hoc caelum, rutilantia sidera monstrant.

VI. Sibylla Cumana

Iam mea certa manent, et vera, novissima verba,
 Ultima venturi quod erant oracula regis,
 Qui toti veniens mundo cum pace, placebit,
 Ut voluit, nostra vestitus carne decenter,
 In cunctis humilis. Castam pro matre puellam
 Deliget, haec alias forma praecesserit omnes.

VII. Sibylla Hellespontica

Dum meditor quondam vidi decorare puellam,
 Eximio (castam quod se servaret) honore,
 Munere digna suo et divino numine visa,
 Quae sobolem multo pareret splendore micantem:
 Progenies summi speciosa et vera Tonantis,
 Pacifica mundum qui sub ditione gubernet

VIII. Sibylla Phrygia

Ipsa Deum vidi summum punire volentem
 Mundi homines stupidos et pectora caeca rebellis,
 Et quia sic nostram complerent crimina pellem
 Virginis in corpus voluit demittere caelo
 Ipse Deus prolem, quam nunciet Angelus almae
 Matri, quo miseros contracta sorde levaret.

*Behold, the joyful day which lifts black glooms
 will soon come, unravelling the knotted volumes of the prophets
 of the Judaeae people, as is told by the songs of the people.
 They will be able to touch this bright king of the living,
 whom in human clasp an untouched virgin will nourish.
 Heaven affirms this, the glowing stars show it.*

*Now remain certain and true my new words,
 that were the latest prophecies of the coming king,
 who, coming in peace for the whole world, will be happy,
 as he willed, properly dressed in our flesh,
 humble with all. A chaste girl for his mother
 he will choose, who in beauty shall surpass all others.*

*As I contemplate I once saw a girl adorned
 with exceptional honour (for she kept herself chaste),
 by his gift and divine spirit seeming worthy,
 who in great splendour would bear a glittering offspring:
 the child, fair and true, of the highest Thunderer,
 who will govern the world with peaceful authority.*

*Myself I saw the highest God wanting to punish
 the stupid men and blind hearts of an insurgent world,
 and because crimes so fill our skin
 into the body of a virgin God himself wanted to send down from
 heaven the son, whom an Angel will announce to the nourishing
 mother, by whom he will raise the wretched from inescapable squalor.*

17 Laus Trinitati Hildegard von Bingen

Laus Trinitati, que sonus et vita
ac creatrix omnium in vita ipsorum est,
et que laus angelice turbe
et mirus splendor archanorum,
que hominibus ignota sunt, est,
et que in omnibus vita est.

18-21 Prophetiae Sibyllarum Orlandus Lassus

IX. Sibylla Europaea

Virginis aeternum veniet de corpore verbum
Purum, qui valles et montes transiet altos.
Ille volens etiam stellato missus Olympo,
Edetur mundo pauper, qui cuncta silenti
Rexerit imperio: sic credo, et mente fatebor:
Humano simul ac divino semine gnatus.

X. Sibylla Tiburtina

Verax ipse Deus dedit haec mihi munia fandi,
Carmine quod sanctam potui monstrare puellam,
Concipiet quae Nazareis in finibus, illum
Quem sub carne Deum Bethlemitica rura videbunt.
O nimium felix, caelo dignissima mater,
Quae tantam sacro lactabit ab ubere prolem.

XI. Sibylla Erythraea

Cerno Dei natum, qui se demisit ab alto,
Ultima felices referent cum tempora soles:
Hebraea quem virgo feret de stirpe decora,
In terris multum teneris passurus ab annis,

*Praise to the Trinity—the sound and life
and creativity of all within their life,
the praise of the angelic host
and wondrous, brilliant splendor hid,
unknown to human minds, it is,
and life within all things.*

*From the body of a virgin will come the eternal word,
pure, which will cross valleys and high mountains.
He, sent still willing from starry Olympus,
shall be given to the world a pauper, who shall rule all things
with silent majesty: I believe and shall confess in my heart:
from seed both human and divine he is born.*

*Truthful God himself gave these prophetic duties to me,
so I could reveal in song the holy maiden
who will conceive in Nazarene lands him
whom in flesh the lands of Bethlehem will see as God.
O exceedingly happy mother, most worthy of heaven,
who will feed such a child at her holy breast.*

*I see one born of God, who sent himself down from on high,
when joyous sunrises will bring the final days:
the one whom the beautiful virgin will bear from Hebrew stock,
on earth to suffer much from his tender years,*

Magnus erit tamen hic divino carmine vates,
Virgine matre satus, prudenti pectore verax.

XII. Sibylla Agrippa

Summus erit sub carne satus, carissimus atque,
Virginis et verae complebit viscera sanctum
Verbum, consilio, sine noxa, spiritus almi:
Despectus multis tamen ille, salutis amore,
Arguet et nostra commissa piacula culpa:
Cuius honos constans et gloria certa manebit

Epilogue

22 I saw you under the fig tree Elliot Cole

I saw you under the fig tree.

*he will nonetheless be a great prophet in divine song,
seed of a virgin mother, truthful in heart of wisdom.*

*He will be the greatest born in flesh, and the most beloved,
and the body of the true virgin the holy word will fill
with the design, without taint, of the nourishing spirit:
but he, despised by many, for love of salvation,
will reveal the crimes committed by our fault:
whose constant honour and certain glory will endure.*

GALLICANTUS

David Allsopp and **Mark Chambers** *countertenors*
Nicholas Todd and **Christopher Watson** *tenors*
Gabriel Crouch *baritone*
William Gaunt *bass*

"Everything Gallicantus touches seems to turn to gold" - Adrian Horsewood, Early Music Today

Literally meaning 'rooster song' or 'cock crow', *Gallicantus* was a name used in monastic antiquity for the office held just before dawn, which celebrated the renewal of life and offered a sense of gratitude and optimism for the coming

day. The membership of the group shares a wealth of experience in consort singing, and is bound by a belief in the rhetorical power of great Renaissance music. Under the direction of Gabriel Crouch, Gallicantus creates performances and recordings which explore narratives and draw out unifying themes within their apparently diverse repertoire. Gallicantus has performed in many significant venues and festivals in the UK (Wigmore Hall, Spitalfields Festival, York Early Music Festival, Temple Winter Music Festival), as well as Germany, Austria (Trigonale Festival), Poland (Wroclaw Festival), Italy, and the low countries (Utrecht Early Music Festival). In the USA the group holds regular residencies at Princeton and Yale



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Universities, and in 2017 made its Carnegie Hall debut in New York.

Gallicantus has released five CDs on the Signum label, each garnering lavish praise. With "Hymns, Psalms and Lamentations", dedicated to the music of Robert White, critics acclaimed "impassioned, exciting music" (The Times), whilst Gramophone Magazine declared: "What an outstanding disc... The opening of the Lamentations could stand as a kind of illuminated initial at the beginning of a gorgeous manuscript, so transparent and luminous is it." Their second recording "Dialogues of Sorrow - Passions on the Death of Prince Henry (1612)", was described as "one of the best choral releases of the year" by TheArtsDesk.com, possessing "singing of clarity, suppleness and poignancy" (Daily Telegraph); whilst International Record Review proclaimed "...this is a well sung, intelligently produced and exhaustively researched project, which deserves great success." The 2012 release "The Word Unspoken", featuring music by William Byrd and Philippe de Monte was equally well received, with The Sunday Times saying "The intensity of the music is reflected in Gallicantus's beautifully shaped performances". It was named 'Editor's Choice' in Gramophone

Magazine, which noted that "the ensemble's view is delivered with such intelligence and rhetorical persuasiveness that the cumulative weight of their Byrd, in particular, is well-nigh symphonic in effect." The group's fourth CD - the remarkable Lagrime di San Pietro by Lassus, cemented Gallicantus as one of Europe's foremost early music ensembles, earning a second consecutive 'Editor's Choice' selection from Gramophone, as well as nomination for a coveted Gramophone Award in 2014. The group's most recent release, 'Queen Mary's Big Belly' (2017), garnered another 'Editor's Choice' award from Early Music Today, for its 'sumptuous music performed with supreme artistry... brilliant, both musicologically and artistically.'



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Queen Mary's Big Belly
Hope for an heir in Catholic England
Gallicantus

SIGCD128

"The performances are uniformly excellent ... the Litany in particular is beautifully sung, and is one of many moments which make this imaginative, informatively annotated programme worth investigating." **BBC Music Magazine**