

Music 160: Lecture 21: Music of the Renaissance
[Speaker: Keri McCarthy]

[On Screen]
[00:00] Music of the Renaissance
Keri McCarthy

[Keri McCarthy]: Ok today I want to talk with you about Josquin des Prez. He is a composer who is really the first international superstar composer which is fantastic. He grew up near the border between France and Belgium. He went to Italy to study and he worked with patrons in the south of France as well as in Italy. He actually got himself in trouble because both of his patrons ended up being the Pope and one was deposing the other and there were all sorts of problems. So if you look that up on his life you'll find some interesting biographical information. He was also, in terms of humanism, one of the first composers who could really state his own fee or change patrons. This was really unheard of prior.

We've talked about the growing role of composer within music. In fact we start with anonymous because God is giving us the music and moved towards something where people are putting their names on their pieces of music. Josquin takes that to a whole new level in that he was a fairly temperamental person and didn't like to compose when people were asking him to or didn't like to compose what people were asking him to. And through the idea of humanism that the individual might have something personal to contribute and that that individual should be compensated for that. Josquin has the ability to move from patron to patron when he is unhappy working in his given situation. So he does move around more. He assimilates styles more from different locations and so his music has a little bit more diversity. And he is somebody who is similar to Machaut that we talked about earlier, was composing in both sacred and secular genres.

The piece that we are going to listen to of his today is a sacred piece. It is called *Ave Maria*, Hail Mary, Mother of God, and this piece is really something to me that you'll listen to it and have some sort of really strong, I think, reaction to the piece as a whole. It definitely reflects a very changing aesthetic in terms of the sound quality, the number of voices. But also listen for the textures in this piece. It starts out in canon which we've talked about where the voices each come in with the same line of music but staggered. And then it develops all of these different sections of texture and richnesses. So we'll have canon and then we'll have homophony. You might have a little bit of polyphony going at the same time where multiple voices are sort of challenging each other for the primary role of melody. So well hear that within the Josquin. This piece is sung a cappella which means without instrumental accompaniment without piano. Originally the term means within the chapel.

The piece like I said honors the Virgin Mary. It is four voices and starts out in imitative style. We talked about all of this. Listen to the symmetry and the balance. The way that the phrases move along together. And listen especially, please look through your book and look at the text for this, and listen to how Josquin characterizes each section of the text based on the texture. So the parts where all four voices come together and are singing the same thing at the same time are the most important parts of the work according to Josquin. And so we start to see that in terms of

that ancient Greek ethos. In terms that texture can highlight text and can change how people understand or hear the text of the work that we are listening to. One last thing about the Josquin that I think is probably one of the most significant features of the piece is that we hear the piece go along for a period of time and then it really stops and leads into silence. The voices are finished and you think that it is the end of the pieces. And then you hear this really gorgeous homophonic all of the voices singing together at the same time “Oh mother of God, remember me”. In Latin yes but take a look at the text and listen to how beautifully this section is written.

In terms of humanism and Josquin’s personal story this is interesting because a patron has paid for him to create a piece usually that would benefit the patron. Usually that would be something that the patron would ask for maybe their name to be inserted someplace there. Instead we get this person plea as though from Josquin directly to Mary saying oh mother of God, remember not us which is what you would think with humanism, remember us as a community, remember us down here. He is interested in remember me. So I think that speaks very well to what humanism did for a composer and specifically Josquin in the Renaissance period that he can make and articulate the claim for his personal self in a work that was paid for by another individual. By someone of higher rank and a higher establishment. So listen to the Josquin at this point and hopefully you’ll enjoy it as much as I do. It is a beautiful piece.

So we just listened to a piece by Josquin composed around 1485 in that area there. We are going to listen to a piece of music next that was written about 60-70 years later. I want to talk with you a little bit about the Counter Reformation that comes about as a part of the protestant reformation. Protestant reformation in 1517 we have Martin Luther who is a monk himself nail of 95 theses. Nailed a paper with 95 complaints about the church to the door of the church in Wittenberg on Halloween, which is a nice feature.

What was he complaining about? He was complaining about a number of things. A lot of things that are mostly that are probably the most publicized are the sale of indulgences. The idea that the church as we knew it, as we understood it, had become fairly wealthy. That instead of providing as a service to the community it was beginning to accumulate wealth of its own. That it was showing that wealth in the larger churches. So we had a lot of art work, a lot of gold on display when people who were in the community may have had need for food that could have been purchased with those same types of artistic elements through the sale of those elements or otherwise. The money could have gone to better use. The sale of indulgences is a concept that if you had enough money, you could sort of go and commit your sins and then go in and admit to your sins and pay for them. So whatever you did on Saturday night could be paid off on Monday and you could still have a pretty good chance of getting into heaven at the end of it. So that was also something that Luther objected to. He wanted the conversation in the church to be entirely from the bible. And he wanted that conversation to be understood by the people in the congregation. So he wanted more materials in the vernacular language, in his case German, but in England in English and etcetera, etcetera so that the people could really understand and not only understand but participate.

One of Luther’s most important contributions in terms of music was that he did want the congregation to be able to sing. So we start out with these sort of really simple, easy tunes that anybody could be singing in the church services. The hymn tunes that everybody would sing

together. Eventually we end up with these four part chorals that are just beautiful where you have soprano, alto, tenor, and base. We have those models provided by people around Luther's time. And some of the most famous were provided by Bach during the Baroque period. So we have these really beautiful pieces that are in German singing praises to God and that people can understand, the people singing anyway can understand, as they are singing in the church service. It takes the church a while to get really upset with Luther but eventually they kick him out and he decides he's going to form his own church and does so. That church actually catches on fairly quickly in the 1520s, 30s and 40s. It becomes something that the Catholic Church has to respond to. Initially it decides that it is going to kind of burry its head in the sand and not worry too much about what Luther is arguing about. But by the 1540s it realizes early in the 1540s that it has to come together and make some sort of response. There is also some really beautiful music that comes out of that and that is the piece that we are going to talk about next.

So the Council of Trent is part of the counter reformation of what we will now call the Catholic Church. Now that we have a Protestant Church we have to call this other church something else and that becomes the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church meets from the early 1540s from 1542 until the 1560s. almost twenty years are spent trying to decide in the town of Trent what it is that should be done in response to the criticism of Luther and this emergence of a Protestant tradition. Mostly they talk about stripping down. The stripping down of the church possibly. They considered changing the language out of Latin into the vernacular which of course we know that they did not do. We know that it stays in Latin all the way to the Twentieth Century. They consider the idea that music, like the Machaut and like the Josquin, may actually no longer be contributing to people understanding the text or appreciating the text. That music may have become something that could itself become sort of sinfully indulgent within the concept of the Catholic Church. For a while we understand that they were considering stripping down everything and bringing things back to chant or removing music entirely from the church. So the concerns with that in the musical community probably were quite high.

Palestrina was an Italian composer. He worked mostly in Rome for a string of Popes. He worked in the Papal Chapel which I love to say. One of the Popes that he worked for was named Pope Marcellus and the piece that we are going to listen to is called the Pope Marcellus Mass. That Pope was around actually only less than a year. He died shortly after having become Pope. The piece relates to the story of the Council of Trent very nicely because we assume that composers would have been fairly concerned about the loss of music in the church. Maybe the loss of their livelihood as well.

This piece works off of some of the types of polyphony we heard in the Josquin. You will hear more variance in texture but Palestrina was working hard in this piece to keep the text intelligible so that you could understand the text as it was being sung. The first part of course you will be able to hear because you will hear the initial Gregorian chant that basically set the pitch for the other voices as they come in. Interesting to know this is a six voice texture. It is very, very thick. Despite that listen to how well you can hear the articulation of the Latin text. You may not understand it directly but as you are following along in the book you will be able to read along and understand the text really clearly.

What did Palestrina do to accomplish this? Instead of working in canon like we did in the Josquin he would take that six voice texture and use only four voices. And then switch and use a different set of four voices. Or two voices at a time. So he was constantly changing the texture of the piece but it was intelligible because all of the voices are moving at the same rate of speed and articulating the same words at the same time. Much more clear than something like canon would have provided. And so you'll hear this great depth. You'll hear a lot of highs and lows within the texture and so there is a lot of breadth in the range that is being used.

The book talks a little bit about castrati which of course we need to talk about at some point so why not with Palestrina. Castrati were at one point it was not allowed for women to be singing in the church. It was not deemed appropriate for women and men to be singing together. And so who would sing the top voice? Mostly young boys and at some point maybe we needed to fill in those ranks or there was a young boy who was particularly promising as a soloist. Especially if this child was not grown into a wealthy family there was an opportunity there for him to have a large amount of care and wealth accumulated through a lifetime of singing. That sounds fantastic right? The only catch with that castrati in order to maintain the quality of the young boy's voice had to be castrated before that voice could change into the male full male voice that would be lower. So we would have a mix of boys and castrati singing in the upper voices. I believe that in the Palestrina that we are listening to women's voices but you'll hear that they don't use bravado and they are trying to recreate this Renaissance conception of what the choir would have sounded like with Palestrina. And so when you are listening for that you can sort of think about that as well.

The other interesting thing if you are interested is there was one last castrati before the practice was outlawed who was alive during the period of recorded sound in the early, early twentieth century. So if you go online to YouTube you can look up the last castrati and listen to a little bit of music that he was singing. I have to say that I would guess that both the recording quality and his singing quality because he was quite old when he was making those recordings, which is a good and a bad thing when it had been outlawed far earlier, but you don't get the quality of sound that I think was probably present with castrati originally. So you may listen to it and think boy he made a mistake in terms of choice but apparently he had a great life, was well respected around Europe, toured and stayed with heads of state and such. So there was an exchange there made on a child's behalf at a young age. Kind of interesting to think about as you are listening to this Palestrina.

So listen to the Palestrina *The Gloria*. Think about both this how the high voices sound, whether they would have been women or boys singing, but listen especially for the clarity of text and the way that text is orchestrated within the voice types to create a lot of variation and texture with a full six part voice.

Lastly we are going to talk about secular music from the Renaissance. We have a lot larger repertoire from this time period to choose from. I think you'll enjoy listening to it, I hope. We talked about the fact that there is a larger middle class emerging during the Renaissance period. These are people who would be interested in maybe playing instruments and you have a family together and you all play violas. Some of you play larger ones and smaller ones and you all get together and play instrumental music after dinner and on the weekend. Or maybe you get

together and decide you want to sing. People were fairly cultured and had enough skills to be able to read music fairly well. And were able to, you know, get together after dinner and have time to need entertainment. So the madrigal in particular is something that fills the need for a market. A market particularly in Ital. Madrigals emerge first in Italy. A madrigal is a piece of music that is sung they are virtually all secular, they are all entertainment, and they were created in response to the creation of the printing press. We have a printing press and what change? We don't have to have people who are scribing out the music by hand but we can create a single piece of music, press it down, and create a thousand copies of that and sell that music very quickly. So music is being distributed far further in Europe. Especially in the second half of the Renaissance. And that middle class is really interested in purchasing that music and performing that music. Not for concerts and so not for a presentation or entertainment of the elite but for the entertainment of the singers themselves. That is really interesting and unusual and probably would have in many cases changed the quality or the difficulty, the skill level necessary, in the pieces that composers were writing. Because if you are considering that it is an amateur group of performers who are performing for their own enjoyment you may write differently than you would have for say the [**Concierto Delidana**], this women's choir that was in one of the houses in the [**Deest**] family in Italy. So that would be a professional choir and you would write music differently for that group. So we start to see music being written differently for different levels from amateur to professional and different markets being published and promoted throughout Europe and in particular Italy.

You might listen a little bit your text book offers some information about instrumental music form this time period which is interesting. Instrumental music really comes into its own equal maybe to that of vocal music in the Baroque period. We are not there yet. But what were instruments doing? They were performing pieces that were vocal in nature. There was no reason that you couldn't take a piece that was originally a madrigal and perform it like I said on a family of instruments that were similar or whatever instruments you had lying around your house. So that is what we think was happening. We have lots of pictures of instruments being played. We know in what settings that they would have been performed at the home and in processions, outdoors, at festivals, weddings, those types of celebratory events. We had instruments being performed. We had very little instrumental music written form this time period. We think though with these pictures they were reading music. So what were they reading? Probably transcriptions or just direct copies of the vocal tunes without the voice being sung. So listen a little bit. There is a dance that is in your CD. You can listen to instrumental music from the Renaissance period.

We are going to focus right now instead on the madrigal itself. One singer to a part. Interesting to the printing press that madrigals were printed with one page, one part. So you would buy the soprano part and separately you would also buy the soprano part. And these would be written in the music and you would not have a full score. And so as you are singing along the piece sort of emerges meaning that if the soprano accidently misses a beat or misses a measure or doesn't come in you are ending up with a different piece and nobody knows how the voice parts are supposed to go together until as a group, as an ensemble, all of the parts are put together in song. So these were funny little pieces. Usually the text were very light hearted and either supposed to be about love, there are a lot of them that are really smutty. If you want to look up some Italian ones you can find out about a swan. Not actually meaning a swan but you can look that up on your own.

As sometimes and the one that we are going to listen to is in praise of a queen so occasionally they go that direction but mostly they were intended for performance around the dinner table after you have had a meal. Maybe you have had a glass of wine and now you are all singing together. And they would have allowed the music to emerge as the performers are reading and understanding it. So it would have been entertaining not only in just being able to hear and sing with each other but to understand how the music and the words interact as you go.

That would be, lead us into a discussion briefly of the term madrigalism, and I'll show you these in particular in this Thomas Weelkes *As Vesta was from Latmos Hill Descending*.

Madriagalisms were when the music replicated something that was insinuated in the text. So with Vesta we have as Vesta was from Latmos Hill descending she spied a maiden queen ascending. Unfortunately I will say right now that Weelkes was the one who wrote this and he uses different words or different names for the same characters and I am sorry that is a little bit confusing. But stick with me here. Vesta is a goddess and she is from Latmos Hill descending, coming down. She spies a maiden queen ascending. This maiden queen would have been in England Queen Elizabeth, the maiden queen. She is coming up the hill attended on by all the shepherds of her train. So there are a whole bunch of people that are hanging out with Queen Elizabeth who from this point on we'll call for a very short time the maiden queen and then later Oriana. To whom Diana, which is actually the same as Vesta, and this is why maybe composers shouldn't write their own lyrics perhaps, Vesta's darlings came running down amain to me. So Vesta, the goddess, is coming down a hill. She sees a queen coming up the hill. And all of the people who were attending to the goddess see how fair this maiden queen is and how wonderful she is that they all leave their goddess and come running down to take care of the queen instead. First two-by-two, then three-by-three. Guess how many voices we have going at a time? Two-by-two, then three-by-three. When we hear them running down guess where the music descends in pitch. When we are talking about the maiden queen ascending we have the music going up all of these are madrigalisms. This piece is riddled with madrigalisms so you should be able to hear and listen for this as it is going through. It should be fun and it should be really interesting to think about being a singer in the original group that was singing through these because it would have been incredibly hard to keep up as you are listening with your own personal voice type as all these other things are going on around you.

Ok so to whom Diana's darlings come running down amain to me in first two-by-two and then three-by-three together leaving their goddess all alone, one voice, right? Hasted thither and mingling with the shepherds of her train with mirthful tunes her presence did entertain. Then sang the shepherds and nymphs of Diana, who is again Vesta, long live fair Oriana, who is actually Queen Elizabeth. So lots of problems with names in this. The long live fair Oriana takes almost half of the length of this piece of music. Listen to it in its entirety. Really enjoy the complexity of texture and these silly little madrigalisms as they go through. They were fun to perform. They were intended for the people performing to create some kind of piece that was entertainment enough for themselves. And enjoy listening to this piece of history as well in terms of a piece of music proclaiming the beauty and the gracefulness of Queen Elizabeth of England. So listen to this madrigal and think about how far we've come in terms of Renaissance music and the fact that we are creating pieces of music that are fairly advanced and sophisticated pieces for a middle class audience.