

GUILLAUME DUFAY (c1400-1474)

Music for St Anthony of Padua

Sleeve Notes

St Anthony of Padua held a very particular significance in the devotions of Guillaume Dufay. The single holy relic in his possession was a piece of the Saint's belt, listed among the 'jewels' in the account of the executors of his will. But the main expression of his veneration was undoubtedly the Mass which he composed in the St Anthony's honour. The beauty and invention of this work is unmistakable even today, half a millennium after its composition. Yet although, as we shall see, the pathos which from time to time breaks through its glittering surface bespeaks a deeply personal involvement in the music, that involvement extended far beyond the aesthetic concerns which drive our admiration of it today.

Life for the medieval man or woman was, in a very real sense, a preparation for death, and the effort to gain the favour of saints was an essential part of that preparation. Their intercession after death for the salvation of the soul was vital in the desperate effort to reduce the term of purgatory, the infernal expiation of the sins of life, that awaited all but the most saintly. Good works in life helped, but without the support and advocacy of saints, the soul had little chance when it came to be weighed in the balance. As the supreme intercessor, the Virgin Mary was the most powerful focus for supplication, inspiring a huge proliferation of Marian devotion. An important musical expression of this in the fifteenth century was the large number of motets composed in her honour, and often concluding with a prayer explicitly begging for her advocacy. One particularly personal example by Dufay bears, as we shall see, an intimate connection with his Mass for St Anthony. Other saints were chosen for their personal associations with the individuals themselves. We do not know the reasons behind Dufay's personal veneration of St Anthony, though they could well date back to his early years in Italy, perhaps to the time, in the late 1420s and 1430s, when he was a singer in the Papal choir.

When death did come, one had to be fully prepared, a task made all the more difficult because no-one knew how or when it would strike. For medieval man, the knowledge that 'in the midst of life there is death' was more than just a conceit; it was an ever-present consciousness. Such awareness finds its expression in every medieval testament, but Dufay's own will, drawn up in 1474, the year of his death, encapsulates it with particular eloquence:

Our days have declined like a shadow and like water running down we are drawn to death with rapid steps; but though the necessity thereof be certain for all men, yet there is none that knoweth the day, or how it shall come, nor is aught happier in men's lot - nay, there is no other happiness but this - than to close this present life with a good end. In order to attain this the more easily a man does prudently if before then, while he still enjoys good health, he takes thought for the disposal of his earthly goods, lest when he ought rather to raise his heart upwards, heavy cares come upon him, by which the mind, concerning

itself with the lowest matters, is pulled back from the contemplation of its maker and the supreme good.

What follows, along with the detailed account of his executors, shows that, like all prosperous and devout men of his day, Dufay went to great effort and expense to prepare himself for his end, and for his progress in the life hereafter. Occupying a prominent place in this preparation was his Mass for St Anthony of Padua.

The enormous increase in the wealth of churches and cathedrals in the later fifteenth century was due in no small degree to the funds donated to them for such posthumous provisions. The endowment of elaborate annual Masses for the souls of the dead in turn brought about an unprecedented rise in the composition and performance of polyphonic Masses. Dufay, for example, specified three Masses - including his own setting for St Anthony - to be performed annually in polyphony in his memory, in addition to no fewer than thirteen low Masses and an annual commemoration 'obit' ceremony for the salvation of his, his family's and his executors' souls. Presumably his credit with St Anthony was already healthy by the time of his death: we learn from his executors' account that his own Mass had been performed every year on the saint's feast day for many years before his demise. But it was after his death and presumed descent into the infernal regions that its supplications became particularly urgent.

Although the will endows the performance of annual polyphonic Masses for St Guillaume (Dufay's name saint) and St. Waudru (the patron of the great church in Mons where he held one of his canonries), only that for St Anthony is specified in detail. The composer left his own manuscript of the Mass 'and several other antiphons' to the Chapel of St Stephen where he was buried and where the Mass was to be performed. As for all the other Masses endowed by him, the chapel was to be illuminated by four candles, one each before his funeral monument (now preserved in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lille) and three 'images', one of which, as we also know from the will, was of St Anthony. The Mass was to be celebrated by the deacon and sub-deacon, along with the master of the choirboys and several of the 'more able' singers, apparently totalling nine singers in all. After the first posthumous performance, perhaps following a tradition established by Dufay himself, there was a dinner at the expense of his estate. The will also specifies polyphonic performances, after compline on the eve of the feast, of the response *Si queris miracula* and the motet *O sydus Hispanie*. Since settings by Dufay of both these texts survive, they were presumably the works performed for this occasion. A performance of the latter, a dramatically imposing work in four parts, concludes this CD.

Like all Mass endowments, those ordained by Dufay's will were to continue until the end of time. We cannot know for how many years, even centuries, annual performances of his great Mass for St Anthony persisted in practice. All we can be sure of is the point when, as for so many of the great religious houses of France, the building which had sheltered it reached its sorry end. Exactly two centuries ago this year, the great Cathedral of Cambrai, the architectural jewel of the north, was sold and dismantled. With this single act of revolutionary zeal, the music of Cambrai Cathedral, like its great bells themselves, was silenced for ever.

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For many years it was believed that the Mass for St Anthony of Padua had been lost. Quotations by the theorist Tinctoris from a collection of Mass Ordinary movements (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus and Agnus Dei) ascribed to Dufay in a manuscript in Trent, Italy, refer to them as excerpts from the 'Mass of St Anthony'. However, this was long thought to be the composer's Mass for St Anthony Abbot, also referred to in his will. About fifteen years ago, though, this assumption was proven to be mistaken: David Fallows demonstrated that examples in a later treatise by Giovanni Spataro from Dufay's 'Missa de Sancto Antonio de Padua' were drawn from the same work.

From Spataro, then, it was clear that at least parts of the Mass for St Anthony of Padua had survived. Yet the fact that this was a Mass for a particular saint implied that it also originally included 'Proper' movements setting texts dedicated specifically to the saint. Although no such movements ascribed to Dufay had survived, a great deal of circumstantial information pointed to an anonymously-copied collection of Propers for St Anthony of Padua in another Trent manuscript. Here again, Fallows was able to marshal evidence from Spataro: the theorist refers to a very unusual change of mensuration (time-signature) 'in the verse' of Dufay's Mass for St Anthony of Padua. Exactly this change occurs in the verse of the Gradual in the Trent cycle.

Various other pieces of information pointed in the same direction. This group of movements shares its manuscript with fifteen other Proper cycles many of which are also apparently by Dufay. The evidence for this claim is complicated, but includes a handful of attributions for individual movements and the sharing of music between cycles. One Mass which fits both these criteria is that for St Francis, which directly follows the Mass for St Anthony in the manuscript, and which shares two movements - the Gradual 'Os justi' and Offertory 'Veritas mea' - with it. Thus although we lack conclusive proof of authorship for each individual movement, it looks as if Dufay's great work, long since silenced in performance, has none the less survived the centuries, and that the movements preserved in Trent are indeed his Mass for St Anthony of Padua.

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If the ten movements of the Mass belonged together in performance, though, there is little in their music to confirm the relationship. This is to be expected in the case of the Proper movements: each one highlights, in the top line, an elaborated version of the plainchant which was originally combined with the text in question. Since there is no musical relationship between the plainchants, the lack of relationship between their settings comes as no surprise. This situation is surprising, though, in the case of the Ordinary movements: listeners who are familiar with later Mass 'cycles' will expect to find these five movements linked together by shared musical material, typically a common melody heard in the tenor in each movement. Yet beyond the odd brief repeated musical motif, there is nothing in this Mass to signal to the listener that the movements belong together. Although the idea of the polyphonic Mass was still very new at the time, probably in the

1440s, when the Mass was composed, such a high level of dissimilarity between movements is unusual.

Yet it is this very variety, a quality perhaps more prized in music in Dufay's time than in our own, that is the key to the Mass's greatness. Any initial bewilderment at the lack of aural 'tags' to help find a way into the vast expanse of music is quickly recompensed by a burgeoning awareness of its limitless invention and extraordinary beauty. This is an awareness that repays repeated rehearsals with an endless fund of insight and satisfaction; and although all musical works are appreciated in different ways by each new generation that encounters them, it may yet give us some sense of the special place that the Mass occupied, through its many annual performances in his lifetime, in the mind of its composer.

Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the passages that strike us as most contemplative are found in the Proper movements, those sections whose texts relate directly to the occasion for which the Mass was intended. The opening Introit, with its gently undulating surface studded with flashes of rhythmic vigour, is surely one of the most eloquent beginnings in the fifteenth century Mass repertory. And it is difficult to hear the Offertory, the one movement in four parts, without being awestruck by its hushed reverence, particularly at its ethereal conclusion on 'cornu eius'.

But this is also a highly virtuoso piece: the rhythmic complexities in its Gloria and Credo, in particular, guaranteed it the attention of theorists for decades after its composition, and made it, as Fallows has observed, by far Dufay's most talked-about work. These complexities usually take the form of proportional relationships between the parts, as in the three-against-two minim relationship at 'Qui cum patre' in the Credo, and the bewildering four-against-three of 'altissimus, Jesu Christe' in the Gloria.

Yet it is also the Gloria that contains what is surely the Mass's most deeply personal moment: at the words 'Qui tollis peccata mundi suscipe deprecationem nostram' the music suddenly changes gear and shifts into an idiom instantly reminiscent of two more familiar works by Dufay. A move into a 'minor' mode is accompanied by a concentration in the top line on the diminished fourth (an interval comparatively rare in fifteenth-century usage) from F sharp to B flat, with the tenor marking out the augmented interval from E flat to F sharp underneath. Another work which was very close to Dufay's heart contains a strikingly similar passage: his four-voice setting of the Marian antiphon Ave regina celorum. The composer asked for this motet to be sung, if time allowed, at his deathbed after he had received the last rites. In the event time was too short and it was heard instead at his funeral the following day after his setting of the Requiem Mass (which has not survived). The motet must, as Fallows has noted, have been written specifically for this purpose, since its added passages of text pleading to the Virgin Mary for its composer's soul would have made it unsuitable for performance in the regular liturgy. Underscoring its importance for Dufay, exactly the same passage is quoted note-for-note at the words 'miserere nobis' in the Agnus Dei of his Missa Ave regina celorum. Although the passage in the St Anthony Mass is not identical with this, the combination of the striking identity of its idiom and the supplicating texts in both cases can scarcely be

accidental. Thus the plea in the Mass, 'who takest away the sins of the world, hear our prayer', receives its echo in the motet at 'have mercy on thy supplicating Dufay'.

It seems fitting that, though the perpetual repetitions intended for Dufay's great Mass by its composer have long since ended, modern technology now allows us to commit it to another kind of permanence, that of the CD recording. With this development, unimaginable to Dufay, his great musical prayer can reach ever more ears, guaranteeing it, though not in any way he could ever have foreseen or intended, a sort of perpetuity. If not the heavenly ears for which it was intended, we can be confident that they will, in their own way, appreciate it just as well.

GUILLAUME DUFAY (c1400-1474)

Music for St Anthony of Padua

THE BINCHOIS CONSORT

MARK CHAMBERS, FERGUS McLUSKY discantus

EDWIN SIMPSON, MATTHEW VINE tenor I

ANDREW CARWOOD, CHRIS WATSON tenor II

ANDREW KIRKMAN conductor

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