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FÒRUM VOCAL

CANTICA SACRA
1000 years of sacred music in Catalonia

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PROGRAM NOTES

A fragment of polyphonic music written in Aquitanian notation to the text Cedit frigus hiemale is found in a 12-13th century collectaneum. This source is now preserved in Paris but originally came from the Benedictine monastery of Santa Maria in Ripoll. Although not a common practice, this particular two-voice Easter conductus is written in the form of a virelai. It dates from around 1250 and represents one of only two extent sources of practical polyphony from the School of Ripoll. In spite of the small amount of music which has survived, this school must have played a significant role in the diffusion and importation of Ars Antiqua polyphony, thanks in large part to its connections with other European monasteries.

Mariam, matrem Virginem is a devotional song to the Virgin, one of the ten songs and dances included in the codex known as the Llibre Vermell which was probably intended to replace the usual repertoire pilgrims performed on the road to and upon arrival at the Benedictine abbey of Montserrat. This piece is one of the most rhythmically complex in the whole manuscript. This fact helps us date the composition at around the last third of the 14th century, along with Inperayritz de la ciutat ioyosa. Form-wise, this particular song is a typical Ars Nova virelai, in which two untexted voices accompany an upper texted voice. This arrangement for choir and organ is made by the well-known composer and choir master of Escolania de Montserrat choir Bernat Vivancos i Farràs (1973). He studied in Montserrat, Barcelona, Paris and Oslo.

The four part villancico, E la don don, verges Maria, is a Christmas piece taken from the Uppsala Songbook, sometimes referred to as the Duke of Calabria Songbook. Jerónimo Scotto published this songbook in Venice in 1556; it contains music connected with the court of Fernando of Aragón (1488-1550), the Duke of Calabria, although the only extant copy of the songbook is preserved in Sweden’s Uppsala University library. The villancico has been tentatively attributed to Bartomeu Cárceres, one of the court musicians. Cárceres’ ensalada La Trulla may have been created from, or inspired by this villancico, because both works use very similar thematic material.
Joan Brudieu (Limoges, ca. 1520; La Seu d’Urgell, 1591), chapel master in La Seu d’Urgell and Santa Maria del Mar (Barcelona), published, under the title Madrigales, a collection of 16 works printed in Barcelona and dedicated to the Duke of Savoy, Carl Emmanuel I. The first of these works, Goigs de Nostra Dona, is a polyphonic setting of Catalan devotional poetry on the Rosary which is used as the basis for a madrigal in nine sections. The traditional theme is treated as a cantus firmus in the madrigal and, considering the period in which it was written, it displays a rather advanced use of both counterpoint and harmonization.

Joan Pau Pujol (Mataró, 1570; Barcelona, 1626) was chapel master at the Cathedral in Tarragona, then at the Basilica of El Pilar in Zaragoza, the Cathedral Church in Barcelona and, finally at the St. George’s Chapel at the Generalitat, the seat of the Catalan government. He lived in a period of change from the stile antico or prima prattica which moved towards the stile moderno or seconda prattica. He was one of the main representatives of this aesthetic change including the Renaissance mannerist style which evolved towards an incipient Baroque style inspired by Italian models. This Regina caeli laetare employs a contrapuntal technique in which the Gregorian melody is used as a cantus firmus moving from one voice to another. It is a good example of the prima prattica in which the composer changes later on to polychoral textures, using basso continuo and the so-called doctrine of Affections (Ger.: Affektenlehre). This particular piece is part of the Office for the Feast of St. George –In festo Sancti Georgij martyris— which provides evidence of Pujol’s time as director of the Generalitat’s chapel.

Joan Cererols (Martorell, 1618; Montserrat, 1680), a monk and chapel master at Montserrat. He represents one of the main exponents of the Catalan Baroque period. The tono ¡Ay, qué dolor! for five voices and basso continuo is dedicated to the Passion of Jesus Christ. The presence of rhetorical figures and other features creates a unique relation between music and text which places this piece firmly within the Iberian Peninsula’s Baroque musical tradition. Cererol’s opening theme is identical to the opening of Johann Sebastian Bach’s Saint Matthew Passion, a theme that appears in the works of other composers of the same period or somewhat later in both Catalonia and Valencia, especially in works related to Passiontide and Holy Week (Joan Baptista Cabanilles and Lluís Vicenç Gargallo, for instance). Bach may have taken this theme as a starting point for his own work. Some of these works must have been disseminated through a Benedictine monastery or through works such as Marin Marais’ Tombeau de Mr. Meliton (1686), another person who might have conceivably known Spanish works.

Here we have a section of the Gloria from the Scala Aretina Mass by Francesc Valls (Barcelona, 1671; ?, 1747), for 13 voices. Francesc Valls was chapel master at both the Cathedral Church in Barcelona as well as the church of Santa Maria del Mar. The work was composed for liturgical use in the Cathedral, according to the composer’s own words. The title Scala Aretina refers to the hexachord or a diatonic six-note scale (the scale of Guido de Arezzo) which gives the work a unifying feature and also serves as a generating melodic motif. The music was the subject of heated discussion because, at one point in the Mass –when the 2nd treble voice enters in the Qui tollis peccata mundi- the interval of a ninth is approached without a proper preparation according to formal harmonic rules. The controversy was started in 1715 by Gregorio Portero, chapel master in Granada, and and lasted up until 1737. In the meantime, around fifty Spanish musicians and a number of foreign ones, such as Alessandro Scarlatti, got involved in the debate. Most of them approved of Vall’s artistic licence, a fact which indicates a notable level of progressive thought in Spanish music during the first half of the 18th century. We should point out that this freedom occurred in the field of liturgical music,
which is traditionally more conservative than vernacular musical styles. The vocal and instrumental forces of the Mass fall well within the usual praxis of Spanish music at the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century—that is: polychoral settings and the use of *basso continuo* among other features.

**Antoni Soler** (Olot, 1729; El Escorial, 1783) was educated at the Escolania de Montserrat and was chapel master at San Lorenzo monastery in El Escorial. His keyboard works, which follow the school of Domenico Scarlatti, were especially valued. In the motet *Laudate pueri Dominum*, the two predominant styles in 18th century Spanish music can be readily identified: the polyphonic texture, rooted in the older Renaissance style, and the so-called modern or harmonic style, occurring most often in his religious output in Latin.

Although **Ferran Sors** (Barcelona, 1778; Paris, 1839) is better known as a composer for the guitar, he has a small number of religious works. The motet *O crux ave, spes unica* is a setting of one of the strophes from the hymn *Vexilla Regis*, written by Venantius Fortunatus (†600), the thematic center of which revolves around the symbol of the cross. However, this particular strophe was only added to the original text much later during the Middle Ages. The last two lines were changed after the Council of Trent. Sors, however, ignored this change, perhaps because of its connection to the Benedictine order which was somewhat more conservative and his early training at Montserrat. This *a capella* motet is most likely a reworking of his earlier *motet à quatre voix, avec orchestre* which he composed during his second stay in Madrid, around 1804, for the church of La Merced. It was also probably the same piece he presented to Pope Pius VII in 1825, since, at that time, he was an aspiring candidate for admittance to the Order of the Golden Fleece. The music was strongly criticized by Father Giuseppe Baini, chapel master at the Pontifical Chapel and a strong defender of church music in the style of Palestrina). Nevertheless, the motet clearly imitates the so-called *stile antico* although we cannot overlook the fact of how influential Casanovas was in Sors’ overall musical language. This is undoubtedly because *O crux* was intended as a gift to the Pope, and instead of using the *stile moderno* or Neapolitan style, which was a more common compositional approach in this period, he preferred to use a more traditional style. The frequent use of chromaticism and the remarkable use of dissonance are significant in this motet; the same could be said for the texture which demonstrates a balance between homophony and polyphonic writing.

**Cristòfor Taltabull** (Barcelona, 1888; Barcelona, 1964) studied with Felip Pedrell (Tortosa, 1841; Barcelona, 1922). He represents Catalan nationalism but his interests ranged from folksong to early music, the world of Wagner and the Arab world. He lived in Paris between 1912-1940, and returned later to Barcelona. *Ecce panis angelorum* is one of a pair of works *Dos motets eucarístics* composed after 1940. The other piece is an *Ave verum* for three men’s voices.

**Dos cantigas del Rey Alfonso X el Sabio**, composed in 1957 by **Frederic Mompou** (Barcelona, 1893; Barcelona, 1987), are the composer’s own harmonisations of two *Cantigas de Santa María*, numbers 100 (*Santa Maria, strela do dia*) and 179 (*Ben sab’a que pod’e val*). The choral setting is based on an earlier work, *Cançó i dansa nº 10* for piano, written in 1953 and transposed to a new key for the choral version. The search for his own musical language is clearly reflected and influenced by composers such as Gabriel Fauré. He also devoted considerable time to the study of harmonic relations and resonances, reflecting his fascination with the harmonics and overtones of bells. Émile Bulliremos, in *Le Temps* (22 April 1921), defined the basic features of Mompou’s style as: balance, subtlety, intimacy, a certain “essentiality” in nature, plus simplicity.
Josep Vila (Sabadell, 1966) composed *Sanctus-Benedictus* in December 1994 and published it in 2000. He is well-known as a choir director and in 1990 founded the choir Lieder Càmera in Sabadell. Currently he is director of the *Orfeó Català* in Barcelona.