



The Sixteen: *Heavenly Harmonies**

18 November (Monday) — 7.30 pm

Royal Castle in Warsaw – Museum
Great Assembly Hall
4 Zamkowy Square

The preserved oeuvre of composers active in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Poland are mainly religious works. They were performed during liturgical acts held with the participation of Polish kings in the Wawel Cathedral in Cracow and in the Warsaw Collegiate Church of St John the Baptist. Pieces for such occasions were composed mainly by musicians of the royal band, including Italians, who willingly shared their talents with local artists. Both Polish and Italian composers illustrated with their music the then ideas of heavenly harmonies.

Concert programme

Grzegorz Gerwazy Gorczycki
(1665–1734)
O rex gloriae

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina
(1525–1594)
Pulchra es, amica mea

Giovanni Francesco Anerio
(1567–1630)
Missa Pulchra es: Kyrie & Gloria

Grzegorz Gerwazy Gorczycki
Rorate caeli (II)

Bartłomiej Pękiel
(1633–1670)
O adoranda Trinitas

Asprillio Pacelli
(1569–1623)
Beati estis

Vincenzo Bertolusi
(1550–1608)
Ego flos campi

Bartłomiej Pękiel
Ave Maria

Vincenzo Bertolusi
Osculetur me

Giovanni Francesco Anerio
Salve Regina

Luca Marenzio
(1553–1599)
Iniquos odio habui
Missa super Iniquos odio habui: Credo

Gregorz Gerwazy Gorczycki
Sepulto Domine

Luca Marenzio
Jubilate Deo

Bartłomiej Pękiel
Resonet in laudibus

Marcin Mielczewski
(1600–1651)
Jubilate Deo

Vincenzo Bertolusi
Ave verum corpus

Performers:
The Sixteen

* co-produced with the Ars Cameralis Festival, next concert: 19 November in Katowice

The Sixteen: *Heavenly Harmonies*

The musical patronage of the Polish Vasa dynasty was an unprecedented phenomenon. The financial resources that Sigismund III allocated to the maintenance of his band were so great that many of his contemporaries considered them excessive. The papal nuncio Germanico Malaspina was to state that the money spent on royal musicians would be better spent on something more useful, for example the re-Catholicisation of Sweden... For Vasa, however, investing in musical culture was a key element of his policy. That is why in December 1594, the monarch sent his emissaries to Rome to recruit musicians for his band. They were offered salaries several times higher than those they would receive in Roman churches, thanks to which subsequent waves of Italian musicians came to Poland; consequently, they radically changed the royal ensemble performance practice.

The first group of invited musicians was headed by Annibale Stabile, who resigned from the post of choirmaster in the Roman Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore to gain an analogous position at the court of Sigismund III. A little earlier, Stabile was the *maestro di cappella* of the Jesuit Collegium Germanicum, where he continued the stylistic traditions of his great teacher, Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina. It is worth mentioning that the latter was in some way associated with the power centres in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, since as early as in 1584, he dedicated the fifth book of his motets to the bishop of Warmia, Andrew Báthory – a relative of the then Polish king, Stephen Báthory. Moreover, Palestrina's oeuvre



Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina

fig. Samuel Amstler

had already been well known in Poland. His motet based on the text of *Pulchra es* from the biblical Song of Songs served one of the later choirmasters of the Polish monarch as a model for a *missa parodia* – a musical arrangement of a mass cycle based on an already existing composition.

After Stabile's death, the position of the choirmaster of the Polish king was held by Luca Marenzio, one of the most important creators of Italian madrigals.



Luca Marenzio

fig. author unknown

He was also known for his liturgical compositions, some of which could have been performed in Poland. The papal official Giovanni Paolo Mucante, who visited Warsaw in the autumn of 1596, mentioned that Marenzio conducted a performance of a mass using the then fashionable echo technique in the Collegiate Church of St John the Baptist. Most likely, it was the two-choir *Missa super Iniquos odio habui*, based on the material of

his motet (also in eight parts). The organist of Marenzio's royal ensemble was Vincenzo Bertolusi, who stayed in Poland a little

longer. In 1601, he published a collection of his polychoral motets dedicated to Sigismund III; among these pieces, we can find Eucharistic (*Ave verum corpus*) and Marian (*Osculetur me*) compositions revealing features of the Venetian style, typical of Bertolusi.

The Roman tradition, on the other hand, was represented by the successive choirmasters of King Sigismund's musical ensemble, including Asprilio Pacelli. In the first years of his stay in Poland, he published his own collection of motets, featuring the three-choir *Gaudet in caelis*. Pacelli served as the choirmaster of the Polish ruler for over twenty years and witnessed the transfer of the royal court (and thus of the entire band) to Warsaw. He was succeeded by Giovanni Francesco Anerio (also from Rome), known as author of religious dialogues popular in the Eternal City. Anerio was also a very prolific composer of liturgical music. An example thereof is *Missa Pulchra es* based on the previously mentioned motet by Palestrina, preserved in the Wawel collections. In the Wawel Cathedral, a band maintained by the bishops of Cracow was active, which performed a rather conservative repertoire. Back then, it was easier to hear newer music in Warsaw, where Anerio's compositions were probably sung, such as *Salve Regina*.



Asprilio Pacelli

fig. author unknown

In addition to Italian artists, the band of the Polish Vasa dynasty also included Polish composers who perfectly assimilated the stylistic traditions originating from Italy. Among them, one of the most outstanding creators was Marcin Mielczewski, who worked as a violinist at the court of Ladislaus IV. In 1645, however, he became the choirmaster of the band of the king's brother, Charles Ferdinand, who was politically appointed bishop of Wrocław at the time. The hierarch rarely appeared in Silesia, yet Mielczewski's compositions – copied into one of the musical manuscripts originating from the area on the Oder River – reached the region anyway. It is in this manuscript that the *Jubilate Deo* concerto is written down, which Mielczewski scored for three choirs and a *basso continuo* part. For some time, Bartłomiej Pękiel (a generation younger) was even the *maestro di cappella* of the royal band in Warsaw. After the Swedish invasion of Poland, however, he moved to Cracow, where he led the Wawel band. Many of his works have survived in the music collections developed there, including *Ave Maria*, kept in a fairly conservative style. At the turn of the eighteenth century, this style was continued by Grzegorz Gerwazy Gorczycki. In his oeuvre, there are many works embedded in the Renaissance tradition (for example, *Missa Rorate*), which enjoyed an exceptionally long life at Wawel.

Tomasz Jeż



The Sixteen

Whether performing a simple Medieval hymn or expressing the complex musical and emotional language of a contemporary choral composition, The Sixteen does so with qualities common to all great ensembles. Tonal warmth, rhythmic precision and immaculate intonation are clearly essential to the mix. But it is the courage and intensity with which The Sixteen makes music that speak to so many people most of all. Celebrating its forty-fifth anniversary this year, The Sixteen gave its first concert in 1979 under the direction of the founder and conductor Harry

Christophers CBE. Their pioneering work since has made a profound impact on the performance of choral music and attracted a large new audience, not least as 'The Voices of Classic FM' and through BBC Television's *Sacred Music* series. The voices and period-instrument players of The Sixteen are at home in over five centuries of music, a breadth reflected in their annual *Choral Pilgrimage* to Britain's great cathedrals and sacred spaces, regular appearances at the world's leading concert halls and award-winning recordings for The Sixteen's CORO and other labels.

Recent highlights include the world premiere of James MacMillan's *Stabat Mater* (at the Barbican in 2016 and live streamed from the Sistine Chapel in 2018) and his Symphony No. 5 'Le grand inconnu' (2019 Edinburgh International Festival and the Lincoln Centre, New York), both commissioned for Harry Christophers and The Sixteen by the Genesis Foundation, an ambitious ongoing series of Handel oratorios, a debut tour of China, and a new, specially-commissioned series of programmes presented by Sir Simon Russell Beale entitled *A Choral Odyssey*.

