

PROGRAM NOTES

The careers of Henry Du Mont (1610-1684) and Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643-1704) frame a grand era of church music in France during the reign of Louis XIV. The music of Du Mont—who was *sous-maître* in Louis's *Chapelle royale* from 1663 to 1683—and that of Charpentier—who applied for the same position after Du Mont's retirement—not only resounded to the glory of God but also reflected and amplified the pomp and grandeur of Louis and his vast entourage at Versailles.

Henry Du Mont grew up in Maastricht, the Netherlands, where he studied organ in the choir school of the Notre-Dame Basilica. He was appointed organist at that cathedral in 1629, yet obtained several leaves of absence to study composition with the best teachers in Liège, where he was exposed to music influenced by both French and Italian styles. No record survives of Du Mont's travels after he left Maastricht in 1638, but in April 1643 he was appointed organist at the church of Saint Paul in Paris, one of the most important parishes in the city. Du Mont so distinguished himself in that position that in 1653 he was appointed as harpsichordist to the Duc d'Anjou (brother of Louis XIV) and in 1660 he became the harpsichordist to Queen Marie-Thérèse. Three years later he was given the responsibility for the music in the royal chapel.

Prior to his 1663 appointment, Du Mont had published *petits motets* for two to four voices and continuo. The posthumous publication in 1686 of his *Motets pour la Chapelle du Roy* revealed to the world his mastery of *grands motets*, works for solo vocalists, choir, multiple string instruments, and continuo. While the 1686 publication contained twenty *grands motets* (including *Magnificat anima mea* and *Exultat animus*), Du Mont is known to have composed seventy during his two decades of service to the royal chapel. Of those, all but twenty six are lost (aside from the 1686 print, six survived in manuscript). Regarding the *grands motets*, Laurence Decobert has written

The diversity of these works in form, style and scoring is one of their chief characteristics, indicating that they were composed over several decades. The orchestral scoring, usually in five parts with two *dessus de violon* [literally, treble violins], is very varied, including passages for trio or for quartet (with two upper parts or one upper and two middle parts). In almost half the motets the accompaniment to the choruses is peculiar to Du Mont, with an independent *dessus de violon* and inner parts quite separate from the voices.... The *grand choeur* is always in five parts ... while the *petit choeur* may take different forms, [with] five voices... in *Exultat animus* and the *Magnificat*. In the last-named the soloists remain independent from the *grand choeur* in the *tuttis*, considerably enriching the sound and adding great variety of color.... Du Mont's *grands motets* bear witness to a perfect synthesis of the Franco-Flemish, Italian and French styles. Although they rapidly fell into oblivion, they laid the foundations of the genre's development and acted as models to the composer's successors as *sous-maître* to the royal chapel.

Little is known about Marc-Antoine Charpentier's early years, other than that he was born in Paris and that his father was a scribe. Although we know nothing of his teachers, the musical education that he received in Paris ultimately led him to travel to Rome in 1666 to learn about the latest developments in Italian music. Charpentier copied out the complete scores of Giacomo Carissimi's oratorio *Jephte* and a polychoral mass by one Francesco Beretta, and when he returned to Paris in 1670 he brought with him many other copies of Italian motets and oratorios. He soon benefitted from the patronage of Marie de Lorraine, proprietress of one of the largest private musical establishments in Paris. For her musicians, Charpentier composed motets, psalm settings, pastorales, and an *Idyle sur le retour de la santé du roi*, celebrating Louis XIV's recovery from an ailment in 1687. He also composed six secular theater pieces for the ensemble, and in this regard his connection with Marie de Lorraine may have led to his collaboration, beginning in 1672, with Molière's troupe, previously abandoned by Jean-Baptiste Lully.

In the late 1670s Charpentier began composing masses and motets for various churches and convents. Beginning in 1679, he was asked to provide music for the young dauphin's chapel (separate from that of

Louis XIV), and apparently some of Charpentier's motets pleased the king, who gave the composer a pension in 1683. That same year—upon Henry Du Mont's retirement—the king held a composition competition for the *sous-maître's* replacement. Charpentier was among the sixteen composers who passed the first round, but illness prevented his participation in the second. Missing appointment to the royal chapel, Charpentier instead provided music for several Jesuit institutions, ultimately becoming the music master at the Jesuit church of St. Louis in Paris. In 1698 Charpentier became *maître de musique* at the Sainte-Chapelle, a post—regarded as second only to the same position in the *Chapelle royale*—that he occupied until his death in 1704.

The *Messe pour les Trépassés*—actually a Requiem—was one of the first works Charpentier composed after his return from Rome in 1670. The Mass includes the *Motet pour les Trépassés*—subtitled “Plaint of the Souls in Purgatory”—which was placed between the Dies Irae and the Sanctus. Théodora Psychoyov has written that

...this motet for double choir bears the stamp of Rome not only in its scoring but also in its theatricality. In a vast *rondeau* form, the recurring element is the chorus “Miseremini mei.” Containing unusually bold harmonies, such as augmented octaves and fifths, and also broken by heart-rending silences..., this moving musical lament expresses pain and contrition but also serves as a warning, for upon this fleeting life on earth depends Man's salvation after death....

After an instrumental introduction, the double choir's Agnus Dei closes the mass in a mood of hushed consolation. About this movement Catherine Cessac wrote

Besides the infinitely delicate modulations on the words *dona eis requiem*..., it is the final “Sempiternam” that truly transports the listener to an incredibly celestial sphere. Over a long pedal point, the vocal parts move along an amazing harmonic sequence in which every chord creates a surprise—are we in E or in A, in major or minor?—finally illuminating the entire work with a breathtaking, totally unexpected, major chord.

Charpentier wrote the most famous of his *Te Deum* settings—the only one with trumpets and timpani—in the early 1690s, probably for the Jesuit church of St. Louis. At the time, the pretexts for performances of the *Te Deum* were most often occasions of national rejoicing, but there were so many such occasions (the 1692 victory at Steinkerque and the 1693 surrender of Charleroi among them) that we may never know what led to the commission of Charpentier's setting. Whatever the occasion, Graham Sadler tells us that “the Jesuits can scarcely fail to have been uplifted by this rich and powerful setting.” H. Wiley Hitchcock—the creator of the catalog of Charpentier's works—provided this description of the *Te Deum*, H. 146:

Its orchestra is scored brilliantly..., and it is written in the blazing key of D-major (a key characterized by Charpentier as “*joyeux et très guerrier*”). Charpentier calls for eight solo singers and a four-part chorus, and composes the prose poem in eight movements, in the manner of a ceremonial courtly *grand motet*. Contrast, drama, and diversity are the qualities that strike one most in this glorious work, reminding one of Charpentier's aesthetic ideal, one aiming for “great diversity in music... the very diversity is what creates the perfection.”

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