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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Portrait of Queen Anne de Cleves, c.1539,
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Performing editions reconstructed and
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1117 Chestnut Street, Burbank, California 91506
Recorded March, 2009 at All Hallows Church,
Gospel Oak, London
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Recorded, edited & mastered in DSD

JOHN SHEPPARD

Media vita

stile antico

PRODUCTION **USA**

JOHN SHEPPARD (c. 1515–1558)

Media vita

e 3 other liturgical works

1	<i>Responsory:</i>	Gaude, gaude, gaude Maria	14'13
2		The Lord's Prayer	4'19
3	<i>Anthem:</i>	I give you a new commandment	3'00
4	<i>Antiphon:</i>	Media vita	25'32
5	<i>Anthem:</i>	Christ rising again	4'24
6	<i>Anthem:</i>	Haste thee, O God	3'34
7	<i>Hymn:</i>	Te Deum	15'14

stile antico

Helen Ashby, Kate Ashby, Rebecca Hickey, sopranos

Emma Ashby, Eleanor Harries, Carris Jones, altos

Jim Clements, Julian Forbes, Andrew Griffiths, Benedict Hymas, tenors

Will Dawes, David Stuart, baritones

Oliver Hunt, Matthew O'Donovan, basses

Media vita & other liturgical works of John Sheppard

The early life of John Sheppard (c.1515-1558) remains a mystery. Tradition holds that he was a chorister at St Paul's Cathedral, but the first time he appears with any certainty is on his appointment to the post of *Informator Choristarum* at Magdalen College, Oxford in 1543. He left Magdalen in 1548 to become a 'Gentleman of the Chapel Royal', though the exact date of his taking up this post is uncertain. He seems to have maintained some unofficial association with Magdalen in the 1550s, though he is not to be confused with the unruly Richard Shepper, a fellow of Magdalen, whose violent physical abuse of young boys on two occasions in 1555 has at times been erroneously attributed to the composer.

Sheppard can certainly be counted amongst the latecomers in the modern revival of sixteenth-century music; it has only been in the last two or three decades that his music has been performed or recorded in any quantity, and even now his reputation still has a good deal of catching-up to do. This is in stark contrast to his contemporary in the Chapel Royal Thomas Tallis, for example, whose music has been in the British choral repertoire for over a century.

There are several reasons for this apparent neglect. First, Sheppard's music survives almost exclusively in manuscript form; much of Tallis's music was published. Secondly, many of his Latin works are preserved in an incomplete source, requiring time-consuming editorial reconstruction in order to produce performing editions. As a result, these works did not make it into the original *Tudor Church Music* edition in the 1920s, because the project was abandoned on financial grounds after only ten of the projected twenty volumes had been completed. Thirdly, the successful resurgence of many Tudor composers partly rested on their English anthems which, until recent decades, were far more welcome in the Anglican liturgy than Latin motets. Although some enduring anthems have lasted from Edward VI's time (1547-53), it was really under Elizabeth that the Tudor anthem reached its zenith; Sheppard died barely a month after Elizabeth's accession. Fourthly, Sheppard's music is frequently simply more difficult to sing than that of his contemporaries, often spanning a vast vocal range, with disjunct vocal lines and

unexpected harmonic progressions common features; furthermore, he had a penchant for writing music in many voice parts: six is common in the Latin motets, and he further subdivides the parts on a regular basis.

That Sheppard can be ranked amongst the very finest composers of his generation, however, is in no doubt. His musical style is bold, inventive, and thoroughly individual. His counterpoint is often dense, more concerned with the colourful interweaving of his parts and the harmonic effect than with strict imitative technique.

This programme presents a sample of his work in different liturgical genres. As a general principle, the Latin works date from either the reign of Mary I (1553-58) or Henry VIII (up to 1547). Of the three included here, the *Te Deum* seems the most likely candidate for an earlier date of composition on stylistic grounds, while *Gaude, gaude, gaude Maria* and *Media vita* probably date from the 1550s. These Latin pieces provide the greatest scope for large-scale composition, and each one is based on a plainchant melody presented as a monorhythmic cantus firmus, around which Sheppard weaves intricate counterpoint. By contrast, the English-texted anthems – probably all Edwardine with the possible exception of *The Lord's Prayer* – reflect the Protestant desire for textual clarity epitomised by Archbishop Cranmer's personal preference for syllabic word setting.

The colossal antiphon *Media vita* ranks amongst the largest-scale pieces of the entire century, and is certainly amongst the most powerful in terms of its cumulative emotive effect. It is a setting of a Lenten Nunc Dimittis antiphon at Compline – but its scale seems to point beyond this liturgical purpose alone; it must surely have been written with a particular event in mind. As Richard Turbet has speculated, it may have been written in memory of Ludford, who died in the summer of 1557, and whom, as a fellow parishioner of St Margaret's, Westminster, Sheppard must have known well. Alternatively, the influenza epidemic of 1557-59 – the deadliest to hit London since the Black Death, and quite probably the cause of Sheppard's own death – may well have provided the impetus for this most soul-searching of pieces.¹ Its gravitas is evident from the very opening; indeed, Sheppard

could hardly have gone to greater lengths to give the piece more weightiness: it is one of only a few works in which he presents the cantus firmus in breves rather than semibreves. Furthermore, the full sections of the piece are notated in double-length note values compared with the shorter passages for reduced forces, suggesting that a slow tempo is envisaged. The Nunc Dimittis itself is presented in simple plainchant, as would have been the liturgical custom in such an antiphon.

Equal in richness, but wholly different in mood is the magnificent responsory *Gaude, gaude, gaude Maria*, which opens the programme. This is Sheppard at his sunniest: the texture of the full sections is warm and radiant, with luminous turns of harmony, a strikingly developed tonal sense which seems several decades ahead of its time, and colourful use of false relations. These sections are interspersed with plainchant and with gymel passages in which the upper two voices divide into four parts and are combined in turn with the bass and contratenor voices. The *Te Deum*, another work of impressive grandeur, is an *alternatim* setting of the medieval Latin hymn and the petitions from the Psalms which traditionally follow it, in which plainsong verses alternate with richly-scored polyphony in six parts. It displays notable similarities with a similar setting by John Taverner, which may well have influenced it.

Of the English anthems included, two are settings of texts which were amongst the most commonly set during Edward's reign. *Christ rising again* is a serenely joyful setting of the 'Easter Anthems' as prescribed in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer. *I give you a new commandment* is stylistically very similar, though smaller in scale, with less jubilant melodic lines, and following the 'ABB' form so popular amongst English anthems of the time. In both pieces, Sheppard employs a tightly woven imitative texture with largely syllabic word setting and passages of homophonic writing in order to ensure clear declamation of the text.

The origin of the remaining two pieces is harder to pin down. *Haste thee, O God*, recorded for the first time on this disc,

¹ David Skinner, 'Ludford, Sheppard, Fayrfax': correspondence with Richard Turbet, *Early Music* 23, 366-7.

has traditionally been attributed to Sheppard, though of the four sources, one ascribes it to Tye, whilst another gives the name Thomas Shepherd – either a mistake, or a very obscure composer about whom we know nothing else. Such conflicting attributions are commonplace in this period, but the music doesn't particularly help us here. While it seems to contain some traits in common with Sheppard's other English anthems – indeed, it is full of vigour and character, and has many appealing features – in other places it seems rather to lack his consistency of invention and contrapuntal skill; perhaps the listener should be left to reach his or her own verdict on its authenticity.

The splendid five-part setting of *The Lord's Prayer* is perhaps the crowning glory of Sheppard's vernacular output, and we can be grateful for its survival: it is transmitted in just one source of which only the tenor part survives. Luckily, it appears in another manuscript as an untexted viol piece; indeed, it is not inconceivable that it started off life in this form. The appearance of the same piece in two different guises in this way usually suggests that it was highly regarded by the musicians of the day, and it is not difficult to see why. The work's beautifully crafted vocal lines, carefully sustained counterpoint and sublime touches of harmonic colour place it on a par with the finest of his Latin music.

MATTHEW O'DONOVAN

1 | Gaude, gaude, gaude Maria virgo,
cunctas haereses sola interemisti
quae Gabrielis archangeli dictis credidisti,
dum virgo Deum et hominem genuisti,
et post partum virgo inviolata permansisti.

Gabrielem archangelum scimus divinitus te esse affatum.
Uterum tuum de spiritu sancto credimus inpregnatum.
Erubescat Judeus infelix qui dicit Christum ex Joseph semine esse natum.

Dum virgo Deum et hominem genuisti,
et post partum virgo inviolata permansisti.

Integra et casta es Maria
quae es effecta fulgida caeli porta.
O mater alma Christi carissima,
suscipe laudum pia preconia,
nostra ut pura pectora sint et corpora,
quae nunc flagitant devota voxque et corda.
Tu da per precata dulcis sona,
nobis perpetua frui vita,
o benigna quae sola inviolata permansisti.

Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.
Et post partum virgo inviolata permansisti.

Respond and Prose at 2nd Vespers, Feast of Candlemas

2 | The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us, and let us not be led into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power; to thee be all honour and glory for evermore. Always so be it.

3 | I give you a new commandment:

that ye love one another even as I have loved you. By this all men shall know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another even as I have loved you.

John 13:34-35

Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, Virgin Mary!

Believing the Archangel Gabriel's words,
you brought all heresy to nothing.
While still a virgin you brought forth God and man,
and after giving birth, you remained an undefiled virgin.

We know that the Archangel Gabriel was sent by God to speak to you.
We believe that your womb conceived by the Holy Spirit.
The unhappy Jew may blush for shame, who says that Christ was born of Joseph's seed.

While still a virgin you brought forth God and man,
and after giving birth, you remained an undefiled virgin.

Unsullied and chaste you are, Mary,
you who have become the bright door of heaven.
O gentle and dearest mother of Christ,
receive our reverent hymns of praise,
that our minds and bodies may be pure,
for which devout voices and hearts do long.
Grant us through your sweet-sounding prayers
the enjoyment of eternal life,
O blessed one who alone have remained undefiled.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost.
And after giving birth, you have remained an undefiled virgin.

4 | Media vita in morte sumus. Quem quaerimus adiutorem nisi te, Domine, qui pro peccatis nostris juste irasceris?

Sancte Deus, sancte fortis, sancte et misericors Salvator, amarae morti ne tradas nos.

Nunc dimittis servum tuum Domine, secundum verbum tuum in pace. Quia viderunt oculi mei salutare tuum, quod parasti ante faciem omnium populorum. Lumen ad revelationem gentium, et gloriam plebis tuae Israel. Gloria Patri et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto. Sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

Ne projicias nos in tempore senectutis;
cum defecerit virtus nostra ne derelinquas nos Domine.

Sancte Deus... ne tradas nos.

Noli claudere aures tuas ad preces nostras.

Sancte fortis... ne tradas nos.

Qui cognoscis occulta cordis, parce peccatis nostris.

Sancte et misericors... ne tradas nos.

Nunc dimittis Antiphon at Compline, 3rd & 4th Sundays in Lent

5 | Christ rising again from the dead now dieth not; death from henceforth hath no power upon him. For in that he died, he died but once to put away sin, but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. And so likewise count yourselves dead unto sin, but living unto God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Alleluia!

Christ is risen again, the firstfruits of them that sleep. For seeing that by man came death, by man also cometh the resurrection of the dead. For as by Adam all men do die, so by Christ all men shall be restored to life. Alleluia!

Book of Common Prayer, 1549: Romans 6:9-11, 1 Corinthians 15:20-22

6 | Haste thee, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me. O Lord, let them be ashamed and confounded that seek after my soul. Let them be turned backward and put to confusion that wish me evil. Let them for their reward be soon brought to shame that cry over me, "There, there!" But let all those that seek thee be joyful and glad in thee, and let all such as delight in thy salvation say alway, "The Lord be praised". As for me, I am poor and in misery; haste thee unto me, O God. Thou art my helper and redeemer; O Lord, make no long tarrying. Amen.

Psalms 70

In the midst of life we are in death. From whom may we seek help except you, Lord, who, on account of our sins, are justly angry?

Holy God, holy and strong, holy and merciful Saviour, do not hand us over to the bitter pains of death.

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people. To be a light to lighten the gentiles, and to be the glory of thy people Israel. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Do not cast us away in old age;
when our strength fails, do not abandon us, Lord.

Holy God... pains of death.

Do not close your ears to our prayers.

Holy and strong... pains of death.

You who know the secrets of our hearts, forgive our sins.

Holy and merciful Saviour... pains of death.

7 | Te Deum laudamus; te Dominum confitemur.
 te aeternum Patrem omnis terra veneratur.
 Tibi omnes angeli: tibi caeli et universae potestates;
 tibi cherubin et seraphin incessabili voce proclamant:
 Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus: Dominus Deus Sabaoth!
 Pleni sunt caeli et terra maiestatis gloriae tuae.
 Te gloriosus apostolorum chorus,
 te prophetarum laudabilis numerus,
 te martyrum candidatus laudat exercitus,
 te per orbem terrarum sancta confitetur ecclesia
 Patrem immensae maiestatis;
 venerandum tuum verum et unicum Filium,
 Sanctum quoque Paraclitum Spiritum.

Tu Rex Glorae Christe. Tu Patris sempiternus es Filius.
 Tu ad liberandum suscepturus hominem non horruisti virginis uterum.
 Tu devicto mortis aculeo,
 aperuisti credentibus regna caelorum.
 Tu ad dexteram Dei sedes, in gloria Patris.
 Iudex crederis esse venturus.
 Te ergo quaesumus tuis famulis subveni,
 quos pretioso sanguine redemisti;
 aeterna fac cum sanctis tuis gloria numerari.

Salvum fac populum tuum Domine et benedic hereditati tuae.
 Et rege eos et extolle illis usque in aeternum.
 Per singulos dies benedicimus te,
 et laudamus nomen tuum et in saeculum saeculi.
 Dignare Domine die isto, sine peccato nos custodire.
 Miserere nostri Domine, miserere nostri.
 Fiat misericordia tua Domine super nos, quemadmodum speravimus in te.
 In te Domine speravi; non confundar in aeternum.

We praise thee, O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.
 All the earth doth worship thee, the Father everlasting.
 To thee all angels cry aloud: the heavens and all the powers therein;
 to thee cherubim and seraphim continually do cry:
 Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth;
 heaven and earth are full of the majesty of thy glory.
 The glorious company of the apostles praise thee.
 The goodly fellowship of the prophets praise thee.
 The noble army of martyrs praise thee.
 The holy church throughout all the world doth acknowledge thee,
 the Father of an infinite majesty,
 thine honourable, true and only Son,
 also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter.

Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ: thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.
 When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man, thou didst not abhor the virgin's womb.
 When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death,
 thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.
 Thou sittest at the right hand of God, in the glory of the Father.
 We believe that thou shalt come to be our judge.
 We therefore pray thee, help thy servants,
 whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood.
 Make them to be numbered with thy saints in glory everlasting.

O Lord, save thy people and bless thine heritage.
 Govern them and lift them up for ever.
 Day by day we magnify thee,
 and we worship thy name ever world without end.
 Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin.
 O Lord have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us.
 O Lord, let thy mercy lighten upon us, as our trust is in thee.
 O Lord, in thee have I trusted; let me never be confounded.

The Book of Common Prayer Verses from the Psalms

English translations (1-6): Matthew O'Donovan



stile antico is an ensemble of young British singers, now established as one of the most original and exciting new voices in its field. Prizewinners at the 2005 Early Music Network International Young Artists' Competition, the group is much in demand in concert, performing regularly throughout Europe and North America. Their recordings on the harmonia mundi label have enjoyed great success, receiving the *Diapason d'or de l'année* and the *Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik*; their debut, *Music for Compline*, was nominated for a Grammy® Award. The group's most recent release, *Song of Songs*, won the 2009 Gramophone Award for Early Music and reached the top of the US Classical Billboard Chart.

Working without a conductor, the members of *stile antico* rehearse and perform as chamber musicians, each contributing artistically to the musical result. Their performances have repeatedly been praised for their vitality and commitment, expressive lucidity and imaginative response to text. *stile antico*'s repertoire ranges from the glorious legacy of the English Tudor composers to the works of the Flemish and Spanish schools and the music of the early Baroque. They are regularly invited to lead courses at Dartington International Summer School, and are committed to developing their educational work, for which they have received generous funding from the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

stile antico's recent performances include debuts at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw and the Boston, Bruges and Utrecht Early Music Festivals (each broadcast on national radio), and the world premiere of John McCabe's *Woefully arrayed* at the Three Choirs Festival. They have toured extensively with Sting, appearing throughout Europe, Australia and the Far East as part of his Dowland lute-song project *Songs from the Labyrinth*. Notable engagements in the 2009-10 season include a New York debut in the *Music before 1800* series, appearances in the Spitalfields, Rheingau, Barcelona and Al-Bustan Festivals, and performances in France, Belgium and Estonia.