

# Magnificat anima mea Dominum

**Magnificat from The Second Service** Orlando Gibbons 1583?-1625

**Magnificat “Praeter Rerum Seriem”** Orlandi di Lassus 1532?-1594

**Magnificat a Sei Voci** Claudio Monteverdi 1567-1643

**Magnificat BWV 243** J S Bach 1685-1750

The Magnificat is one of the great Latin hymns of the Catholic Church. According to Biblical tradition the text was spontaneously composed by Mary under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Shortly after being informed by Gabriel of her immaculate conception as the mother of Christ, Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth who is pregnant with John the Baptist. In response to Mary's salutation, Elizabeth and her unborn child are filled with the Holy Spirit; Mary, upon seeing this, prays the Magnificat as recorded in the Gospel according to Luke, 1:46-55.

*Vulgate Latin as set by Lassus, Monteverdi, Bach*

1. Magnificat anima mea Dominum:
2. Et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo.
3. Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae:  
ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes.
4. Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est:  
et sanctum nomen eius.
5. Et misericordia eius a progenie in progenies timentibus eum.
6. Fecit potentiam in bracchio suo:  
dispersit superbos mente cordis sui.
7. Deposuit potentes de sede:  
et exaltavit humiles:
8. Esurientes implevit bonis:  
et divites dimisit inanes.
9. Suscepit Israel puerum suum recordatus misericordiae suae:
10. Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros:  
Abraham et semini eius in saecula.

*This hymn is said or sung daily in Christian churches around the world; when used liturgically, a doxology is added:*

11. Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto.
12. Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper:  
et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

*English translation from the Book of Common Prayer of 1666 as set by Gibbons*

1. My soul doth magnify [proclaim] the Lord:
2. And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my saviour.
3. For he hath regarded [looked with favour on] the lowliness [humility] of his handmaiden [servant]:  
for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
4. For he that is mighty hath magnified me:  
and holy is his name.
5. And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations.
6. He hath shewed strength with his arm:  
he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts [in their conceit].
7. He hath put down [deposed] the mighty from their seat:  
and hath exalted the humble and meek.
8. He hath filled the hungry with good things:  
and the rich he hath sent empty away.
9. He, remembering his mercy, hath holpen [aided] his servant Israel:
10. As he promised to our forefathers:  
Abraham and his seed, for ever.

11. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.
12. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be:  
world without end. Amen.

Musical settings of this text have been in use since at least 800 AD. In the early Catholic Church, simple plainsong melodies were used as a transport for the text. During the late Medieval and early Renaissance periods, composers set the text to more complex polyphonic music for multiple voices; in the late Renaissance and the Baroque, voices were supplemented by instruments.

## Magnificat from The Second Service

**Orlando Gibbons 1583?-1625**

Orlando Gibbons was court composer at the English royal chapel in the service of King James I. The sacred vocal style in vogue at that time was a “verse” style, where soloists delivered the majority of the sung text with a choir providing affirmation and backing at key emotional moments. The verse style was borne out of practical necessity in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century in England: rampant economic inflation and a chronic cash shortage in the fledgling Anglican Church meant that church musicians could not be paid appropriately, and so the standards of English musical performance in the 1580s and 1590s were low. Restricting most musical duties to a talented few was a necessity, not a choice. But by the early 17<sup>th</sup> century the verse style had taken on its own unique artistry and Gibbons, with access to England's finest singers at the Chapel Royal, was able to extend the style into a uniquely English art form. In *The Second Service* he sets music for the key texts of both the Morning and the Evening services of the Anglican Church – including the Magnificat which was sung in the Evening – in this verse style, with alternations between soloists and the full choir of boys and men of the Chapel Royal.

*Treble* Jane McKinlay, Ondine Godstchalk  
*Countertenor* Alexandra Hill, Christopher Warwick  
*Tenor* Alastair Carey, Richard Taylor  
*Bass* Simon Baskerville, David Treacher

*Chamber Organ* Maxwell Kenworthy

## Magnificat “Praeter Rerum Seriem”

**Orlandi di Lassus 1532?-1594**

The English tradition of singing the Magnificat in the Evening was descended from an ancient Catholic ritual of the middle ages. The Service “of Lights” (or “of Candles”), dating from 800 AD, paired Mary's Magnificat with another spontaneous hymn from the New Testament, the Song of Simeon. Some time before the Renaissance the Service of Lights was split in two, with the Catholic Vespers – a late afternoon or early evening service – inheriting the Magnificat and Compline – a late evening service – inheriting the Song of Simeon. The English tradition of singing both in a single Evensong is directly descended from the original Service of Lights.

Vespers was sung daily Catholic venues across Renaissance Europe and composers wrote settings of the Magnificat fit for any occasion. Franco-Flemish composer Orlandi di Lassus wrote more than 100 different settings of the Magnificat. His *Magnificat Praeter Rerum Seriem* is a large-scale setting for six voices based on the motifs and modalities of a motet by another early Franco-Flemish composer, Josquin des Prez. Josquin's motet *Praeter Rerum Seriem* was famous across Europe for its ingenuity and beauty; many composers parodied it in their own compositions in homage to Josquin's mastery. *Praeter Rerum Seriem* is a piece that speaks of the great mystery of the immaculate conception, the piety of Mary and the noble chasteness of Joseph. Lassus's Magnificat, based on the themes and modality of this earlier motet, is clearly intended for the Catholic season of Advent and Christmas.

This Magnificat is written in a “paired verses” style typical of the European Renaissance. A plainsong cantor sings the odd-numbered verses (using one of the plainsong melodies passed down from the middle ages) and the choir sings the even-numbered verses in a multi-textured polyphonic style. In this piece Lassus integrates both

the cantor's plainsong and the themes from Josquin's Christmas motet into a seamless and remarkable six-part texture.

## **Magnificat a Sei Voci** **Claudio Monteverdi 1567-1643**

The Renaissance composers in Rome and across Europe focused on achieving ultimate purity and polyphonic perfection in their works for multiple voices, in keeping with the Renaissance interest in humanism and classical Roman purity. But the composers in the north of Italy were forging new ground independent of Rome. Musicians in and around Venice were experimenting with increasingly florid secular styles as early as 1570. Much of the secular innovation was due to the development of the violin, an exciting new stringed instrument. Claudio Monteverdi embraced these developments and, with others, extended them into a fledgling new virtuosic secular style: the opera.

Monteverdi was incredibly innovative. While pushing developments in secular composition forward into new, unexplored territories, he was at the same time intimately familiar with the more traditional polyphonic vocal music of the Renaissance and the rich plainsong heritage of the Catholic Church. In 1610 he published a collection of sacred music that uniquely fused all of these elements: it may be the single most innovative book of music ever printed. A remarkable blending of ancient plainsong, polyphonic writing for multiple voices in the "standard" Renaissance style, and florid, quasi-secular solo passages for trained instrumentalists and vocalists alike, Monteverdi's 1610 publication includes two settings of the Magnificat: one scored for the same rich instrumental forces as the mighty *Vespers*, and a smaller work for six voices and organ we perform tonight. Monteverdi connects all the different movements of the Magnificat using a plainsong theme – similar to that used by Lassus – while extending the boundaries of sacred music by utilising dramatic soloists in an ever more virtuosic fashion. In this performance, the plainsong passages are always sung by multiple voices so they can be clearly heard above the florid passages assigned to the soloists.

This is remarkable music. Although the Magnificat had been divided into paired verses since the middle ages, the way in which Monteverdi partitions the text up among choir and soloists in this piece would have been completely new at the time, and the use of a soloist positioned in a different part of the venue to provide an echo effect – clearly marked by Monteverdi on the score – is utterly innovative in sacred writing.

*Soprano* Pepe Becker, Nicola Edgecombe  
*Tenor* Alastair Carey, Richard Taylor  
*Bass* David Treacher *Chamber Organ* Douglas Mews

~ Interval – 15 minutes ~

## **Magnificat BWV 243** **J S Bach 1685-1750**

Monteverdi's approach to the Magnificat was to prove extremely influential. It was the first in a number of expansive Baroque settings that culminated in Bach's setting of 1730. Monteverdi's new florid style of composition and dramatic performance was first exported to Germany by way of Heinrich Schütz, who visited Venice twice and studied with both Monteverdi and his predecessor Giovanni Gabrieli. Schütz was fascinated by the dramatic power of sacred text and particularly the concept of tension and release in the music mirroring that implied by the text. He was enormously important in establishing a new German Baroque style, and it is from him that Buxtehude and, later, Bach, inherited much of their flair for drama and creativity.

By 1730, Bach was well established as Cantor and Musical Director of St Thomas's Lutheran Church in Leipzig. He had been teaching singing and Latin at the St Thomas School and providing weekly music at St Thomas's Church and as many as three other churches in Leipzig since 1723. His creative output during these first seven years at Leipzig was astounding. In addition to arranging and performing sacred music by other Lutheran composers (including Schütz, Buxtehude and Telemann), Bach wrote more than 300 of his own sacred cantatas, each covering a different liturgical theme and thus appropriate for performance on different Sundays in the Lutheran year. This amounts to nearly five complete annual cycles of Lutheran church music, integrating instrumental overtures and complex vocal writing

alongside Lutheran hymns in which the church congregation could participate.

Bach originally composed the Magnificat in 1723 for use at Christmas; this first version was modelled more on the cantata format and included inserted German texts on the themes of Christmas. Effectively, the piece was a large-scale Christmas cantata and as such was one of Bach's first compositions in Leipzig. After completing his cantata cycles, Bach reworked the Magnificat in 1730, removing the Christmas-specific German texts and refitting the piece to make it suitable for performance outside of the Christmas season.

We do not know the exact performance situation of the 1730 Magnificat. Although it has been fairly well established that the weekly cantatas were probably performed with small forces made up of students from the St Thomas School – Bach had to provide music for more than one church, so resources would have always been stretched thin – there is less certainty around performance practice for the larger scale works. The Magnificat, in light of its beginnings as a cantata-style piece, can certainly be performed effectively with just single voices; our concept of this music being "large scale", for big choirs and big orchestras, may well be a faulty interpretation clouded by the performance practice of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Tonight, we perform the opening and closing movements with multiple voices, but sing most of the inner movements – including some movements traditionally assigned to choirs – with single voices, so you can compare the two interpretative styles and gauge for yourself the style of Bach you prefer.

Bach's Magnificat has a great deal in common with Monteverdi's. The architectural structures are very similar (although the various movements within Bach's setting are more self-contained than Monteverdi's) and both composers treat the opening and closing moments of the text almost identically (albeit with different compositional tools). While Bach was undoubtedly a genius, he was not an isolated flowering of talent: he built logically and inexorably on the work of the great composers who had gone before him. Hopefully, in this performance, you will be able to hear a little of the connection between Bach and his Renaissance predecessors.

*Soprano* Pepe Becker, Nicola Edgecombe  
*Alto* Megan Hurnard *Tenor* Alastair Carey *Bass* Ken Ryan

Academia Sanctae Mariae Baroque Orchestra  
*Leader* Anne Loeser *Director* Robert Oliver

*Violins* Anne Loeser, Clare Macfarlane *Viola* Shelley Wilkinson  
*Viol de gamba* Robert Oliver *Double Bass* Richard Hardie  
*Baroque Trumpets* Peter Reid, Matthew Stenbo, Matthew Verrill  
*Timpani* Larry Rees *Oboe d'amore* Andrea Oliver  
*Baroque Flutes* Pene Evison, Sally Tibbles *Chamber Organ* Douglas Mews

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