

2. Natland in Fiesta

I had been looking forward to November 10th, all the more so as Clive Walkley's Spanish day last year had clashed with various other events and an alternative date proved impossible to find. Clive's "autumn specials" always attract customers from a wide area: they home in on Preclusive Natland with understandable expectations of pleasure. There was a point a fortnight before, however, when only three sopranos had actually booked (and one remembered a Rachmaninov Vespers day some years ago with Roger in, I think, Withington, where a mere attenuated trio of sops were singing — at one point- one to a line, whereas hordes of healthy altos had weighed in: quite a challenge, that!)

On the day, fortunately, the three had swelled to ten, splendid reinforcements having arrived, some drafted from NEEMF, and the total of circa 40 singers and players made a fine and confident sound. The standard of reading throughout the day was exceptional: it was exhilarating to 'wing it' in such good company.

We began with two fairly recently transcribed pieces by one of Clive's favourite Muses, Esquivel, both of them possibly being sung for the first time since the sixteenth century. The *Ave Maria* was a beautifully crafted little essay, with the two Superius parts in happy canon, and all sorts of imitation going on elsewhere, together with simple-hearted word-painting of the heavenly heights and the grounded terra. All parts had their independent moments of affirmation and emphasis and the whole was full of fluid movement. *Beata Dei Genetrix* was an equally ingenious piece with its plentiful echoes and internal parallels, but developed a different mood with its pulse-quickening syncopation at the idea of Mary as 'templum Dei', unique in the extent to which she is pleasing to Christ.

These two very rewarding pieces were but curtain-raisers, however, to Guerrero's *Missa Sancta et immaculata* based on Morales' exquisite, eponymous motet. I remember being thrilled by this latter piece when it was part of Clive's Morales day in

October 2001; as soon as we picked it up, I recognised it and felt the same delight in the rhapsodic and tender setting of the wonder-laden words "You have borne in your lap him whom the heavens cannot contain". The composer has clothed these words in music which is totally wedded to them and I marvel that this moving and beautiful motet is not better known.

By the end of the morning we had read and worked a little on all of the Mass except the *Credo*. We had seen the way Guerrero seizes upon all of Morales' themes, producing a series of highly creative variations "recombining motifs, stretching them, spinning them out and accompanying them with a dazzling array of new counter-melodies and harmonic situations", as Bruno Turner observes. But it is Morales' opening statement particularly that haunts this Mass and in the *Benedictus* the tenors sing 'Sancta et immaculata' as a measured and insistent cantus firmus four times, at two alternating pitches a fourth apart, while the STB lines weave a meditative and liquid 'Benedictus qui venit' around them. After lunch we completed the Mass - what a homage to Guerrero's eminent predecessor and one-time teacher it is!- with the *Credo*. As has often been observed: there is much to believe! The *Credo* must always be a challenge to set with its manifold propositions, each with a different flavour: how to give it wholeness while preserving its variety and colouring its individual definitions? Guerrero handles the text in masterly fashion. The sections are clearly discrete and there are gathering points with each new clutch of propositions., Rather surprisingly he reduces his five voices to the upper three at the *Crucifixus* and extends this treatment through the Resurrection to the Ascension. The five voices reassert themselves with 'Et iterum venturus est' in strong homorhythmic declaration, combining triumphantly to the end of the movement.

This day of Marian pieces continued with a reading of Alonzo Lobo's clever and complex *Ave Maria* for double choir and quadruple canon! Lobo is utterly in command of his material and makes wonderful use of the Gregorian setting of the words as Cantus Firmus in the 2nd tenor and 2nd soprano lines; I sang this

piece first in '97 with Robert Hollingworth in Andalucia (the first of 52 Andrew van der Beek weeks for me!) and loved it then.

The final pieces of the day, both for double choir, were two Marian Responsories by Padilla: the first was his particular 'take' on the Morales *Sancta et immaculata*, and the second *Felix Namque*, the latter text being the Offertory for Saturdays in Advent in honour of the B.V.M. plus a little appended litany of rather charmingly quaint invocations from 1st Vespers on her feasts throughout the year. This piece is homorhythmic throughout within both choirs and is workmanlike and worthy rather than positively inspirational, but it is a pleasant and cheerful setting and one I'd have liked to explore further. The former motet, however, is of a different order of achievement. While doing frank reverence to the Morales model, particularly in the treatment of the opening invocation, with its individual and overlapping rhythms and its imitations between parts, the mood soon becomes very different. Soon the choirs move in block rhythms, and, after the dactyls of 'laudibus efferam nescio' are underlined by Choir 1, the gathering syncopation in all voices produces increasing excitement; whereas the Morales original is sublime and rapt, the Padilla is exhilarated and extrovert. What a thrilling piece and what a delightful contribution it would make to a Christmas programme.

It had been a day of spectacularly lovely music and Clive had directed with his usual authority and grace, twinkling and bubbling with enthusiasm as he shared his insights with us. Assuredly it had been another Natland bullseye!

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