

**FRENCH DEVOTION
IN THE SAINTE-CHAPELLE**

Friday, October 15, 2021

Live! at 10th & G
945 G Street NW, Washington, DC

Saturday, October 16, 2021

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
228 S Pitt Street, Alexandria, VA

FRENCH DEVOTION IN THE SAINTE-CHAPELLE CHARPENTIER'S *MISSA ASSUMPTA EST MARIA*

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2021 AT 7:00 P.M. | Live! at 10th & G, Washington, DC
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2021 AT 7:00 P.M. | St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Alexandria, VA

PROGRAM

Missa Assumpta est Maria, H 11

Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643-1704)

Kyrie

Simphonie devant le premier Kyrie

Kyrie

Couplet de Kyrie pour l'orgue: Fantasia, OL 48

Christe

Simphonie devant le second Kyrie

Second Kyrie

Louis Couperin (1626-1661)
Charpentier

Gloria

Évangile: Ouverture pour le sacre d'un évêque, H 536

Credo

Offertoire: Pour un reposoir, H 508

Ouverture

Tantum ergo

Amen

Allemande grave

Sanctus

Benedictus pour l'orgue: Fantasia "Duretez," OL 1

L. Couperin

Agnus Dei

Charpentier

Antiphone: Domine salvum fac regem, H 303

MUSICIANS

Dessus (Soprano)

Margaret Carpenter

Haigh

Amy Nicole Broadbent

**Haute-contre
(Alto/Contralto)**

Sylvia Leith

Andrew Rader

Taille (Tenor)

Jacob Perry, Jr.

Matthew Loyal Smith

Basse taille (Baritone)

Aaron Cain

Ian Pomerantz

Basse (Bass)

Mark Duer

Edmund Milly

Flute

Colin St-Martin

Kathryn Roth

Organ

John Walthausen

Theorbo

William Simms

Viola da gamba

Joanna Blendulf,

pardessus de viole

Leslie Nero,

haute-contre de viole

Niccolo Seligmann,

taille de viole

Amy Domingues,

basse/quinte de viole

Jessica Powell Eig,

basse continue

Dana Marsh, Conductor & Artistic Director

Anonymous, underwriter



ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643–1704) is one of the leading figures of the French Baroque. In many ways he is to French music what Henry Purcell is to English. His output, some 550 works, is conserved in a series of manuscript volumes, all in his hand. Only his opera *Medée* was published. For Charpentier, an opera was something of an outlier; his focus was largely on liturgical or sacred music.

The *Missa Assumpta est Maria* is one of his undisputed masterpieces. It was composed towards the end of his life, in 1702, when he was employed as music director at la Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, on the Île de la Cité. This was his last appointment, and the most prestigious. In earlier times he had worked in the Private Music of Mlle. de Guise; he had also been employed by the Jesuits to direct the music at their principal church in Paris, St. Louis-le-Grand. La Sainte-Chapelle crowned these previous appointments, and his *Missa Assumpta est Maria* crowns his liturgical compositions. We may safely assume it was performed on August 15, 1702, for the Feast of the Assumption, arguably the grandest of all the Marian feasts in the year. Charpentier certainly didn't disappoint the clergy and congregation of la Sainte-Chapelle, either in the richness of his invention or in the ambition which lay behind the work.

Like all masses, it is a setting of the Ordinary: Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei. In this performance, the vocal setting is articulated by some instrumental pieces. Following the instructions given by Charpentier in his manuscript, organ versets are provided for the Kyrie and the Benedictus (where the verset in effect replaces a sung setting). Then two independent instrumental items serve elsewhere, the *Ouverture pour le sacre d'un évêque*, H 536, for the Gospel, and *Pour un reposoir*, H 530, for the Offertory. These items employ the same instrumental ensemble as we hear used in the mass setting, for indeed this is a "messe concertante." Within the mass, the strings provide independent "symphonies" (most obviously in the elaborate Kyrie), in addition to extending the textures of the vocal writing. The sequence of Mass movements ends with the prayer for the King: *Domine salvum fac regem*, H 303.

Many things stand out in Charpentier's music, not least what we might call the visual. Using a dazzling range of scorings, he presents us with one cameo after another, curating an entire gallery. His resource in this regard is remarkable, and hugely effective. We might be tempted to read it as a reflection of the medieval glass of la Sainte-Chapelle, each musical vignette reaching out to one of the lights forming the very walls of the building. Take for instance the opening pages of the Gloria: a slow-moving descending tetrachord in each voice settles on "pax hominibus." The dominant chord of this caesura is extended in a wonderful play of stasis ("peace,"

indeed). After this veritable Christmas scene (the text is the one proclaimed by the angels at Christ's birth), a whole bar of silence prefaces the gayful outburst of "laudamus te, benedicimus te" before, after only five measures, melding into "adoramus te." But not for long; just four measures this time before the unbuttoned rejoicing recommences at "glorificamus te." Here Charpentier allows himself a little more elbow room, elaborating the text with melismas. The sense of swinging thuribles and plumes of incense billowing in the air is captured in the following "gratias agimus." The broader harmonic rhythm and textural grandiloquence make for a fitting climax. At this moment we are only 56 measures into the movement, but we have traversed five distinct dramatic scenes. Charpentier's diversity of invention is remarkable—his music a veritable kaleidoscope. But there is no loss of coherence: the almost vertiginous switches of direction have a strong cumulative drive.

Similar features characterize the beginning of the Credo. No-one can be unmoved by the translucence of "visibilium omnium," or the pathos of the trio "crucifixus etiam." On the level of new ideas, and changes of texture and pace, we have the grandest of feasts for the grandest of feast days. What also needs to be said is that Charpentier is a craftsman of the highest order. We hear this in his contrapuntal mastery and harmonic virtuosity. The counterpoint is never so strict that it takes over; rather it is a vehicle for managing the texture in an engaged and intelligent fashion. As for Charpentier's harmonic practice, it places him alongside Henry Purcell as one of the most innovative and sensational harmonists of the Baroque period.

The word sensational is a good one to describe Charpentier's music. As with all French music of this period, the intention is to trigger an emotional response, *vivement et à propos* as Le Cerf de la Viéville calls it. Nuance and subtlety play their part here. So does allusion. The listener must have a heart for a melting *port de voix*, a gracious *tremblement*, a lively *pincé*. The details in the music are legion, and it can be a connoisseur's business to pick them all up. That said, Charpentier's brush is also broad enough to appeal strongly to the listener who may be coming to this music for the first time.

As regards performing forces, it is very likely that the mass was sung by solo voices, as it is this evening. Each of the voice types, dessus (soprano), haute-contre (alto or "high tenor"), taille (tenor) and basse taille (baritone) and basse (bass) are allotted solo lines within reduced textures (duos, trios, quartets). At the same time, Charpentier divides his vocal ensemble into first and second "choirs" (à 5), thus adding to the spatial opulence of the work. Following suit, the strings (a viol consort) and flutes are also single players,



ABOUT THE PROGRAM (cont'd)

supported by theorbo and organ. Such a disposition by no means makes a madrigal of this music, which carries heft as well as displaying delicacy. Any notion that the French style is somehow effete is so wide of the mark as to be risible. The instrumentation looks over its shoulder, back to Renaissance models, but the style strikes out bravely into the uplands of the Baroque. Charpentier's *Missa Assumpta est Maria* is one of the most striking monuments in this landscape.

Edward Higginbottom

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



Dana Marsh began his musical training as a boy chorister at St. Thomas Church Choir School in New York and at Salisbury Cathedral in England. He earned his undergraduate degree in organ performance at the Eastman School of Music and received masters and doctoral degrees in historical musicology from the University of Oxford. Praised by *The Los Angeles Times* as an “energetic and

persuasive conductor,” and by *The Washington Post* as “a superb choral conductor, energetic and precise,” Marsh has entered into fruitful collaborations with the London Mozart Players, Studio de musique ancienne de Montréal, the Choir of St. Thomas Church Fifth Avenue, the Portland Baroque Orchestra, and the Musica Angelica Baroque Orchestra, among others. As an acclaimed countertenor soloist and consort singer (1992-2008), he performed with the American Bach Soloists, Concert Royal of New York, New York Collegium, Seattle Baroque Orchestra, and the Academy of Ancient Music. As a singer/soloist with the Choir of New College Oxford while undertaking his D.Phil. research, he toured frequently with the Academy of Ancient Music, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and the European Union Baroque Orchestra, recording 15 discs with New College Choir, one of which won the Gramophone award in early music in 2008. Marsh was Assistant Director of Music and Director of Chapel Music at Girton College Cambridge, and he currently serves as Director of the Historical Performance Institute at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music.

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