**Program Notes**

Vespers is one of the many liturgical orders retained and adapted by the Lutheran church, especially the Saturday and Sunday Vespers in the city churches. The Lutheran version of vespers has adhered close to the Catholic model, consisting of versicles, three or four Psalms with antiphons, lessons, responsory, a hymn, prayers, the Magnificat, and a closing Benedicamus. The main changes have been the use of German for some but not all items, an occasional sermon, greater use of the organ, and provision for congregational participation. In both confessions, Vespers has been the most flexible of the main liturgical services, allowing the most space for free and new-style musical compositions, including instrumental music (Monteverdi’s Vespers of 1610 is one celebrated example). Flexibility has included even the time the service was held: for example, Saturday Vespers has often occurred in the late afternoon and Sunday Vespers as early as 1 pm.

Today a modern version of Vespers has arisen in Germany called Orgelvesper. Depending on locale, it is not always a service like that being celebrated today, but rather an afternoon or early evening concert, normally between 3 pm and 6 pm and lasting an hour, featuring the organ. Only organ music can be heard, or organ with a vocal or instrumental soloist, a small choir may be present, and sometimes a lesson or Psalm or a short homily may be included. Somewhat surprisingly, the Magnificat is rarely performed in these services, although it was the devotional highlight of the vespers retained by Martin Luther.

Our Praetorius Organvespers combines the prominence of the organ with the traditional service order found in Franz Eler’s *Cantica Sacrae* of 1588, a printed service book used in schools in north Germany by legions of boys. Eler’s book is organized by the liturgical year and contains chant propers together with detailed instructions for the incorporation of other sung service elements, including Lutheran chorales which are always sung before the Magnificat. Our service uses several of the Pentecost propers listed in Eler, two of Luther’s great hymns, “Komm, Heiliger Geist” and “Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist,” and otherwise emphasizes the vocal music of two of the many early 17th-century composers named Praetorius: Michael and Hieronymus (unrelated). Most likely, they met early in their careers in 1596 at the famous Gröningen Orgelprobe (an organ evaluation, drawing over 50 organists from a wide area) but never had other contact as far as we know.

Michael Praetorius (1571/72–1621), from Creuzburg (near Eisenach) and educated in Thuringia, Saxony, and Saxon-Anhalt, studied at the university in Frankfurt/Oder and subsequently worked in Frankfurt, Dresden, Wolfenbüttel and Kassel, both as organist and Kapellmeister. He knew Italian music and performance practices well, published an encyclopedic treatise, *Syntagma musicum*, and composed over 1200 choral works in addition to the *Terpsichore* dances most people associate him with (which are only harmonizations of pre-existing tunes). The modern edition of his works numbers 20 volumes of tightly edited German and Latin sacred music in settings for all manner of performing forces of his time, ranging from ingenious two-part chorale arrangements up to large-scale settings for multiple choirs of voices and instruments. A devout Lutheran, Praetorius composed much service music to German texts and melodies, illustrating the myriad possibilities of chorale settings for any level of singers and players. A sampling of his music has been issued this year by Bálint Karosi and Canto Armonico on the Hungaroton CD “Clavierübung III: The Chorales,” containing duets, a double motet, and a four-voice setting for upper voices of these chorales in addition to the more common SATB settings in use.

While much attention has turned to his Christmas music, with numerous recordings and performances, no one seems to have recorded any of the considerable output of music he wrote for the feast of Pentecost. These range from simple two-part settings of the hymn “Veni Creator Spiritus” in *Hymnodia Sionia* (1611, which contains 14 versions of that hymn), to four-part, strophic harmonizations of chorales, to more elaborate polyphonic and/or antiphonal chorale treatments, to the expansive concerted settings of “Komm, Heiliger Geist” from his last two publications, *Polyhymnia Caduceatrix & Panegyric*a (1619, heard today) and *Puericinium* (1621). One extended psalm setting, of “Venite, exultemus Domino” (Psalm 95), found in his *Musarum Sioniae: Motectae et Psalmi latini* (1607) is designated as appropriate for Pentecost, and has been recorded by the Huelgas Ensemble. Praetorius’ three-choir setting of “Veni sancte Spiritus/Komm heiliger Geist” from the 1619 publication displays his genius for musical combinations: the text and music of the opening ritornello are the first two phrases of a Latin antiphon for Pentecost and a Hallelujah, altered rhythmically and ornamented. The choir of soloists presents the text and music of the best-known German chorale for Pentecost, “Komm, heiliger Geist,” in fragmented motivic passages. These sections, enhanced by instrumental support, alternate in the work, culminating in a final ritornello of all musical forces. Ever the practical church musician, Praetorius instructs that some notated parts can be either sung or played on instruments or omitted, depending on the forces at hand.

We include one of Praetorius’ four-part settings of chorales, collected in his large publication *Musae Sioniae*, whose volumes were issued over the course of five years and dispersed throughout eastern and northern Germany. The Pentecost chorales “Komm, Heiliger Geist,” “Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist,” and “Komm, Gott Schöpfer” (“Veni Creator” with a German text) appear in the 1607 and 1609 volumes, often in multiple versions tailored metrically or melodically for specific congregations – in locales such as Meissen, Saxony or villages in Thuringia, for instance. “Der Heilig Geist,” heard today as a Magnificat interpolation, is collected with multiple “Komm, Heiliger Geist” settings in the 1609 volume.

Despite his attention to the theoretical, didactic works and systematic compilation methods, Michael Praetorius was anything but a pedant. As the singers in Canto Armonico have noticed during our several years performing his works, Praetorius delighted in variety, flexibility, and surprises, even in music written for the most rudimentary forces. He understood well that for music to engage the beginning singer, it had to be appealing from the outset. Childlike singsong, repetition, and dancelike rhythms characterize the treble solo ensembles of our music today, with the doorbell-like “Veni, veni” heard in the opening “Veni, Sancte Spiritus/Komm, Heiliger Geist.” and the closing “Benedicamus Domino” for three trebles and the repetitive, sing-songy flourishes in the central sections of the “Veni, Sancte Spiritus/Komm, Heiliger Geist.”

Hieronymus Praetorius (1560–1629) led a rich life centered in Hamburg as organist of the Jacobikirche from 1582 to his death. Together with his father and sons, between 1556 and 1651 at least one member of the Hamburg Praetorius family was organist at one of the city’s four large churches. Hieronymus was the most prominent composer of the family with 100 Latin and German motets, eight Magnificats, and six Masses. [A number of these works were recorded in 2007 by the Choir of the Church of the Advent under Edith Ho’s direction.] An early publication in 1599 was followed by the five-volume *Opus musicum*, which appeared between 1616–1625 and contained his vocal works for 5 to 20 voices. More than half of Hieronymus Praetorius’s sacred vocal music adopted the double-choir or polychoral style commonly associated with Italy and Venice. His 8 organ Magnificats, 19 hymns, 9 Kyries, and other organ works copied in 1611 (for example, “Veni Creator Spiritus” from the Visby Tablature) firmly established him as an important figure in the north German organ tradition. Apart from this elaborate vocal music, Hieronymus was involved in the education of choirboys in the schools, compiling a service book of chants and chorales that circulated in the late 1580s, but Eler’s publication in 1588 superseded that of Hieronymus Praetorius.

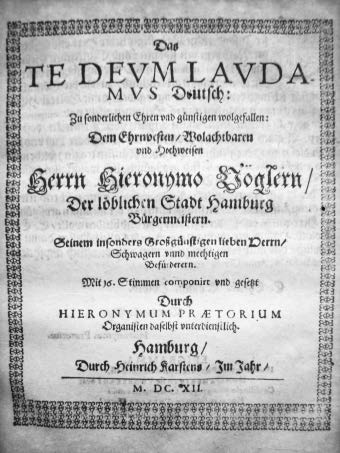
The two Praetoriuses represent different sides of sacred music in Germany: the one retaining the older and more traditional compositional styles and genres of predominantly Latin motets, masses, and Magnificats, but creating pioneering organ works, the other adapting and combining the German chorale with new Italian elements and obligatory instrumental parts and basso continuo. To extend the German comparisons further, the better-known Henrich Schütz (1585–1672) was able to adopt the Italian techniques more comprehensively, from direct contact with Giovanni Gabrieli and Claudio Monteverdi in Venice, and exposure to the newest styles during his wide travels. His large oeuvre emphasizes expressive text setting, solo singing, varieties of performing resources, and less liturgically oriented music, while looking backward in some German motet collections and his Passions. The musical riches from the first half of the 17th century by these three Germans, along with Scheidt, Schein, and the many composers of marvelous organ works, comprise a repertoire that is still too often overlooked by modern performers.

The Becker Psalter is a metrical German translation of the whole book of psalms by the Leipzig theologian Cornelius Becker (1561–1604). The translations were originally published without melodies, but Schütz so admired them that he composed settings for the entire group. He published the psalter in 1628 as Opus 5, with an enlarged version in 1661. The relatively plain strophic settings are Schütz’s largest collection of liturgical music and they breathe an objectivity and sincerity typical of Lutheran worship of the time.

Performance possibilities for a Magnificat are numerous, ranging from pure chant, through alternating chant and polyphonic vocal or organ verses, to a long version in which chant, vocal polyphony, and interpolated organ verses, most commonly four, present the text. These practices of combining vocal and organ Magnificats or substituting one for the other are cited in many documents and church service orders of the 16th and 17th centuries, including Michael Praetorius’ performance recommendations.

Why an organ Magnificat? Often choirs or singers were simply not available so the organist improvised or composed a polyphonic organ piece using the notes of the chant tone and mode as the theme. Frequently the Magnificat tone (of which there are eight, designated I. Toni, II. Toni, and so forth in vocal and instrumental settings – today’s being VI. Toni or on the sixth tone) is heard in long note values with other parts added below or around it. The chant can also be broken into smaller motives which then are combined in various ways, or combined with free accompaniment parts—the combinations are infinite and each composer or each verse of a Magnificat can be widely different. The huge repertoire of 17th-century organ Magnificats has inspired the idea of organ vespers as a type of vespers service or short organ recital. Indeed, at Lübeck’s Jakobikirche during Ulf Wellner’s employ there, a cycle of organ Magnificats by a number of 17th-century composers was performed at the weekly Orgelvespers over one year.

It was also a widespread practice, especially in German-speaking lands, for a composer to add vocal settings of seasonal and festival texts to the Magnificat. Some scholars believe that such additions to Magnificat settings may have been antiphon substitutes rather than true supplementary pieces, but many sources suggest that they were interpolations sung between the Magnificat verses. In today’s performance, a specifically Pentecost Magnificat has been created by the interpolation of one vocal work on a text for that festival day.

The German Te Deum by Hieronymus Praetorius was composed specifically for the rededication of the Hamburg St. Gertrude’s Chapel in 1607. A printed dedication sermon by Pastor Lucas van Cöllen describes the whole service in remarkable detail and identifies most of the music in the service and how it was performed. About Praetorius’s Te Deum the pastor wrote: “After that was sung Herr Gott dich loben wir, which Hieronymus Praetorius, our church organist, has composed for sixteen parts in four choirs. The first choir was sung, the second was played by cornets and sackbuts from a special platform, the third by string instruments and regals from another place, the fourth by the organ.” With a few modifications, today’s performance reflects this description. The Te Deum was not published until 1612, recycled as an occasional work in honor of a Hamburg mayor, and then republished in Praetorius’s *Opus musicum IV* (1618). His work is the largest-scale setting of the German text before 1607 and is only surpassed by Johann Hermann Schein’s Te Deum for twenty-four voices of 1618, now lost.

The “Te Deum laudamus,” reputedly written by St. Ambrose, is the ultimate paean to God within the Christian church, surpassing all the alleluias, hosannas and glorias found in other liturgical texts. Not normally a part of Vespers, it can be included for special occasions as well as performed on its own as a festive work. The German version, “Herr Gott dich loben wir,” is Luther’s rhymed paraphrase probably written and published in 1529, with a text and melody version issued in 1533. The melody is a type of psalm tone, in that the twenty-six double lines of text and the “Amen” are sung to only four primary melodic patterns, to be performed antiphonally by two choirs. Typically Choir I introduces a phrase, followed by echoed answerings or repetitions of full or partial phrases in one or more of the other choirs. Praetorius’s setting breaks up the continuity of the Litany-like repetitions by dividing the lengthy work into three distinct parts. A further division and point of great contrast occurs shortly after the beginning when the boys chant, “Heilig ist unser Gott,” to accompany bowing before the altar. Other divisions are created by the two written-out repetitions at the ends of Parts Two and Three. Each of the three parts ends with a rhythmically climactic tutti built from short-valued, repeated-note motives, with the choirs often grouped in pairs. The majestic, lengthy text allows little opportunity for extensive text expression, but towards the beginning the high voices of the Cherubim and Seraphim are represented by high-pitched motives tossed among the four soprano parts, heightened by the contrasting instrumental colors. At a later point the “precious blood of the martyrs” is accompanied by rising scales in the lower parts, which create growling thirds and rasping note clashes. The more prayerful beginning of Part Three finds its expression in the motet style, incorporating suspensions, some melismas, and a point of imitation on the text “be merciful to us.” The most exciting moments, of course, are created by the sixteen-part tutti passages in which extremely dense, rhythmically animated, and expansive sonorities filled the Chapel with glorious sounds.

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