



"VIRGO PRUDENTISSIMA"

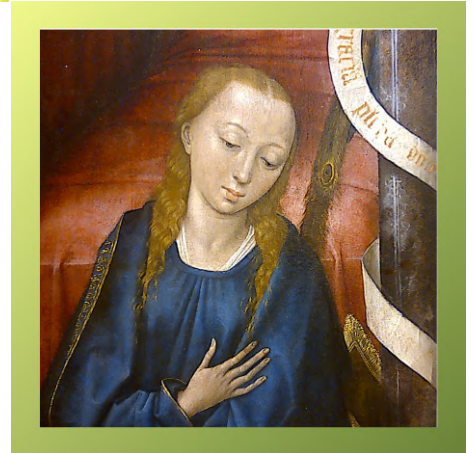
Heinrich Isaac, v.1450 – 1517
Messe solennelle à la cour des
Médicis

Heinrich Isaac's Missa Virgo prudentissima stands out as a very rare work in the panorama of the Ordinary settings composed at the turn of the sixteenth century. Its monumental sound, linked to the six-voice texture, the imaginative use of its cantus firmus, and its mature and sure contrapuntal writing make it one of the most successful works by the Flemish master.

Heinrich Isaac represents perhaps better than any of his contemporaries the musical exchange between Florence and northern Europe. Born and presumably trained in Flanders, he reached Florence in 1485, where he stayed for roughly ten years, got married and developed lifelong connections in the city. His oeuvre betrays a deep curiosity about local musical traditions and an uncanny ability to absorb and elaborate diverse musical languages. This variety, in addition to his superb control of contrapuntal techniques and large-form organization has made Isaac one of the most celebrated composers of his generation in his days as well as now.

The program of this concert imagines a Florentine celebration, possibly during a visit of Pope Leo X, to whose influence Isaac owed the financial security of his last years. The polyphonic movements of Isaac's Mass Ordinary are integrated with plainchant used at the Florentin cathedral - where Isaac worked as a singer - and bookended by two beautiful motets from the composer's famous posthumous collection : the Choralis constantinus.

This imaginary liturgy constitutes a fitting modern celebration of Isaac's career, divided between the imperial court of Maximilian of Habsburg and the city of Florence. After all, the composer produced some of his best music for the imperial court but ended up spending most of his adult life in the Tuscan capital. This duality is symbolically captured in this concert programme, in which the clean melodic lines of the Florentine chant beautifully alternate with the rich yet clear texture of Isaac's most important imperial Ordinary, with the antiphon for the Virgin connecting all the polyphonic movements.



THE MASS "VIRGO PRUDENTISSIMA" IS A STRIKING EXAMPLE OF THE ART OF HEINRICH ISAAC. THE POLYPHONY OF THIS TIME SELDOM REACHED SUCH A DEGREE OF SOUND PLENITUDE AND PERPETUALLY RENEWED INVENTION. MASTERPIECE OF A COMPOSER VERY ADMIRER IN HIS TIME, THIS SUMPTUOUS WORK DOES NOT CEASE SEDUCING THE LISTENER AND THE MUSICIAN OF TODAY.

