

Orlandus Lassus

Dedication to the Hieremiae Prophetae Lamentationes quinque vocum (1585)

(edited by Robert Forgács)

Orlandus Lassus (c.1532-1594) was one of the most outstanding composers of the sixteenth century. Born at Mons in the Southern Netherlands, he began his musical career as a chorister, and according to his first biographer, the humanist Samuel Quicquelberg, he was abducted three times owing to the beauty of his voice. He spent his formative years in Italy (c.1544-1554) before appointment to the court of Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria in 1556, where he remained for the rest of his life, serving as *Kapellmeister* to this duke and his son, Wilhelm V. From here his music and reputation spread across Europe; he was ennobled by Emperor Maximilian II and made a Knight of the Golden Spur by Pope Gregory XIII during the 1570s. His 2,000 surviving compositions cover all the major genres of vocal music of his time, both sacred and secular. He was also a very talented linguist and wrote a large body of letters in a mixture of French, Latin, German, Italian, and Spanish.

His *Hieremiae Prophetae Lamentationes quinque vocum* were composed in Munich c.1585 and dedicated to the abbot of the Bavarian monastery of Benediktbeuern. While these Lamentations are among Lassus's most beautiful and expressive works, their document of dedication ranks as one of the most interesting written by him, perhaps with assistance from one of the humanist scholars at Munich. Despite its formulaic, eulogistic style, it provides interesting reflections on musical life and attitudes to music in Bavaria during Lassus's lifetime, as well as an awareness of the classical tradition of the *laudes musicae*. It was published by Adam Berg at Munich in 1585. The only modern edition (with facsimile of the original) is in Orlando di Lasso *Sämtliche Werke, Neue Reihe*, vol. 22, edited by Peter Bergquist (Kassel and Basel: Bärenreiter, 1992), pp. XIV, XXXVIII. It has not previously been translated into English.

Hieremiae Prophetæ Lamentationes quinque vocum

Admodum Reverendo in Christo Patri, Domino Ioanni Benedicto, Celeberrimi Benedictoburani Monasterii Abbati Vigilantissimo Pariter et Dignissimo, Domino Mihi Plurimum Observando.

Inter omnes quos Bauaria Prælatos habet, habet autem permultos plurimis maximisque tam animi quàm ingenij virtutibus ornatos, neminem ego certè noui, rei Musicæ tam addictum, atque est Paternitatis Vestræ Reuerentia. Neque enim ipsa solùm in ea arte excellit, et Musicis concentibus oblectatur, sed diligentiam etiam adhibet, vt qui eius curæ creditus est optimorum et omni scientiarum genere præstantissimorum Monachorum coetus, cùm à studijs grauioribus relaxare animum aliqua ex parte permittitur, Musicæ vel exercendæ vel addiscendæ tempus impendat, quod studium illud non modò aures suauiter demulceat et vitæ humanæ toedia soletur, atque emolliat, sed fractas etiam diuturna vel lectione vel commentatione, aut rerum diuinarum contemplatione animi vires restituat, et ad labores denuò alacriùs suscipiendos instauret, vt taceam (quod Reuerentiam quoque Paternitatem Vestram spectare non est dubium) nullum esse aliud diuinas laudes in choro maiore siue decore siue deuotine concelebrandas (non minimam monasticæ curæ partem) sit magis idoneum, ne dicam necessarium. Cùm igitur meas hasce lucubrationes ad diuinum cultum mea quoque industria propagandum atque promouendum in vulgus emittere decreuissem, iamdudum autem de Reuerentia Paternitate Vestra quam ob Musices summum amorem impensè amo, aliquo mei predij fructu, donanda cogitassem, nihil ei gratius hoc ipso munusculo futurum existimaui, hoc præsertim tempore, quo eius vsus aliquis in suo templo futurus est, nimirum ad Ecclesiæ, luctum etiam harmonia moestiore aptiùs exprimendum. Hoc itaque ex optimo atque Reuerentiæ Paternitati Vestræ studiosissimò animo profectum obsequium vt boni consulat, et Musicam eiusque alumnos et asseclas fauore perpetuò prosequi fouereque ne desinat, etiam oro, meque eius humanitati commendo. Monachij 3. Martij, Anno 1585.

Lamentations of the Prophet Jeremiah for five voices

Wholly to the Reverend Father in Christ, Lord Johann Benedikt, most vigilant and likewise most worthy abbot of the celebrated monastery of Benediktbeuern, Lord most to be honoured by me.

Amongst all the Prelates which Bavaria possesses, and it possesses very many adorned with many and such great virtues of mind as of character, I certainly have known no one so devoted to the subject of music as is Your Paternal Reverence. For you not only excel in this art yourself and take delight in musical harmonies, but also show concern that the community of excellent monks entrusted to your care, outstanding in all kinds of knowledge, when they are allowed to a certain extent to relax their minds from more serious studies, spend time in either practising or learning music, which study not only soothes the ears with sweetness, and consoles and softens the disagreeable aspects of human life, but also restores the mind's strength, enfeebled by daily reading or discussion, or the contemplation of divine things, and refreshes it, so that work may be taken up again more energetically, not to mention (what there is no doubt that Your Paternal Reverence also sees) that there is nothing else which is more suitable, not to say necessary, for the celebration of divine praises in choir with greater glory or devotion (not the least part of the monastic charge).

Since therefore I had decided to publish these nocturnal labours of mine to propagate and promote divine worship by my industry too, and I had long since thought that Your Paternal Reverence (whom I love immensely because of your great love of music) should be given some fruit of my estate, I thought that nothing would be more welcome to you than this little gift, especially at this time, when there some would be some use for it in your chapel, to express indeed the grief of the Church with sadder harmony. Therefore that Your Paternal Reverence may look favourably on this homage from the best and most devoted soul and on his music, and may not cease to advance and cherish with perpetual favour his pupils and followers, I pray, again and again and commend myself to your kindness. At Munich the 3rd of March, in 1585.

Commentary

Lines 1-2: Father Johann Benedikt Maerz was abbot of the great monastery of Benediktbeuern in the Bad Tölz-Wolfratshausen district of Bavaria, founded c.735 by the Benedictine Order. He was obviously closely associated with the Bavarian court, as he was one of the celebrants of a special Mass held at St Martin's Church, Landshut, Bavaria, in June 1585, when Duke Wilhelm V was admitted into the Order of the Golden Fleece by the Emperor Rudolph II.

Lines 3- 4: The frequent use of superlatives is typical of the flattering and eulogistic style of language used in sixteenth-century dedicatory documents.

Line 5: Lassus addresses his dedicatee primarily in the third person as an added mark of respect and deference.

Line 8: The use of diacriticals above certain vowels is common in Neo-Latin texts, while the substitution of the German Ess-zett for a 'double s' was typical of the conventions of Latin spelling in German-speaking countries at this time.

Lines 8-12: Lassus's justification of the value and importance of music is derived from Aristotle's *Politics* 8.7.4, where Aristotle discusses the psychological effects of music within the broader context of the place of music within the education of the young. These views of Aristotle were a commonplace in the *laudes musicae* throughout the sixteenth-century.

Line 14: the singing of the Divine Office, the *opus Dei*, was one of the obligations of monastic orders since at least the time of St Benedict (c.480-c.550), and is clearly set forth in his Rule, dating from the early sixth century.

Line 15: it is rather amusing but also indicative of his humanist environment that Lassus uses the classical term *lucubrationes* for his compositions. But perhaps he had indeed written them at night, seeing that his daytime duties as *Kapellmeister* were very onerous.

Lines 19-20: The Lamentations were composed specifically for the Office of Tenebrae, a special conflation of the services of Matins and Lauds, observed during the *Triduum Sacrum*, the last three 5

days of Holy Week. During the sixteenth-century this office was usually anticipated on the previous evening. So, in 1585, the service would have been observed on the eves of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday, namely on April 8, 9 and 10 respectively.

