

Mother, Sister, Daughter

Programme

Anon (Verona 761, c. 1495): *Missa de Beata Virgine*

Anon (Verona 759, c. 1480): *Vespers of St Lucy*

Orante Sancta Lucia
Lucia virgo quid a me petis
Per te Lucia virgo
Soror mea Lucia
Tanto pondere

Marguerite de Navarre (1492-1549): *Avés poinct veu la malheureuse*
Anon attr. Juan Anchieta (1462-1523): *Mater Christi cooperto capite*

Anon, attr. Leonora d'Este (1515-1575): *Vespere autem sabbati*

Anon (Brussels 27766, c. 1560): *Second Vespers of St Clare* (excerpts)

Psalm Antiphon: Post vitae Clarae terminum
Psalm Antiphon: Laudans laudare studeat
Hymn: En preclara virgo Clara
Magnificat Antiphon: Salve sponsa Dei

Joanna Marsh (b. 1970): *The Veiled Sisters*

Musica Secreta

Directed by Laurie Stras

Yvonne Eddy, Hannah Ely, Elspeth Piggott: sopranos

Sarah Jane Champion, Victoria Couper, Katharine Hawnt: mezzo-sopranos

Kirsty Whatley: harp

Claire Williams: organ

Alison Kinder: bass viol

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Esther Morgan *The Silence of Living in Houses* (Bloodaxe Books, 2005). Reproduced with permission of Bloodaxe Books, www.bloodaxebooks.com

Mother Sister Daughter

The lives of women in Renaissance Europe were shaped by their family ties: every path they might pursue would be defined by whose daughter, sister, or mother they were, whether in the city, at court, or in a convent. Women learned to be women from the Bible and liturgy, and from the communities of women around them. Storytelling and music were direct ways of connecting the lived experiences of listeners with the lives of holy (and unholy) women.

While there is no hard evidence linking a set of late fifteenth-century choirbooks now held in the Biblioteca Capitolare in Verona with nuns, the *Missa de Beata Virgine* which opens MS 761 is adorned with illuminations of Saint Lucy and Benedictine nuns, clustered around a choirbook and singing a Kyrie. The settings of the psalm antiphon texts of the *Vespers of St Lucy* from MS 759 are freely composed what Canadian scholar Julie Cummings calls “the community motet” style. Their simplicity allows the story to be heard clearly: a dialogue between Lucy and St Agatha, in which Lucy prays to the saint to heal her mother.

The Lucy Vespers is almost unique in the Renaissance repertoire. Only one other complete set of Vespers psalm antiphons exists, also for a female saint: Clare. It, too, is found in a convent manuscript, Brussels MS 27766. Dated 1560, the Biffoli-Sostegni manuscript is so called after the nuns whose names are embossed on the leather bindings: Agnoleta Biffoli and Clemenzia Sostegni. I have recently shown that it originated in the Florentine convent of San Matteo in Arcetri, the home of Suor Maria Celeste Galilei, daughter of Galileo Galilei – who four years before her death became responsible for teaching the novices plainchant and for the day-to-day running of the choir.

The *Vespers of St Clare* are more extensive than Lucy’s, with two separate liturgies – tonight we perform a shorter version of the Second Vespers. Written for four high voices, like most equal-voice polyphony of the early sixteenth century they exploit dissonance and sounding parallel intervals. Clare’s office tells of her determination to take holy vows; the establishment of her order; of her death and that of her sister Agnes soon afterwards, and their ascent to Heaven.

Even in spaces where formal compositional skills were lacking, Renaissance women found ways to adapt music to tell their stories by writing new words to existing music. *Mater Christi cooperto capite* is found in Verona MS 760. The motet, now attributed to Juan Anchieta, was copied as *Rex autem David*, but “Rex autem David” and “Absalon” have been pasted over with “Mater Christi” and “Jesu Christe.” David’s grief is turned into the Virgin’s grief over the body of her dead son, creating the musical equivalent of a *Pietà*.

Women of high rank were also involved in creating music, whether or not they were acknowledged as composers. Marguerite, Queen of Navarre, was a prolific poet and composer of spiritual songs. *Avés poinct veu la malheureuse*, sung to the traditional tune *La peronnelle*, is like a Hilaire Belloc cautionary tale describing the fate of she who clings to misery and turns away from God’s grace.

Suor Leonora, daughter of Alfonso I d’Este of Ferrara and Lucrezia Borgia, was a gifted musician who spent almost her whole life at the convent of Corpus Domini in Ferrara. *Vespere autem sabbati*, tells the story of the women running to the tomb on Easter morning – Mary Magdalene and the “altera Maria,” Mary Salome, sister of the Virgin Mary.

After thirty years of performing music of women from the past, we wanted something of our own to add to the repertoire, so we commissioned *The Veiled Sisters*, by British composer Joanna Marsh. The work weaves together past and present in two texts, by Norfolk poet Esther Morgan (b. 1970) and seventeenth-century poet Alessandro Francucci (fl. 1620). Morgan's poem is spoken from the point of view of a woman looking from a dark interior outward at another in the sunlight; Francucci's praises a young, beautiful singer who is making a parallel but opposite journey, entering a convent for a life in enclosure. The texts echo the perspectives of our historical women and the works they inspired: Clare joyously entering her cloistered life, and all the nuns, named and unnamed, who created this music, the only trace they leave behind.

For detailed information on the sources, the performance, and suggestions for further reading, see musicasecreta.org.

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The Ensemble

Musica Secreta is the most established female-voice early music ensemble in the UK. For over thirty years, they have performed, taught, and recorded music written by and for women from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. The musicians, all women, have performed with major ensembles including the Tallis Scholars, The Sixteen, Tenebrae, Magnificat, Siglo d'Oro, Ensemble Plus Ultra, the BBC Singers, Joglearesa, and the Rose Consort. They have made nine albums, four of which are of music exclusively by historic women composers. Their pioneering research has been recognised by awards from the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women and the American Musicological Society. Their 2019 recording, *From Darkness Into Light* (Obsidian CD 719) was shortlisted for the *Gramophone* Early Music Award, 2020. Their most recent release, *Mother, Sister, Daughter* (Lucky Music LCKY0001), was selected by the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker* as one of the top classical albums of 2022.

The Director

Laurie Stras is Emeritus Professor of Music at the University of Southampton, and a passionate advocate for female-voice polyphony in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. She is a regular contributor to print and broadcast media, and has published extensively on women singers in early music and popular music. She is currently preparing a Cambridge Element on the Biffoli-Sostegni manuscript, San Matteo in Arcetri, and Suor Maria Celeste Galilei, for which she has been awarded a 2023-2024 Leverhulme Emeritus Fellowship.

Missa de beata Virgine

Anon: Verona, Biblioteca Capitolare MS 761, c. 1495
AC, EP, VC, YE, KH, CT, KW, AK, CW

1. Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.
Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

2. Gloria in excelsis Deo. Et in terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis. Laudamus te. Benedicimus te. Adoramus te. Glorificamus te. Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam. Domine Deus, Rex cœlestis, Deus Pater omnipotens. Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe. *Spiritus et alme orphanorum Paraclite*. Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris. *Primogenitus Mariæ Virginis matris*. Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis. Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostrum. *Ad Mariæ gloriam*. Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere nobis. Quoniam tu solus Sanctus, *Mariam sanctificans*. Tu solus Dominus, *Mariam gubernans*. Tu solus Altissimus, *Mariam coronans* Jesu Christe. Cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris. Amen.

Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace to men of good will. We praise Thee. We bless Thee. We adore Thee. We glorify Thee. We give Thee thanks for Thy great glory. O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father almighty. O Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son. *O Spirit and kind comforter of orphans*. O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father. *First-born of the Virgin Mother Mary*. Who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Who takest away the sins of the world, receive our prayer, *to the glory of Mary*. Who sittest at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. For Thou only are holy, *sanctifying Mary*. Thou only art the Lord, *ruling Mary*. Thou only art most high, *crowning Mary*, O Jesus Christ. Together with the Holy Ghost in the glory of God the Father. Amen

Vespers of St Lucy

Anon: Verona, Biblioteca Capitolare MS 759, c. 1480

Vespers psalm antiphons 1-4 and Magnificat antiphon, Feast of St Lucy
AC, EP, VC, YE, KH, CT, KW, AK, CW

3. Orante sancta Lucia, apparuit ei beata Agatha, consolabatur ancillam Christi.
While Saint Lucy prayed, the blessed Agatha appeared unto her, and consoled the handmaiden of Christ.

4. “Lucia virgo, quid a me petis quod ipsa poteris præstare continuo matri tuæ?”
“O virgin Lucy, why do you ask of me what you can so easily obtain for you mother?”

5. “Per te, Lucia virgo, civitas Syracusana decorabitur a domino Jesu Christo.”
“Through you, O virgin Lucy, the city of Syracuse shall be made glorious by the Lord Jesus Christ.”

6. “Soror mea, Lucia virgo, deo devota, quid a me petis quod ipsa poteris præstare continuo matri tuæ?”
“Lucy, my sister, you, virgin consecrated to God, why do you ask of me what you can so easily obtain for you mother?”

7. Tanto pondere eam fixit spiritus sanctus, ut virgo domini immobilis permaneret.

With such power did the Holy Spirit fix her to the ground, that the virgin of Christ remained immovable.

8. *Avés point veu la malheureuse*

Marguerite de Navarre (1492-1549): Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, ms fr. 24298, *Les Dernières œuvres de la reine de Navarre...* (c. 1550)

VC, AK

[Autre sur le chant: «Avez point veu la peronnelle?»]

Avés point veu la malheureuse,
Que tous ennuis viennent chercher,
Qui de nul bien n'est desirouse,
Et ne veult de joye approcher?

Ne la cherchez point en la plaine
De propre delectation;
Elle s'en va sur la montaigne
De toute tribulation;

Le rossignol, ny la callandre,
L'estourneau, la pie et le jay
Ne font point là leur chant entendre,
Ne aussy le doux papegay.

Et en lieu de douce musique
Sont reynes et chauves souris,
Et à son pleur melancolique
Prent plus de plaisir qu'en son ris

Mais sy Dieu tout bon la dellaisse
En ce rocher plus dur que fer,
Tristesse, qui son cueur abaisse,
Le menera jusqu'en enfer.

En luy trouve telle armonie,
Que d'homme et d'oyseaux fuit les chants;
Du monde veult estre bannie,
Pour estre avec luy seule aux champs.

[To the tune of “Avez point veu la peronnelle?”]

Have you ever seen the unhappy one
for whom all the troubles come,
who is desirous of no good
and does not want to draw near to joy?

Don't look for her on the plain
of her own delight;
she goes off to the mountain
of all tribulation.

Neither the nightingale, nor the lark,
the starling, the magpie, and the jay
ever make their song heard,
nor also the sweet popinjay.

And in place of sweet music
are foxes and bats,
and at her sad weeping
they take more pleasure than in her laugh.

But if the God of all good abandons her
in this rocky place harder than iron,
Sadness, who debases her heart
will lead her to Hell.

In him she finds such harmony,
since she flees from the songs of men and birds,
She wants to be banished from the world
to be with him alone, in the fields.

9. *Mater Christi cooperto capite*

Anon, attr. Juan Anchieta (1462-1523): Verona, Biblioteca Capitolare MS 760, c. 1520
Contrafact of “Rex autem David” Antiphon, Summer Histories, Kings
KH, KW

Mater Christi cooperto capite incedens,
lugebat filium, dicens:
Jesu Christe, fili mi, fili mi Jesu Christe,
quis mihi det ut ego moriar pro te, fili mi Jesu Christe?

The mother of Christ, went with covered head,
mourning her son, saying,
“Jesus Christ, my son, my son, Jesus Christ!
who will grant me that I might die for you, my son, Jesus Christ!”

10. *Vespere autem sabbati*

Anon, attr. Leonora d'Este (1515-1575): *Musica quinque vocuum ... materna lingua vocata* (1549)

Magnificat antiphon, Vespers, Easter Sunday
AC, EP, YE, KH, CT, AK, CW

Vespere autem sabbati,
quae lucescit in prima sabbati:
venit Maria Magdalene, et altera Maria,
videre sepulchrum. Alleluia.

Now late on the Sabbath,
as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week,
came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary
to see the sepulchre. Alleluia.

Second Vespers of St Clare - excerpts

Anon: Biffoli-Sostegni manuscript, Brussels, Bibliothèque du Conservatoire Royal, MS 27766 (1560)

Psalm antiphons, hymn, and Magnificat antiphon for Second Vespers, Feast of St Clare
AC, EP, VC, YE, KH, CT, AK, KW, CW

11. Post vitae Clarae terminum
Clara cum turba virginum
ad caelos evolavit
suum complexa Dominum
regnat in regno luminum
quo Dominus regnavit.

After the end of Clare's life, Clare, with the multitude of virgins, flew to the heavens into the Lord's embrace. She reigns in the realm of light where the Lord has reigned.

12. Laudans laudare studeat,
In laudem semper prodeat
Plebs ista salvatoris
Quam tanta ditat sanctitas,
Non cesset ipsa civitas
A laude conditoris.

Praising strives to praise advances ever in praise this saviour's people, to her whom holiness has so enriched this community itself will not cease its founder's praise.

13. Hymn: En praeclara virgo Clara
regnat in regno luminum
quam amasti desponsasti
Jesu, corona virginum.

Mundo spreto, corde laeto,
Francisci magisterio
carnem terit et te quaerit
Jesu nostra redemptio.

Per te solem parit prolem
sanctarum gregem pauperum,
quas tu ditas et maritas
conditor alme siderum.

Puritate, paupertate
mater et eius agmina
tu sectantur, imitantur
O gloriosa Domina.

Finit cursum, scandit sursum
Claret multo prodigio
annotatur, comprobatur

in caelesti collegio.

Virgo pura, nostri cura
fac tibi sit in curia
sint optata per te data
beata nobis gaudia. Amen.

So the illustrious virgin Clare reigns in the kingdom of light; when you loved her, you were betrothed. Jesus, crown of virgins!

The world, having been rejected; the heart, having been made happy; through the office of Francis she sheds her flesh and seeks you, Jesus, our redemption.

Through you, the sun gives birth to offspring, the flock of the poor female saints, whom you enrich and marry, creator of the stars.

By purity, by poverty, the mother of her flock; we follow and imitate you, O glorious Lady. She finished the journey, she climbed upwards, she shone through many miracles, inscribed and approved in the heavenly college.

Pure virgin, our guardian, make yourself to be in our house. Your gifts are to be desired, our blessed joy. Amen.

14. Salve sponsa Dei
virgo sacra planta minorum
tu vas munditie
tu previa forma sororum
Clara tuis precibus duc nos ad regna polorum.

Hail bride of God, sacred virgin, flower of the Minorites; you, the spotless vessel; you, the predecessor of the body of sisters, Clare, with your prayers, lead us to the heavenly realm.

15. *The Veiled Sisters*

Joanna Marsh (b. 1970)

AC, VM, VC, YE, KH, CT, AK, KW, CW

Half Sister, Esther Morgan (2005)

I watch you from my dark house,
how the sun tilts your face towards me,
Your smile blossoming in the warmth.

I leave this house rarely
wrapped in white layers like a bee-keeper
to protect me from the swarms of light,

or like the veiled princess
whose throat was so translucent
the swallowed wine showed through.

Do you sense the thinness of my skin,
how, exposed, it would simmer like milk?
Do I arouse a cruelty in you or tenderness?

Last night I offered my sleeplessness to you,
my body glowing like a candle
under the magnolia's gloved hands.

Alessandro Franzoni "Nel Monacarsi della Sig.ra Erminia Abelli, bella cantatrice" (c.1620)

Costei, che il bello col suo bello, abbellà;
onde d'Abelli li serva bel nome
sotto l'incarco di corpore some
vive fatta à Dio sposa, e come Ancella.

Al'hor, che elessò solitaria cella
con Forbice crudel troncò le chiome
e fè novo stupor, ch'io non sò come
cadere l'oro dal terra, in vaghe anella.

Quivi romita et à compagna giace
romita al Mondo, accompagnata à Dio
sprezzando humili più superbi Mostri.

Quivi in fiamme d'amore suo cor si sface,
e col dolce cantar pone in oblio
l'humane cure, e imparadisa i Chiostri.

She, that beautifies Beauty with her beauty,
so that Abelli is a good name for her,
under the bond of fleshly duties
lives made into God's bride, and handmaiden.
Now she has chosen the solitary cell,
with cruel shears she cut her hair
and made a new wonder, that I don't know how [to relate]
as the gold fell to the floor in a ring.
Now enclosed and frozen to marriage,
shut away from the world, wed to God,
scorning all humble and prouder demonstrations.
Here in flames of love she turns her heart,
and with sweet singing puts into oblivion
human worries, and makes the cloisters into a paradise.