Presented with generous funding from the Lumen Christi Institute and the Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation

PROGRAM

Conductus: In Rama sonat gemitus
Antiphon with Magnificat: Opem nobis O Thoma
Motet: Opem nobis O Thoma / Salva Thoma / Pastor caesus
Conductus: Christi Miles
Carol: Clangat tuba

TEN-MINUTE PAUSE

Carol: Letare Cantuaria
Alleluia: Gloria et honore
Sequence: Spe mercedes et coronae
Responsor: Iacet granum
Motet: Ianum / Iacinctus / Iacet granum
Motet: Thomas gemma Cantuiariae/Thomas caesus in Doveria
Conductus: Novus miles
NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

The story of Thomas Becket (ca. 1118-1120 –December 29, 1170), at bottom, demonstrates the dangerous interactions that occurred between church and state in medieval England. Becket was the son of a thriving London merchant. He was well educated, studying at the Merton Priory in Surrey and law in London, before continuing his training in Paris. After his father’s death, Thomas entered the service of Theobald, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1141. The English king Henry II took note of Becket’s excellent service and placed him the powerful role of chancellor in the mid-1150s. The king and his chancellor became close friends and evidently spent much time socializing and engaging in sports. Upon Theobald’s death, the king unsurprisingly appointed his friend the next archbishop of Canterbury in 1162. Thomas, however, quickly transformed his fun-loving ways, pursuing a life of austerity following his consecration. The archbishop soon began to show opposition to the king’s policies, especially Henry’s desire to have clerics guilty of crimes brought under the jurisdiction of secular authorities. The strained relationship between the king and archbishop grew as the king tried to limit the ecclesiastical power in England. Becket fled to France, remaining in exile for several years and returning in 1170. On December 29 of that year, four of the king’s henchmen, believing that Henry wanted the archbishop dead, brutally murdered Thomas while he was praying in Canterbury Cathedral.

Becket was swiftly canonized in 1173 by Pope Alexander III, and his feast day remains December 29. The saint’s shrine in Canterbury Cathedral became an important destination for pilgrims. Geoffrey Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales, written at end of the fourteenth century, centers on a group of pilgrims on their way to the shrine of St. Thomas at Canterbury Cathedral. T.S. Eliot’s 1935 play Murder in the Cathedral also dramatizes this historic event. Thomas Becket is venerated as a saint and martyr by both the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion, and his infamous slaying remains one of the most storied moments in medieval English history.

After his death, the archbishop was honored in gestures of cultural expression, including music. Liturgical melodies for his feast were matched by pieces of music for the saint to be heard outside the church’s walls. Though much music for Becket has been edited, it is rarely heard in performance. British musicologist Denis Stevens directed an all-Becket program of music at Canterbury Cathedral in 1970, commemorating the 800th year since the archbishop’s death. The concert featured the Accademia Monteverdiana, the Jaye Consort of Viols, and the Choir of Trinity School, Croydon. This performance complemented an article Stevens wrote on the plentiful late-medieval music composed for the saint. Our program tonight is just a small sample of the works from this period celebrating Becket’s life.

The music of this program appropriately spans a variety of liturgical and extraliturgical genres. At least four pieces were designated for use in services or masses on Thomas’s feast day. The simplest is the antiphon Opem nobis O Thoma, which was heard across Europe at the office of Vespers. This brief melody frames the recitation of the Magnificat (Mary’s canticle) and represents the musical and liturgical apex of the evening service. Iacet granum is a responsory that begins the nighttime office of Matins for Thomas’s feast. The responsory as a genre features a verse sung by a soloist, as opposed to the communal recitation of the Magnificat heard in Opem nobis. Finally, there are two chants that would have been heard consecutively at the celebration of Mass before the Gospel reading —the Alleluia with verse Gloria et honore and the sequence Spe mercedis et coronae. The Alleluia for St. Thomas shares its melody with several other liturgical feasts, notably one of the Alleluias (with verse Dies Sanctificatus) from Christmas Day. Using a syllabic delivery, the sequence elaborates the legends and theology surrounding Thomas, while extending the musical compass of the preceding Alleluia. Among the titles conferred on the saint in this prose, Thomas is described as an “athlete” (a champion of Jesus).

The remaining works on the program could potentially be used in a liturgy, but it is more likely that they were used in ceremonies and revels to celebrate the English saint outside of church. Two anonymous carols occur in the middle of tonight’s program – Clangat tuba and Letare Cantuaria. These light, catchy works survive in later fifteenth-century manuscripts and are distinctive because of their musical form, alternating
between a refrain (called a “burden”) and verses, presumably sung by single voices. While the latter carol is entirely in Latin, Clangat tuba sets its verses in Middle English.

The program is peppered with three motets, multilayered choral works built on a preexisting idea. The short motet Opem nobis O Thoma / Salva Thoma / Pastor caesus is rooted in a segment of a Vespers chant (Pastor caesus) and contains four parts, the highest two voices declaring separate poems. Because the individual layers can be quite difficult to decipher, we will cycle through this very brief piece three times. The motet Ianuam / Lacinctus / Lactet grunum is considerably longer than Opem nobis but has a similar construction to that motet, recasting the responsory chant Lactet grunum as the foundation of the four-voice work. While the chant that sits at the bottom of this motet fails to mention Thomas, these new poetic texts assumed by the upper voices elucidate the subject, naming the archbishop of Canterbury no fewer than eight times and telling of his notorious plight. Finally, the motet Thomas gemma Cantuariae / Thomas caesus in Doveria is the only piece on the program that has achieved some standing in music history and modern performances of medieval music. It was unearthed in the flyleaves (excess outer pages) of a non-musical manuscript from England, acquired by Princeton University around 1950. The motet has dual texts like the previous motets, but only one is about Thomas Becket. The second text commemorates another “Thomas” martyr, Thomas de la Hale, a Benedictine monk murdered by the French forces that attacked his priory in the English port city of Dover. This motet is not built on a chant; rather, a harmonic “idea” between the two bottom voices – repeated more than two-dozen times – forms the basis of the work, an idea amounting to a short series of chords that, in some ways, sound quite modern for the period.

Complementing the three motets on the program are three pieces known as conductus (In Rama sonat gemitus, Christi miles, and Novus miles), a genre that flourished in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The opening conductus is sung in unison, while the others are polyphonic. The function of conductus has been unclear to scholars: the meaning of the word (conducere = to guide) might suggest that it accompanied a processional of some sort, but “conductus” might also be a generic term without reference to its use. These pieces tend to set rhymed and rhythmical poetry and also have been interpreted as being musically rhythmical. In Rama sonat gemitus and Christi miles have nearly the same amount of text, but the latter is remarkable for how the text is prolonged curiously with a device called a cauda (Latin: “tail”), a lengthy section of music, sung on the first and last syllables of the poetic couplet. In Rama sonat gemitus makes allegorical reference to Chapter 31 of Jeremiah and to the Feast of Holy Innocents, which is celebrated on December 28, not coincidentally, the day before the murder of Thomas, himself a “holy innocent.” The other two conductus portray Thomas, among other descriptions, as a “soldier” of Christ, a common title for saints in the Middle Ages.

**Singers**
Soprano: Laura Lynch, Stephanie Sheffield
Tenor: Matthew Dean, Andrew Fredel, Keith Murphy, Matthew Schlesinger
Bass: William Chin

**About Schola Antiqua**
Schola Antiqua is a Chicago-based professional vocal ensemble exclusively dedicated to the performance of music before the year 1600. The group is the winner of the 2012 Noah Greenberg Award from the American Musico logical Society, recognizing outstanding contributions to historical performing practices. An ensemble that executes the pre-modern repertory with “sensitivity and style” (*Early Music America*), Schola Antiqua takes pride in providing the highest standards of research, performance, and education involving many underserved repertories in the early musical canon. Founded in 2000 under the artistic leadership of Professor Calvin M. Bower from the University of Notre Dame, the ensemble was Artist in Residence at the University of Chicago in 2006-2007. The ensemble has served in a similar capacity for the Lumen Christi Institute since 2009. Schola Antiqua has recorded three CDs and is due to release its fourth in October 2014 on the Naxos label. Much of the music on its albums has never received a modern recording. The group’s music has aired on the syndicated national broadcasts of
With Heart and Voice, Millennium of Music, and Harmonia and has received reviews in Early Music America, Fanfare, the Journal of Plainsong and Medieval Music, and Notes (Music Library Association).

**ABOUT THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR**

Michael Alan Anderson is Schola Antiqua’s second Artistic Director and a founding member. He is Assistant Professor of Musicology at the Eastman School of Music (University of Rochester), where he specializes in late medieval and Renaissance sacred music. Anderson received a Ph.D. in the History and Theory of Music at the University of Chicago in 2008, and his book *St. Anne in Renaissance Music: Devotion and Politics* is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press in 2014. He is the 2012 winner of the Deems Taylor Award given by the American Society for Composers, Authors, and Publishers for outstanding writing about music. Other awards include the Alvin H. Johnson AMS 50 Dissertation Fellowship, the National Endowment for the Humanities summer stipend, the Grace Frank Grant (Medieval Academy of America), the Provost’s Multidisciplinary Award (University of Rochester), and the Whiting Foundation Fellowship (University of Chicago).

**SPECIAL THANKS**

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