



Musica
NOVA

direction Lucien Kandel

Shadows & Light Prague 1585

Jacob Handl (1550-1591)

Shadows & Light Jacob Handl

Prague at the dawn of the Baroque era

Musica Nova Ensemble
artistic direction : Lucien Kandel

Christel Boiron, Esther Labourdette, Cantus
Lucien Kandel, Josquin Gest, Contratenors
Jérémie Couleau, Thierry Péteau, Tenors
Marc Busnel, Guillaume Olry, Bassus

Specialized in the interpretation of Renaissance handwritten or printed works, Musica Nova explores incredible pieces of early music, through collaboration with recognized musicologists. For the past several years, Musica Nova has been studying the music of Jacob Handl known as “Gallus”, with the help of Marc Desmet, musicologist and world-renowned expert in the oeuvre of this composer (biography in appendix).

Jacob Handl’s complex and multifaceted body of work, edited entirely in Prague, testifies to the various artistic movements developing at the time in the new capital of the Holy Roman Empire, and of the Kingdoms of Bohemia, Hungary and Croatia.

He chose the motet as a preferred means of expression: over 500 compositions of this kind were published in his lifetime in voluminous printed anthologies covering the whole liturgical calendar.

The Musica Nova Ensemble invites the audience to a varied and colourful overview of this typical end of the 16th century form of expression. A time that coincides with the first manifestations of the Counter-Reformation movement in the wake of the Council of Trent, but also a time when musicians, following the renewal trends happening in painting, become more and more interested in producing new melodic patterns and previously unheard sounds. The successively bright or pathetic obtained effects reveal a dynamic in which one can detect the dramatic will of Early Baroque.



Prague at the dawn of the Baroque era

Prague at the end of the 16th century is a city of remarkable cultural effervescence, to which its architecture stands as first witness. In 1583 the Emperor Rudolph II sets it to be the seat of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. The Imperial transfer implied a proliferation of building and renovation initiatives giving a new image to the capital of Bohemia. From the fortress city profoundly marked by Gothic urban architecture gradually emerged palaces, residences and sanctuaries which combined the elegant and sinuous lines of Early Baroque with the typical Central European art of sgraffito and painted walls.

This cultural richness also became apparent in music, as the Imperial Chapel started welcoming musicians from all over Europe. Flemish composers such as Philippe de Monte, Jacob Regnart or Karel Luython stand out, but also Italians like Alessandro Orologio, or Spanish, with the presence in Prague of Mateo Flecha “El Joven”.

Yet in this age of cultural flowering, a paradox becomes apparent: the Catholic Hapsburgs have established their seat in a city where only 15 % of the population shares the beliefs of Roman Catholicism. This alone provides a sufficiently relevant explanation for the fact that the Court’s richness brings little to no advantages to the Czech composers themselves.

In this muddled context the figure of Jacob Handl becomes all the more fascinating, as he distinguishes himself as one of the time’s most receptive composers to the diverse spiritual and human sensibilities of this unique city.

Jacob Handl, known as “Gallus” (1550-1591)

Of Slovenian origins, Jacob Handl pursued a musical career that set him apart amongst the composers of his time. Educated far from big cities or princely chapels, Gallus seems to have acquired his art as a self-taught musician, while living in monasteries such as Melk in Austria or the Moravian monastery of Zábřeh, near Brno. His familiarity with liturgical chant became very apparent in his work, and especially in his preference for antiphon musical compositions, where two choirs alternate and respond to each other. It is also during his time spent in religious establishments that Gallus became acquainted with some of the better-known Central-European polyphonic musical repertoires, produced by such composers as the Franco-Flemish Josquin Desprez.

From 1580 to 1585 Handl was in the service of the Bishop of Olomouc, Stanislas Pavlovský, a great amateur of enlightened art. It is in this context that his work became more refined, adding a whole pallet of new tones to his style, while the clarity of his harmonic structure gave his music a surprisingly modern twist. The extraordinary rhythmical vitality of his prosody was already very close to Baroque concertante style. Leaving his official position in 1585, Handl became choirmaster in a small church in Prague’s Old Town. The sombre and damp atmosphere of this location seems to have favored and set the tone for a more disquiet polyphony which seems to characterize his work during his final years, and which is also similar to the musical mannerism appreciated at the Emperor’s Court at the time. Posterity will confirm the unique character of his oeuvre, perfectly situated at the crossroads of the numerous traditions of sacred polyphony.

Marc Desmet, for Musica Nova



A multifaceted program

to be put together according to your wishes

The Advent

“Earth must rejoice at the announcement of Christ’s coming!”

The Advent, marking the beginning of the Christian liturgical year, provides from a musical standpoint a richness and variety comparable to another essential period of the Holy year, the Passion of Christ. It is a time of waiting and preparation preceding the celebration of the Birth of Christ, filled with joy and exuberance.

Since the Middle-Ages, Gregorian chant progressively gave way to sublime polyphonies built on the plain chant. During the Renaissance, facing the Protestant reformation, the Roman Catholic Church also had to reform. Music became a way to regain the lost prestige of Catholicism. Thus, in Italy and all over Europe, luxuriant polyphonies for 6 to 12 voices were composed, under the influence of the Venetian writing of Cori Spezzati, initiated by Adrian Willaert. This technique of diffusing several choirs in different parts of the edifice became very popular throughout the Christian world, and the work of Jacob Handl-Gallus testifies to this trend.

The Passion

Of all the big European cities at the end of the 16th century, Prague is the most religiously diverse one. The celebration of the Holy Week in such a city becomes a question of many different traditions. Familiar with the cosmopolitan artistic milieu close

to the Emperor’s court, and even more so with the literate confraternities of the Lutheran and Czech confessions, Gallus conceived an avant-garde music that was both sensitive to the multiple variations of the religious ceremonies in the city and respectful in the same time of the liturgical codes and decorum of the Catholic tradition. It is the reason why he has conceived several polyphonic versions of the narrative of the Passion of Christ, for 6 to 8 voices, written for double choir.

The Resurrection

From the darkness of the Passion rises the light of Resurrection. The painful agony of Christ is followed by a time to sing His divine praises. The rebirth of Christ brings forward a feeling of joy and ecstasy, only strengthened by the luxurious polyphonies chanting His glory.

Handl puts every musical subtlety in the service of the liturgy, especially in the choral recitatives where dialogues between Marie-Madeleine and Christ or the angels are being staged. Here the genius of Gallus brings him to integrate short repetitive and percussive rhythms into religious pieces for the first time in the history of religious music. Choirs in echo, polyphonic narratives, motets written for an impressive number of voices (from 6 to 16)- an obvious aesthetic modernism can be detected not only in the Baroque architecture he becomes familiar with in Olomouc and Kroměříž, but also in the style of his motets.

This project offers...

Besides its staged performances, the Musica Nova Ensemble also has the vocation to transmit and to share its passion for Early Music with future professionals, as well as amateur singers. For the past several years, Musica Nova and its artistic director, Lucien Kandel, have been organizing various activities in order to keep up with this goal: concerts, master-classes or non-professional workshops, in partnership with various structures or institutions such as City Halls, Music Academies and other early music ensembles.

The Shadows & Light project puts forward several activities in order to familiarize the public with the work of Jacob Handl:

- Concerts preceded by a 30 minutes introduction into the era and music of the composer.

- Master-classes giving students the possibility to participate in a professional concert.

After the master-class, singers are invited to take part in a concert with the Musica Nova ensemble. An experience that will allow future professional singers to get a taste of the challenges and the excitement of stepping onto a professional stage.

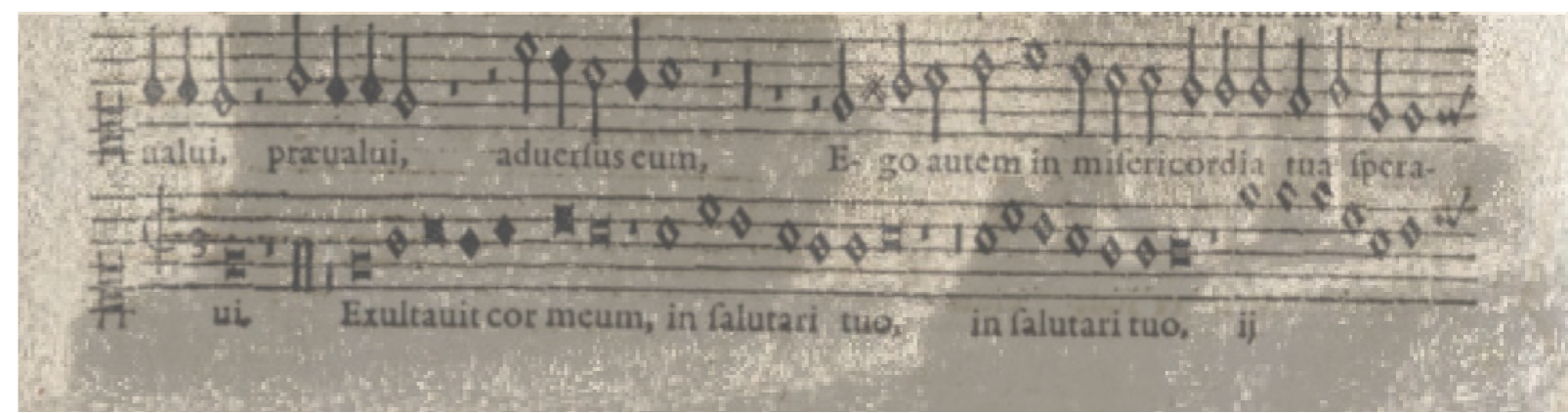
And also:

- Cultural actions in primary schools.
- Artist residencies to which young students are invited to learn about polyphony and its different possibilities (echo choirs, polychoral music, harmonized recitatives), followed by a concert for children.

- Conferences by musicologist Marc Desmet.

CD recording:

After a series of preparatory concerts, and working in close collaboration with the musicologist Marc Desmet, Musica Nova has made a selection amongst the over 400 motets composed by Jacob Handl, in order to create a program conceived as a triptych of the life of Christ: the birth (the Advent), the death (the Passion), and the Resurrection.





Biographies

Musica Nova

Founded in the year 2000, the Musica Nova Ensemble brings together a group of talented singers, and also sometimes instrumentalists, under the artistic direction of singer and conductor Lucien Kandel.

A passionate quest in search of emotion through music drives the group to produce a diverse musical programme. From the Middle Ages to Baroque, Musica Nova departs into various musical periods and universes.

The ensemble approaches its music with an eye for historical accuracy, through the use of original manuscripts. The interpretation of period documents involves a serious reflection with respect to the musical rules of the time (such as *musica ficta* and pro-

nunciation) as well as the intended nuances of the pieces. The singers and musicians read their music in facsimile and their interpretation of it is thus inevitably modified.

The result is a very specific sound, a particular momentum, a musical line which makes of Musica Nova one of the most exceptional Early Music ensembles in the world, a group whose energy seems to transport the listener; temporally and spiritually.

The Musica Nova Ensemble has performed on some of the most prestigious French and international stages, and several of its recordings are considered benchmark interpretations.

Lucien Kandel

Artistic director and conductor

After studying German and Linguistics at the University of Limoges, Lucien Kandel turned to singing. Between 1991 and 1996 he was trained at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique (CNSM) in Lyon, where he studied classical, romantic and contemporary repertoires under Jacqueline Bonnardot and subsequently ancient chant under Marie-Claude Vallin.

He has performed all types of music from Gregorian chant to present-day works. He has sung regularly with A Sei Voce, The Huelgas Ensemble, Elyma, The Bernard Tetu Solistes de Lyon and Douce Mémoire.

Lucien Kandel is particularly committed to the pedagogy of singing and he has taught at the ENS-LSH in Lyon as well as at the Académie des Cuivres in Le Monastier. He is also regularly invited to direct master classes at Royaumont Abbey on the repertoires of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

He has been teaching ancient music at the Haute École de Musique in Geneva since 2011.

Marc Desmet

Musicologist

Former student of the Universities of Lille, Paris-Sorbonne and Tours, Marc Desmet is a Senior Lecturer in musicology at the Jean-Monnet University of Saint-Etienne. Author of a Ph.D. thesis on the paraphrasing of Philipp Desportes' psalms (1593-1643) and their different musical versions, he specializes in the study

of French spiritual music during the reigns of Henry IV and Louis XIII, as well as the polyphonic music of Central Europe in the 16th century.

Member of the Institute Claude Longeon for Renaissance and Classical Age studies at the University of Saint Etienne (UMR 5037 of CNRS), he has recently published the first complete critique of the *Spiritual Canticles* (1622) of Charles de Courbes, printed at Symétrie Editions.

His teaching and lecturer activities have led him to study the different facets of musical history and notation during the Renaissance period while working with many different universities (The Science Institute of Ljubljana in Slovenia, The Faculty of Musicology of Cremona, Italy, The University of Magdeburg in Germany) and musical centres (cycle of conferences at the Cité de la Musique, Paris).

His research activities focus on the reading and interpretation of musical sources found in such prestigious libraries as the Bibliothèque Nationale de France or the Municipal Library of Rouen. He has written for several collective works publications (*Guide de la musique de la Renaissance* - upcoming publication - and thematic publications of the Institute Claude Longeon), for periodicals (*Psaume*, *Cahiers rémois de musicologie*, *Revue de musicologie*) and monographs on French or Central European music of the 1550-1650 period.

He is currently preparing an extended study of the works of the Slovenian Renaissance composer Jacobus Gallus.

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