

# Guitara Illuminata

The music of Josquin des Prés (c. 1450-1521)



## *Guitara Illuminata*

*The Music of Josquin  
des Prés (c.1450-1521)*

**Vocal masterpieces of the  
Renaissance heard for the  
first time as guitar duets**  
*(both nylon and steel strings  
being utilized to distinguish  
the lines of poliphony)*

**Jeffrey Hamilton Steele**  
*guitars*

*Newly edited and mas-  
tered (2004)*



Originally recorded June 1997 at Spring St. Guitar Studio, Gloucester MA and released on *Centaur Records*

### **Guitars:**

1974 Michael Cone (strung with Thomastik 'Rope Core' steel strings)

1981 Frank Hasselbacher

### **MISSA PANGE LINGUA**

- 1] Plainchant (1:11)
- 2] Kyrie (2:26)
- 3] Gloria (3:33)
- 4] Credo (6:15)
- 5] Sanctus (6:17)
- 6] Agnus Dei (7:40)

### **MOTETS**

- 7] Dominus Regnavit (4:13)
- 8] Magnus es tu, Domine (5:33)

### **FANFARE**

- 9] Vive le Roy! (1:52)

## CHANSONS

- 10] Cueurs Desolez (2:13)
- 11] Mille Regretz (1:51)
- 12] Canción del Emperador [Narváez] (2:19)

## MISSA HERCULES DUX FERRARIAE

- 13] Kyrie (2:04)
- 14] Gloria (3:17)
- 15] Credo (5:56)
- 16] Sanctus (4:05)
- 17] Agnus Dei (6:35)

*total time: 67:36*

## Notes

Of what little is known of the life of Josquin des Prés, a few details stand out that help form a picture of his nature. He was born in Picardy (in France, close to the border with Belgium) and distinguished himself as a singer in boyhood. That he grew to be considered one of the most valued composers of the day is evidenced by the higher fees paid him compared with his contemporaries. That he valued the spiritual over the material is implicit in his choice to spend his last period at the college of Condé, near his birthplace, when he might easily have held a court position in any of a number of countries. He must have sensed the conditions required for him to produce a work of the depth of *Pange Lingua*.

## Missa Pange Lingua

In this arrangement, of what may have been Josquin's final work, the original score has been transposed down by a minor third, both guitars having their strings tuned as were the Renaissance lute and vihuela (the interval of the major third now occurring between the third and fourth strings instead of between the second and third strings). As it was common contemporary practice to perform vocal music on these instruments, it is not surprising that this configuration lends itself idiomatically to the vocal polyphony of that time. In fact, vihuela *tablature* arrangements of Josquin's vocal music provide clues in questions of *musica ficta* (sharps and flats *added* to the original score by performers in accordance with contemporary practice) as there can be little doubt as to whether a note is sharped when the actual *fret* on which it is fingered has been indicated. [Although these arrangements are from another region and produced by the next generation]. Throughout most of the work, each guitar plays two of the four voices the latter originally corresponding to counter-tenor (alto), tenor, baritone and bass ranges.



I. The piece begins with the plainchant on which the mass is based, *Pange Lingua* ("O my tongue, proclaim the mystery") whose text speaks of how Jesus "concluded in a marvelous manner his life on earth." It is played once each on the nylon and steel string guitars, two successive "verses" being each heard in different octaves. The melody is in the phrygian mode a church mode in the minor with a particularly dark intensity, owing to the second degree of the scale being a half step above the root note.

This is followed immediately by the *Kyrie* the shortest movement in most masses, having the briefest text whose three sections are in 3/4 ("The Lord has mercy"), 2/4 ("Christ has mercy") and 3/4 ("The Lord has mercy") respectively. Here the first phrase (ten notes) of the plainchant melody is the basis for (what begins as) a canon at the fifth. Although printed editions do not maintain the phrygian mode in each entering voice, I have taken the liberty of doing so (as was done in the first recording made of the Mass by the New York Pro Musica). This makes for alternation between *two* phrygian tonal centers, a fifth apart, throughout the Mass.

II. With the *Gloria*, a generic chant intro ("Glory be to God on high") leads us into a similar treatment of the plainchant melody, followed by a playful exchange between voices on the two-word text phrases: *Laudamus te. Benedicimus te. Etc...* ("We praise thee. We glorify thee."). This style continues through other declarations of praise. When the text foreshadows the *Agnus Dei* (*Qui tollis peccata mundi...*), the meter switches to 2/4 with a more plaintive canon that begins, this time, using the first *four* notes of the plainchant. With *suscipe deprecationem* ("hear our prayer"), we hear the first *homophonic* (all parts singing the same words at the same time) moment in the mass thus far. Note how the plea *misere nobis* ("have mercy on us") also to be heard in the *Agnus Dei* movement is dramatized by an octave leap in the melody. The Holy Spirit may have been a nimble one in Josquin's view, for the music takes on a dance-like (dotted rhythm) character for the *Cum Sancto Spiritu* that closes the movement.

III. The *Credo* begins in 2/4 with what can be interpreted as a much embellished version of the first two phrases (21 notes) of the plainchant. Though very similar to the opening of the other movements, there is something particularly declarative about the lines here, reflecting strength of belief ("I believe in one God, the father almighty, etc."). The list of beliefs builds to a crescendo with the *Qui propter nos homines* ("Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven"). There follows the suddenly quiet peace of the *Et incarnatus est* ("And became incarnate by the Holy Spirit"), which closes with one of

few cadences on the relative major. Played by a single guitar, it is the most extended section of homophony in the Mass. I experience this moment as a letting go of the struggle to predict our destinies.

The plainchant's first phrase is next invoked for the reverential *Crucifixus* ("He was crucified also for us"); the ascent to heaven is reflected in rising scales; and dotted rhythms return for sitting "on the right hand of the Father". The *Et in Spiritum Sanctum* ("I believe in the Holy Spirit...") section reaches its apex in a duet for the two upper voices. The meter then shifts to an unshakable 3/4 meter for the acknowledgement of baptism, back to 2/4 for "the resurrection of the dead", and back to 3/4 for "the life of the world to come." The final *Amen* is a brief "tape loop" type canon such as will be given more extended treatment in the *dona nobis pacem* that closes the mass.

IV. Like the *Kyrie* and *Gloria*, the *Sanctus* begins in 3/4 with the first phrase of the plainchant, its first brief section coming to repose in a plagal (IV-I) cadence on the relative major. *Pleni sunt coeli* ("Heaven and earth are full of your glory") is set to fiery canonic writing in the two upper voices where imitations come as close as one beat apart often defiant of meter. In fact, breaking free of time signature constraints is a musical device Josquin appears to use more often *the further from earth* he would like to take us as one may experience in the following *Osanna in excelsis*.

To balance the earlier duet, the next section, *Benedictus qui venit* ("Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord"), is sung by the two *lower* voices. The bass voice pauses, as though a mountain climber, to hear each of his initial phrases echoed by the baritone. Seeking this voice from the next mountain, he hikes towards it; and thus we hear the time between echoes decreasing. Could this be Josquin's depiction of the journey towards God: how we seek the being who produced the echo we have been hearing, only to find that He was singing to us from within? As is customary, the *Sanctus* closes with a reprise of the *Osanna*.

V. Also beginning in 3/4, the *Agnus Dei* ("Lamb of God") quotes the first three notes of the plainchant but then surprises us on the fourth note by jumping down to the sixth degree of the scale rather than the seventh (as we have heard in every previous instance) temporarily transforming the earthly melancholy and struggle felt in the phrygian minor mode into the heaven-bound *relative major*. Though we may be led to expect that this section will cadence on the major, in the penultimate beat Josquin brings us back into minor. The middle section is an extended duo between the two higher voices, played on the solo classical guitar, in 2/4. Like the *Pleni sunt coeli* duo (from the *Sanctus*), the voices at first have canon entrances fourbeats apart, but intensity increases as each voice becomes more anxious to be heard and soon the entrances are coming only one beat apart. On the

first *miserere nobis* ("have mercy on us") of this section, we twice hear a yearning phrase that Josquin will reinvoké near the close of the movement.

In the final section, each voice enters three beats apart (in 3/4) with one "*Agnus Dei*" each, pathos leant by wrenching half-step dissonances. Here, only three notes of the plainchant remain intact, beyond which the melody has a new shape emphasizing or giving in to the gravity of the root note. The meter immediately shifts to 2/4 as the treble voice begins the first *six* notes of the plainchant in augmentation (lengthened note values) a technique Josquin used throughout his earlier masses but only chose this single instance to employ in this one. After the usual *qui tollis peccata mundi* ("who takes away the sins of the earth") we are led into the *dona nobis pacem* ("grant us peace"). Josquin appears to evoke three consecutive and distinct moods with each statement of this famous prayer: *reticence* (when the voices are paired), *heroism* (repeated notes followed by a brief descent culminating in the aforementioned "yearning" phrase), and, finally, *bliss*. The sense of inner peace evoked by this closing canon (one that one well might wish would cycle forever) is at the same time plaintive Ñ possibly the last look behind upon reaching the Kingdom of Heaven.

### Motets, Fanfare and Chansons

These shorter works by Josquin have been chosen to unveil further aspects of his compositional character. We find here, as well as on other pieces chosen for this recording, examples of his penchant for alternating between two closely related modes. *Dominus Regnavit* is the first piece here employing major modes (the ionian and mixolydian, diatonic major and diatonic major with flatted seventh respectively) which combined with frequent octave leaps and nursery-rhyme-like motives gives this motet an air of innocence. *Magnus es tu, Domine* is in two sections, the first of which hearkens back to medieval music with its syncopated rhythms; it cadences on the natural minor (aeolian), while the second (*Tu pauperum refugium*) cadences in the more somber phrygian mode.

The fanfare, *Vive le Roy*, was probably written for the coronation of Louis XII in 1498 the 7-note *cantus* being based on solfege syllables divined from the title.

The first two *chansons* are secular laments, the first in the aeolian and the second in the phrygian. *Canción del Emperador* is an ornamented version of *Mille Regretz* written about fifteen years after Josquin's death by the Spanish vihuelist Luys de Narváez. The sensitive melismas serve to raise the pathos of the original to a new level, as well as compensate for the lack of sustain available on a plucked instrument. Although Narváez raises the pentultimate note up a half step, I refrain from doing so in the original *chanson* for the pathos it adds.

## Missa Hercules Dux Ferrariae

While the *Missa Pange Lingua* may be the most profound work of the Renaissance, the *Missa Hercules Dux Ferrariae* certainly ranks among the most vibrant and fiery of the period. Josquin wrote it fifteen years earlier for his employer, the Duke of Ferrara. An eight-note motif (D C D C D F E D, circuitously derived from the latter's name) forms the melodic and harmonic basis for nearly every section of the Mass. The natural rise and fall of this phrase is reflected in the ecstatic polyphony of the surrounding voices. In the last three movements, we hear the motif in quicker note values in some instances and backwards in others. For this transcription, I have preserved the original key one guitar in standard tuning while the other is "capoed" at the fifth fret in lute tuning (resulting in a *scordatura* of A-D-G-B-E-A). *Cueurs Desolez* was also arranged in this way.

Guitars, arrangements and liner notes: Jeffry Hamilton Steele