

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Concerto Italiano: Monteverdi's Madrigals

Sunday 8 December 2024, 3pm
Queen Elizabeth Hall

Classical music has always had reinvention at its core. Throughout our programme, we at the Southbank Centre – alongside our Resident Orchestras and Resident Artists – capture that trailblazing spirit with works that broke the mould across the ages and brand-new approaches to timeless classics.

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Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

Repertoire

Monteverdi Madrigals, Bk.4

72'

Performers

Concerto Italiano:

Monica Piccinini *soprano*

Sonia Tedla *soprano*

Maria Chiara Gallo *mezzo-soprano*

Andres Montilla *alto and tenor*

Raffaele Giordani *tenor*

Gabriele Lombardi *bass*

Rinaldo Alessandrini *conductor*

Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643) was a musical pioneer; an alchemist in whose crucible the stylistic elements of the Italian Renaissance were shaped and forged to create some of the key attributes of the early Baroque. This is no exaggeration: rather as Beethoven would later prove a pivotal figure in the shift between Classical and Romantic epochs, Monteverdi was an innovator, vital to the development of secular vocal music and opera and, as music director of St Mark's Basilica in Venice, sacred choral music. And he knew it. Monteverdi was aware of musical trends, and in the case of his nine books of madrigals defied reactionary opposition to write some of the most vividly colourful settings of poetry ever composed.

The madrigal originated in 16th-century Italy, and the form soon spread across Europe. This secular, intimate type of song is usually for several unaccompanied voices, and is through-composed so that instead of repeated verses, each section of poetry is specifically reflected or illuminated by the music, sometimes using vividly illustrative devices known as 'word painting' or 'madrigalismo'. Rather than singing together throughout (homophony), the voices often overlap or echo one another (polyphony), resulting in sophisticated, rich and evocative textures. The musical range of expression is as varied as the texts set, embracing humour, passion, longing and loss.

Monteverdi was born in Cremona, the city that would become a hub of instrument-making thanks to the families of Amati and Stradivari. Cremona Cathedral's music director was a composer called Marc'Antonio Ingegneri, with whom Monteverdi studied privately. Ingegneri's output included three-voice motets, four-voice spiritual madrigals, three-voice canzonettas (lighter in style than the madrigal) and two books of five-voice madrigals, all of which gave his student a thorough grounding in the possibilities of the form. The ambitious young Monteverdi was soon having music of his own published: his first collection, the three-voice *Sacrae cantiunculae*, was issued in 1582 when he was just 15 years old; madrigals followed in 1583, and a set of canzonettas in 1584. Monteverdi's First Book of Madrigals followed on New Year's Day 1587, when he was all of 19.

This performance lasts approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes.
There is a 20-minute interval.

Given this precocious start, it is intriguing that Monteverdi's Fourth Book of Madrigals was released in 1603 following a hiatus of 11 years since his last published work. The reason for the gap in published productivity may in part have been a practical one. Monteverdi was by now working at the court of Duke Vincenzo I Gonzaga of Mantua, who had joined the crusade in Hungary against the Turks, and in whose luxurious entourage Monteverdi travelled to places such as Innsbruck, Vienna and Prague. Monteverdi was kept busy overseeing musical entertainments; he was declared 'a new Orpheus on the viol' (the viola da gamba), providing both sacred music for the liturgy and secular music for banquets at which, according to one account, the nobility 'spent much of the day engaged in amorous pursuits'. Eventually, Monteverdi became the Duke's *maestro della musica* at the end of 1601.

But the other main factor that may have prompted Monteverdi to take a step back from publication was a controversy caused by one Giovanni Maria Artusi, a Bolognese canon and music theorist. Artusi's attack came in the form of the publication *L'Artusi, ovvero Delle imperfezioni della moderna musica* (Artusi, or On the Imperfections of Modern Music) of 1600, followed by the *Seconda parte dell'Artusi* in 1603, in both of which he criticised a number of musicians, specifically targeting Monteverdi for his daring dissonances and supposed lack of taste and decorum. Some of the works cited were to be published in Monteverdi's Fourth and Fifth Books of Madrigals. Monteverdi hit back with a treatise of his own, and although he was not a theorist, he neatly resolved the issues of late-Renaissance text-setting by promoting the idea of the music serving the text, and the text serving the music, allowing for a wide variety of responses and styles. Artusi's subsequent declarations were rather softer.

Monteverdi, meanwhile, emerged largely unscathed – and when it did at last appear, his Fourth Book of Madrigals, issued when he was 35 years old, was a triumph. The collection was published in Venice by Ricciardo Amadino, and by 1644 had been reprinted seven times, in Italy and elsewhere. The texts set are by a number of authors, including Monteverdi's regular favourites Torquato Tasso, Giovanni Battista Guarini and Ottavio Rinuccini, as well as Maurizio Moro ('Si ch'io vorrei morire') and Ridolfo Arlotti ('Luci serene e chiare'). Monteverdi's style in this set suggests the influence of Gesualdo and of composers from Ferrara such as Luzzaschi; the volume is dedicated to a Ferrarese academic debating society, the *Accademia degli Intrepidi*, and is dated 1 March 1603.

As with Book Three, Monteverdi frames this collection with two particularly striking madrigals: the innovative 'Ah, dolente partita', with its slowly unfolding opening, and the mesmerising, chromatic final madrigal, 'Piagn'e sospira e quandi caldi raggi' a setting of words by Tasso. 'Ah, dolente partita' begins with two unison voices that divide into distinct lines, creating twinging

dissonances in a technique then echoed by the other voices, each pair depicting two hearts rent asunder with exquisite poignancy; a similar illustrative technique to that used in the more agitated 'A un giro sol de' bell' occhi lucenti'.

There are many such instances of word-painting throughout, Monteverdi fully exploiting the abilities of the court virtuosi at his disposal – who were famous for their declamatory clarity as well as for their subtlety of dynamics and pacing, and their dramatic flair. In the Guarini setting 'Ohimè, se tanto amate', 'ohimè', meaning 'alas', is repeated as a sighing figure, evoking a lover longing for acceptance; its erotic connotations are deliciously implied, with dissonant harmonies that would have scandalised the conservative Artusi. 'Quell'augellin', also to poetry by Guarini, is more light-hearted, but it is a rarity in a set that homes in on experiences of yearning and heartbreak, encompassing the sensuality of the extraordinarily beautiful 'Si ch'io vorrei morire hora ch'io bacio amore', which includes anguished chains of overlapping notes, to the emotive farewells of the penultimate 'Longe da te, cor mio, struggomi di dolore'.

'Non più guerra, pietate' presents love in terms of war, the lover imploring not to be seen as the enemy, but as one already conquered who will die only if their beloved wishes it. Rhythms ricochet like gunshot, the lover bombarded on all sides by urgently jostling voices, juxtaposed with moments of devotional clarity. Alongside these extremities of love comes something more otherworldly in the form of 'Anima dolorosa', which suggests the influence of Gesualdo in its heartrending expressivity, conveying real grief and soul-searching – communicated via some of the most astringent dissonances in the whole set.

Individually, any one of these madrigals has the power to overwhelm. Monteverdi cuts straight to the heart of each text, resulting in pieces that, while brief, never let up in their harmonic inventiveness and emotional intensity. Taken as a whole, the effect is heady mix of sensual pleasure and sheer devastation. Could it be, perhaps, that Artusi simply couldn't cope, frightened of his own reaction to music of such visceral power?

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Claudio Monteverdi

Fourth Book of Madrigals (1603)

Ah dolente partita

Giovanni Battista Guarini, Il pastor fido III, 3

Ah! dolente partita!
ah, fin de la mia vita!
da te parto e non moro? E pur i' provo
la pena de la morte
e sento nel partire
un vivace morire,
che dà vita al dolore
per far che moia immortalmente il core.

O sorrowful parting!
O end of my life!
Do I leave you, and not die? Yet I endure
the pain of death
and feel upon our parting
a lively death
that gives life to sorrow
so that my heart may die unendingly.

Cor mio, mentre vi miro

Guarini

Cor mio, mentre vi miro,
visibilmente mi trasform'in voi;
E trasformato poi
In un solo sospir l'anima spiro.
O bellezza mortale!
O bellezza vitale!
Poi che si tosto un core
per te rinasce, e per te nato more.

My love, while I gaze on you
I am visibly transformed into you;
And thus transformed,
In a single sigh, then I exhale my soul.
Oh, killing beauty!
Oh, life-giving beauty!
Since a heart is so quickly
born again through you and, once reborn, dies.

Cor mio, non mori? e mori!

Anonymous

Cor mio, non mori? e mori!
L'idolo tuo, ch'è tolto
a te, fia tosto in altrui braccia accolto.
Deh, spezzati, mio core!
lascia, lascia con l'aura anco l'ardore;
ch'esser non può che ti riserbi in vita
senza speme e aita.
Su, mio cor, mori! lo moro, io vado; a Dio,
dolcissimo ben mio.

My heart, do you not die? Die!
Your idol is taken from you
And will soon be in the arms of another.
Ah, break, my heart!
Leave both the life and the ardour,
because you cannot stay alive
without hope and help.
Come, my heart, die! I'm dying, I'm leaving, farewell
My sweetest love.

Sfogava con le stelle

Ottavio Rinuccini

Sfogava con le stelle
un'infermo d'Amore
sotto notturno ciel il suo dolore,
e dicea fisso in loro:
O imagini belle de l'idol mio ch'adoro
se com'a me mostrate,
mentre cosi splendete,
la sua rara beltate
cosi mostrast'a lei
i vivi ardori miei
la fareste col vostr'aureo sembiante
pietosa si come me fat'amante. compassionate,

Crying to the stars
a love-sick man
beneath the night sky spoke of his grief,
and said, whilst gazing at them:
'Oh, lovely images of the idol I adore,
if only, as you show me,
when you shine,
her rare beauty,
you could show to her
my ardent flames,
You would make her, with your golden look
just as you make me affectionate.'

Volgea l'anima mia soavemente

Guarini

Volgea l'anima mia soavemente
quel suo caro, e lucente
sguardo, tutto beltà tutto desire,
verso me scintillando, e pareva dire:
«Damm'il tuo cor, ché non altronde io vivo.»
E mentre il cor sen vola ove l'invita
quella beltà infinita,
sospirando gridai: «Misero, e privo
del cor, chi mi dà vita?»
Mi rispos'ella in un sospir d'amore:
«Io, che son il tuo core.»

My love gently turned
that dear and radiant
glance (all beauty, all desire)
towards me sparkingly, and seemed to say:
'Give me your heart, for nothing else gives me life.'
And while my heart flew to where it was invited
by that infinite beauty,
I sighed and called out: 'Wretched and deprived
of my heart, who will give me life?'
I was answered with a loving sigh,
'I, for I am your heart.'

Anima mia perdona
Guarini, Il pastor fido, III, 4

Anima mia, perdona
a chi t'è cruda sol dove pietosa
esser non può; perdona a questa, [solo]
nei detti e nel sembante
Rigida tua nemica,
Ma nel core
Pietosissima amante;
E, se pur hai desio di vendicarti,
Deh! qual vendetta aver puoi tu maggiore
Del tuo proprio dolore?

Che se tu se' 'l cor mio,
come se' pur mal grado
del cielo e della terra,
qualor piangi e sospiri,
quelle lagrime tue sono il mio sangue,
que' sospiri il mio spirito e quelle pene
e quel dolor, che senti,
son miei, non tuoi, tormenti.

Luci serene e chiare
Ridolfo Arlotti

Luci serene e chiare,
voi m'incendete, voi, ma prov' il core
nell'incendio diletto, non dolore.
Dolci parole e care,
voi mi ferite, voi, ma prova il petto
non dolor ne la piaga, ma diletto.
O miracol d'amore:
Alma ch'è tutta foco e tutta sangue
si strugg'e non si duol, muor e non langue.

La piaga c'ho nel core
Aurelio Gatti

La piaga c'ho nel core,
donna, onde lieta sei,
colpo è de gl'occhi tuoi, colpa de i miei.
Gl'occhi miei ti miraro,
gl'occhi tuoi mi piagaro,
ma come avvien che sia
comune il fallo e sol la pena mia?

Voi pur da me partite
Guarini

Voi pur da me partite, anima dura,
né vi duol il partire.
Ohimè! quest'è un morire
crudele, e voi gioite?
Quest'è vicino aver l'ora suprema,
e voi non lo sentite.
O meraviglia di durezza estrema:
esser alma d'un core
e separarsi, e non sentir dolore!

My beloved, forgive
the one who is cruel to you, only because
they cannot express pity; forgive the one that only
in their words and outward appearance
seems your enemy
while, at heart,
your most tender lover;
and, if you still wish to take revenge,
ah, what greater vengeance can you have
than your own suffering?

For if you are my beloved,
as you truly are, in spite
of heaven and earth's will,
whenever you weep and sigh,
those tears of yours are my blood,
those sighs are my life's breath, and the sorrows
and pain that you feel
are my own torments, not yours.

Eyes, bright and clear
you set me on fire but my heart feels
pleasure in the fire, not pain.
Sweet and dear words,
you pierce me but my breast feels
not pain in the wound but delight.
Oh, miracle of love:
a soul that is all fire and blood,
Is consumed without pain, dies without languishing.

The wound I have in my heart,
woman, and you are glad of it,
is a blow struck by your eyes and the fault of mine.
My eyes saw you,
your eyes wounded me,
but how is it that we are
both guilty but the pain is only mine?

You are truly abandoning me, cruel one,
and feel no pain in parting.
Alas, this is a cruel death
and do you rejoice in it?
I am close to the hour of death
and you are insensible to it.
Oh, what a marvel of extreme harshness:
to be the soul of someone's heart
and to leave but feel no sorrow!

A un giro sol

Guarini

A un giro sol de' begl'occhi lucenti
ride l'aria d'intorno,
e 'l mar s'acqueta e i venti,
e si fa il ciel d'un altro lume adorno,
sol io le luci ho lagrimose e meste.
Certo quando nasceste
cosí crudel e ria,
nacque la morte mia.

At a single glance of those beautiful bright eyes,
the air around smiles,
the sea and winds grow calm,
And the sky is adorned with a new light;
Only I have eyes with tears and sadness.
Certainly, when you were born
so cruel and stony-hearted
so was born my death.

Ohimé, se tanto amate

Guarini

Ohimé, se tanto amate
di sentir dir Ohimè, deh perché fate
chi dice Ohimè morire?
S'io moro un sol potrete
languido, e doloroso Ohimè sentire;
Ma se, cor mio, volete
che vita abbia da voi, e voi da me,
avrete mille e mille dolci Ohimè.

Alas, if you take such pleasure
in hearing the word 'alas' said, then why make
the one who says 'alas' die?
If I die, you will only be able to once
hear a moaning, miserable 'alas';
but if, my heart, you wish
that I have life from you and you from me,
you shall have a thousand times a tender 'alas'.

Io mi son giovinetta

Anonymous

'Io mi son giovinetta,
e rido e canto alla stagion novella;
cantava la mia dolce pastorella;
quando subitamente
a quel canto, il cor mio
cantò quasi augellin vago e ridente:
'Son giovinett' anch'io,
e rido e canto alla gentil e bella
primavera d'amore
che ne' begl'occhi tuoi fiorisce'. Ed ella:
'Fuggi se saggio sei', disse, 'l'ardore:
Fuggi, ch'in questi rai Flee,
primavera per te non sarà mai'.

'I am a young girl
and I laugh and sing in the new season!'.
Thus sang my sweet shepherdess;
when suddenly
my heart, at that song,
sang like a pretty merry little bird:
'I too am young
and I laugh and sing in the sweet and beautiful
springtime of love
that blossoms in your beautiful eyes!'.
'Flee, if you are wise,' she said, 'from the fire!':
for in these eyes
there will never be springtime for you!.

Quell'augellin, che canta

Guarini, Il pastor fido I, 1

Quell'augellin, che canta
sì dolcemente, e lascivetto vola
or da l'abete al faggio
ed or dal faggio al mirto,
s'avesse umano spirto,
direbbe: 'Ardo d'amore, ardo d'amore'.
Ma ben arde nel core
e chiama il suo desio.
che gli risponde: 'Ardo d'amore anch'io'.
Che sii tu benedetto,
Amoroso gentil vago augelletto.

This little bird which sings
so sweetly, and wantonly flies
now from the fir tree to the beech
and now from the beech to the myrtle,
had it a human soul
it would say 'I burn with love'.
Certainly it burns in its heart
and it calls its love
who replies, 'I, too, burn with love'.
May you be blessed,
loving, tender, pretty, little bird.

Non piú guerra, pietate

Guarini

Non piú guerra, pietate,
occhi miei belli, occhi miei trionfanti!
A che v'armate
contr'un cor ch'è già preso, e vi si rende?
Ancidete i rubelli,
ancidete chi s'arma e si difende,
non chi, vinto, v'adora.
Volete voi ch'io mora?
Morrò pur vostro, e del morir l'affanno
sentirò sí, ma sarà vostr' il danno.

No more war, but pity,
My beautiful eyes, my triumphant eyes
Why do you take arms
Against a heart already captured and surrendering?
Kill the rebels,
kill those who take up arms and defend themselves,
not the one who is conquered and worships you.
Do you want me to die?
I shall die yours, and if the suffering of death
Will be mine to feel, the loss shall be yours.

Sí ch'io vorrei morire

Maurizio Moro

Sí ch'io vorrei morire
ora che bacio, Amore,
la bella bocca del mio amato core.
Ahi, cara e dolce lingua,
datemi tant'umore,
che di dolcezz'in questo sen m'estingua!
Ahi, vita mia, a questo bianco seno,
deh, stringetemi fin ch'io venga meno!
Ahi bocca, ahi baci, ahi lingua, torn'a dire:
Sí ch'io vorrei morire.

Yes, I wish to die
now as I kiss, love,
the beautiful mouth of my beloved.
Oh dear, sweet tongue,
give me so many moist kisses
that from their sweetness in this breast may I perish!
Ah, my life, to this white breast
hold me tight until I faint!
Ah, mouth, kisses, tongue, I say again:
Yes, I want to die.

Anima dolorosa che vivendo

Anonymous

Anima dolorosa che vivendo
tanto peni e tormenti
quant'odi e parli e pensi e miri e senti,
ancor spiri? Che sperì? Ancor dimori
in questa viva morte? in quest'inferno
de le tue pene eterno?
Mori, misera, mori!
Che tardi piú? che fai?
Perché, mort'al piacer, vivi al martire?
Perché vivi al morire?
Consuma il duol che ti consuma omai,
di questa morte che par vita uscendo.
Mori, meschina, al tuo morir morendo.

Sorrowful soul, that in life
endures such pain and torment
whatever you hear, speak, think, see, or feel,
are you still breathing? What do you hope for? Do you linger
in this living death, in this hell
of your eternal sorrows?
Die, wretch, die!
Why do you tarry? What are you doing?
Why, dead to pleasure, do you live for pain?
Why live for death?
End the grief that consumes you
leaving this death that only pretends to be life.
Die, wretch, and put your death to death

Anima del cor mio

Anonymous

Anima del cor mio,
poichè da me, misera me, ti parti,
s'ami conforto alcun a' miei martiri,
non isdegnar ch'almen ti segua anch'io,
solo co'miei sospiri
e sol per rimembrarti
ch'in tante pene e in cosí fiero scempio
vivrò d'amor, di vera fede esempio.

Soul of my heart,
since you part from me (wretched me!),
if you would give comfort to any of my suffering,
do not refuse, at least, to let me follow you
with my sighs only
and only to remind you
that, in such great sorrow and in this fiery torture,
I will live as a true example of love and fidelity.

Longe da te, cor moi

Anonymous

Longe da te, cor mio,
struggomi di dolore,
di dolcezz'e d'amore.
Ma torna omai, deh torna! E se'l destino
strugger vorrammi ancor a te vicino,
sfavilli e splenda il tuo bel lume amato
ch'io n'arda e mora, e morirò beato.

Far from you, my heart,
I am consumed with sorrow,
tenderness and love,
But return now! And if fate
wills me still to suffer when near you,
let your beautiful dear eyes shine and sparkle,
so that I burn and die from them, and I will die happy.

Piagn'e sospira

Torquato Tasso, La Gerusalemme conquistata

Piagn'e sospira, e quand'i caldi raggi
fuggon le greggi a la dolce ombr'assise,
ne la scorza de' pini o pur de' faggi
segnò l'amato nome in mille guise;
e de la sua fortuna i gravi oltraggi
e i vari casi in dura scorza incise,
e in rileggendo poi le proprie note
spargea di pianto le vermiglie gote.

She wept and sighed, and when the sun's hot rays
put the flock to flight for the sweet shade,
into the bark of the pines or beeches
she wrote her sweetheart's name in a thousand ways.
And of her fate the cruel offences
and various misfortunes she carved in tough bark.
And in re-reading her own notes
She covered her blushing cheeks with tears.

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