

Scotland's Music © 2007
Programme 6 11.02.07
A Pilgrimage to St Andrews
writer/presenter: John Purser
producer: David McGuinness

Anon – ad faciendam (Visitatio Sepulchri)
Schola Cantorum Basiliensis
CD Easter Mass from Notre Dame
DHM 05472 77814 2, Track 1

John Purser voice-over: We're in St Andrews Cathedral. You can't do that today as it's a ruin – it was one of the largest cathedrals in Europe and a major centre of pilgrimage. There are few countries which would've allowed their greatest religious structure, housing the relics of their patron saint, to fall into disuse and remain in ruins. Many a European cathedral was rebuilt from the ground up after the Second World War. But perhaps we're unworthy of our former magnificence. But for this programme we're in the cathedral and what we see and hear are all things that were or might've been seen and heard in the cathedral's medieval heyday.

Here in St Andrews was carved what's been described as "one of the most fascinating and beautiful monuments of pre-Romanesque art in Europe" – it's an early 9th-century tomb for a Pictish king, and here in 1318 Robert the Bruce gave thanks for his victory over the English at Bannockburn. Here too was heard - and preserved in the St Andrews Manuscript - some of the most beautiful religious music of any period, any-where.

MUSIC as above (plus Lute)

JP Voice-over: It's Easter Sunday in the late Middle Ages and a play is in progress – Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene discover that the body of Christ has vanished overnight from the tomb. The monk who sings this story himself approaches the tomb from which the great stone has been rolled away.

MUSIC as above (plus Voice)

JP Voice-over: Mary's visit to the sepulchre will be followed by the celebration of Mass. But we're going to slip outside the cathedral and make our way to join the throngs of pilgrims. Many have come – and from many parts of the world:-

Male actor (Tam Dean Burn - reading adapted from original Latin quoted in several sources):
"This bay and shore of the sea, though rough and boisterous, contains a most fertile country; this region, once poor, foul, and desolate, is now rich, beautiful, and flourishing. Hither come to pray a crowd of men from the most distant regions – the loquacious Frenchman, the warlike Norman, the Flemish weaver, the uncivilized German, the Englishman, the Saxon, the Hollander, strangers from Poitou, the quarrelsome folk of Angers, strangers who have drunk the waters of the Rhine and the Rhone and the lordly Tiber, come to seek the prayers of St Andrew. We too, if our humble names may be noticed among so many, have come to solicit the same favour."

JP: At the Guardbridge where pilgrims are first received, a penitent from England, has had his feet washed and bandaged – as is done for every pilgrim. But now that he has reached the cathedral, his

face is distracted by inner sorrows. He does not speak. He sings. It's an old Anglo-Saxon song called "Worldes Blis" - but it's a warning. This world's bliss does not last for a moment. "Think man for what purpose Christ created you." The voice betrays one who has known better times: perhaps, like William Bondolf of Dunkirk, he has come to do penance for manslaughter.

Anon - Worldës Blis
CD Troubadour Songs and Medieval Lyrics,
Paul Hillier, baritone
Hyperion CDA 66094, Track 6

JP Voice-over: Fortunately not every pilgrim comes here seeking healing for sorrow or absolution for his or her crimes. Many come in joy and for them the trip's a kind of holiday, even an opportunity to shake off the shackles of a dull life elsewhere. Looking southwards along the broad street coming out of the sun is another group of pilgrims.

Trad - L'Homme Armée
Ben Alden, Paul Charrier, David McGuinness, Matt Parkin, Antony Shaw, voices
BBC recording

JP Voice-over: They've come via the Earl's Ferry and the hostels at North Berwick and Ardross and have sung their way across Fife - a rude French song, great for marching to - L'Homme Armée - but the armed man isn't a soldier fit for a Crusade, he's a lover armed for seduction. This tune would even be used in settings of the Mass, so their ribald singing so close to the goal of their pilgrimage isn't disturbing to anyone.

But attention turns to an old man leading a donkey across the square. He explains that he's travelled many miles on the back of this animal, but he's now dismounted for the last part of his journey. He asks someone to hold the donkey for him so he can enter the cathedral, but a group of musicians tell him he should lead the donkey in. Doesn't he know that a donkey is led into the church at Christmas? They had one in the Procession a week ago on Palm Sunday - Christ entering Jerusalem on its back. But the old pilgrim's too shy to bring his donkey in even though the musicians start to play the donkey's carol on hammered dulcimer with bells, drum and fiddles.

Trad - The Donkey's Carol/The Friendly Beasts [Orientus Partibus]
Maggie Sansone & Ensemble Galilei
CD Ancient Noels
Maggie's Music MMCD 108, Track 11

JP: The first group of pilgrims of the day is about to be led into the Cathedral. They're ushered in through the West door, out of the spring sunlight. In the momentary calm, the complex patterns of azure, veridian, carmine, and white light that the stained-glass windows cast upon the stone flags, are breath-taking.

A monk leads the group past the tombs in the North transept, pointing out an inscription carved on wood:-

Male voice (TDB): "You who come as a pilgrim, pause, and first look on Robert, then on what remains of Arnold; the last tomb covers Richard; they were once bishops, now they are citizens of Heaven."

JP: But if you know the history of this cathedral, you know that all was not sweetness and light. When Abel returned from Rome in 1254 with controversial authority to become Bishop of St Andrews, he chalked on the cathedral door:-

Male voice (TDB): “Law, the Bible, philosophy – these are mine.”

JP: The next morning, someone, using similar writing, wrote underneath it:-

Male voice (DMcG): “Deceit, partiality, illusory wisdom without measure may raise you up.”

JP: Abel was furious, but to everyone’s relief he died within a few months. But all this now seems merely petty as we’re invited to process slowly up the aisle, led by two members of the choir singing a Responsory in honour of St Andrew himself.

Male voice (Alan Riach): “Andra, perfect man, follower of Christ’s way, suffering crucifixion on the saltire, mak us fit comrades in Hevin.”

Anon - Vir Perfecte

Ben Alden, tenor; Paul Charrier, bass (Cappella Nova)

BBC recording

JP: The group of pilgrims halts at a lectern on which is a small book covered with strange signs that few people understand – signs that mean sounds: in this case the very sounds which have led the group up the aisle. The guide turns to the back of the book to show a signature with a few musical notes above it. One of the group of musicians who played at the door looks at the lines and marks on the vellum and sings what he sees. “May Walter, the writer of this book, be blessed.”

Qui Liber est Scriptus

Male Voice (Ben Alden, tenor)

(BBC Recording not commercially available)

JP: The musicians then ask if they may perform. They want to hear what they’ll sound like in the wonderful acoustic of this vast structure. When they tell the guide they’re from Canterbury he opens the little book at a planctus – a lament for the exile of Canterbury’s own Thomas à Becket. He explains that Scotland’s King William was captured on the same day Thomas was scourged. The coincidence so impressed him that he founded the monastery in Arbroath in Thomas’s name. The guide asks if they know this Lament. They don’t; but after a few moments’ study, they’re ready to try it:-

Anon - In Rama Sonat Gemitus

Landini Consort

LP Nowell Nowell, Medieval & Renaissance Music for the Feast of Christmas

Hill and Dale HD001, Side 1 Track 3

JP: The group is now ushered on to the East end of the Cathedral to the climax of their pilgrimage: the viewing of the Morbrac – the great reliquary which contains bones and clothing of none other than St Andrew himself. “The first to recognise the Divinity of Christ and the First Christian Martyr”, whispers the guide in awe.

The Reliquary is vast. It weighs a third of a ton and only the week before, was carried round the city by twenty-four men. Its canopy is operated by ropes and pulleys. For the moment it is dark. There are screens over the windows high above and the canopy is black and plain. The guide lights each pilgrim's candle, slips quietly into a dark corner and the singing begins.

Anon - Sanctus Ierarchia
Schola Cantorum Basilensis
CD Scotland's Music
Linn Records CKD 008, CD1 Track 8

JP Voice-over: As the voice resounds through the chapel, so the canopy is slowly raised high up on chains decked with figures of angels, and the window screens are moved aside. The doors of the jewelled casket within are opened one by one to reveal the relics of St Andrew, and the sunlight streaks down to touch the bones as though the warmth might bring them life.

Through hundreds of years, thousands upon thousands of pilgrims came to the great cathedral city of Scotland, for this moment of revelation. So what more is there to reveal?

It's to be found in that little book on the lectern, for in that book are melodies not just for one voice, but for two – and more complex still than the chant in honour of Andrew. When that book was made, such things were new to the human ear. Polyphony. Many melodies together. These sounds were the beginning of it all, and they still sound fresh, as though a new spell had been discovered that would work a magic no one had ever dreamt of before.

Anon - Kyrie
Schola Cantorum Basilensis
Scotland's Music
Linn CKD 008 CD1 Track 9