

Conversation with Josquin

Exquisite analysis

It all begins with the analysis of the work.

In the stillness and quiet, you can feel the mechanics, the canons, the echoes, the recurrent, principal and secondary themes gradually shine through. In the meantime, the dynamics stand out as a result of the tessituras, the number of voices, the phrases and tempos, the use of the singers, the distribution between the choir and the soloists.

It is a very special moment dedicated to internal listening. Perfectly in tune.

Then comes the not-so-pleasant moment of getting back to reali...

"Co-onfi-i-i-te-or! Co-onfi-i-i-te-or! Co-onfi-i-i-te-or!..."

What on earth is all that racket?

"Co-onfi-i-i-te-or! Co-onfi-i-i-te-or! Co-onfi-i-i-te-or!..."

The door opens. Josquin comes in, yelling:

"Co-onfi-i-i-te-or! Co-onfi-i-i-te-or! Co-onfi-i-i-te-or!..."

He winks at me:

"Co-onfi-i-i-te-or! Co-onfi-i-i-te-or! Co-onfi-i-i-te-or!..."

Then he says, breathless:

"Good Lord, I am not used to such things anymore... It's so harsh, yet so wonderful! Does it ring a bell?"

"Of course it does. That's your hit song, the *Confiteor* from the *Gaudeamus* mass."

"Ha ha. I knew you were fond of that one."

"I am but you have no idea how much I struggled with it. It took me some time to understand it was one of the key elements of your work... Anyway, what are you doing here?"

An odd interview

"Well, actually, I came to give you a hand."

"So far, you have done little more than interrupt me."

"I figured out that you had some trouble making me "appear" in your Conversations. That is why I decided to pop in."

"I see..."

"Wait!" says Josquin, with a hint of disappointment.

He turns round to face an imaginary audience and says, with a touch of irony:

"Dear readers, master Bourbon is now going to analyse the *Gaudeamus* and the *La sol fa ré mi*!"

"I have already talked a lot about that, Josquin. Besides, I would rather leave the musicology part to my dear friend Jacques."

"All right... Still, tell me... How many singers have you used?"

"I have already mentioned that. As usual, I have gathered a group of soloists, eight of them to be precise, as well as *biscantors* for the first time."

"I don't see what is so new about that?"

"It's a choir of young girls."

"Young girls??!! In that case, they cannot be *biscantors*!"

"Actually, they are. Sometimes in the 'superius' and sometimes in the tenor voice."

"What a strange idea!!!"

"Well, Josquin, I'm not the one who composed these two masses with an *ostinato*! Can you imagine me asking one soloist to sing the *sol fa ré mi* 256 times?"

"Why not? *We* did it!"

"Besides, this choir is a powerful link between the parts. It has enabled me to bring many variations, either on its own with the pianos or with a tenor to reach a *piu forte*, or else appearing in two different parts. And what wonderful freshness they bring!"

"I see... And what about the high points?"

"Well, I did some specific work on that too and I must say that your music was of great help."

"Of course, it was! It was there long before you were born."

"Indeed. In the *Gaudeamus*, you surely remember the supplication of the *Kyrie*, the joyful, powerful then ecstatic rhythm of the *Gloria*, the mechanics of the *Patrem* and the *Sanctus*, the tenderness of the *Et incarnatus* and the *Benedictus*, the suspense before the race towards the abyss of both the *Et in spiritum* and the *Confiteor*, not to mention the dramatic conclusion of the *Agnus*... And again, in the *La sol fa ré mi*, you must recall the tender lyricism of the *Kyrie*, the vigor of the *Et in terra pax*, the *Cum Sancto* and its *Amen*, the internal intensity of the *Qui tollis*, the *Et incarnatus* and the *Sanctus*, the implacable mechanics of both the *Patrem omnipotentem* and the *Et resurrexit*, the contemplation of the *Agnus*..."

"I remember now... I had no time to compose a specific *Agnus Dei* 3 so I had to use the *Agnus I* again..."

Josquinosaurus Rex

Josquin remains engulfed in his memories for a while. Then, he says:

"Everything must come to an end – I, of all people, should know – so I will take my leave now. When shall we meet again?"

"Please, don't talk about that yet. First, I must lick my wounds and get my energy back. I must also find some money. You have no idea how much you cost me!"

"Really? What about the ticket sales?"

"That's not so easy. Concert promoters are convinced that your music is boring. Fortunately, the few listeners who attend the concerts are entranced.

You know, this is not really the kind of music that people listen to nowadays. People want music to be amplified and sensational."

"What about the historical preservationists?"

"They just talk, Josquin. The actual subsidies are scarce. I met this journalist in the streets of Lille the other day. We were discussing the inexorable fall of financial means in our respective fields when she suddenly said:

'In the end, you are one of the last people to stand up for ancient music in Northern France. In a way, you're a dinosaur!' Despite the relatively limited fate of dinosaurs, I felt amused and flattered. A dinosaur! Can you imagine, Josquin? I am a Josquinosaurus Rex!"

Josquin, already on his way, replies:

"Dinosaurs? I came some time after them, didn't I? Isn't it what they call the theory of evolution?"

"Indeed, Josquin, you might say that... See you soon... Yes, you might say that, in a way..."