

## A Conversation With Josquin

In the church of Sainte Croix Vallée-Française, I was about to give the starting pitch for the eleven singers in the *Métamorphoses* and *Biscantor!* ensembles. I closed my eyes for a second...

...and when I opened them again...my binder was empty! My music had disappeared! My tools, my conductor's scores covered with annotations! They'd vanished at the very moment I was finally going to use them! After four years of putting the program together, a year of analyzing *Hercules*, a month of writing out the *Chascun me crie* score.

I threw myself into the search for the Grail I simply had to find. My mad rush to locate it brought to mind all the obstacles I'd overcome: the difficulty of finding venues, the singers who didn't answer their phones, who arrived late for rehearsals and left early, the refused funding requests, the distributors who weren't interested in the recording, the

politician who told me how to perform  
Josquin, my serious lumbago, my terrible  
fatigue...

At the Pont Ravagers station, I caught a  
train...that would be the quickest way! But no,  
it took off in the wrong direction! I tried to get  
out while it was still moving slowly, but the  
door was blocked...Luckily I managed to open  
a window, only to began an exhausting descent  
along a huge building, from balcony to  
balcony, from G clefs to F clefs...

“Your papers, please!”

To my surprise, I'd almost reached the  
sidewalk (1). A hop and a skip later I found  
myself face to face with a rural policemen,  
who looked perfectly ridiculous in a red and  
gold uniform and towering kepi.

“Your music, please!”

Those bright and beady eyes...why, yes, they  
were Josquin's! He was actually there, and

easily recognizable in his high green stockings. And he was obviously very cross.

“What’s this *Chascun me crie* mass?! I never wrote such a thing!”

“Calm down, Josquin... You and a lot of other people have probably forgotten your *Chascun me crie* Credo, which was in Cambrai’s collection of musical scores.”

“Hmmm...”

“It’s true, it’s not your most accomplished work, and I have to admit that its title is what first caught my eye. It must have been a song tune...can you sing it to me?”

“Beeee – C – D – E – Deeee – G!”

“No, I know the melody, for that I can just listen to the piece. It’s the words I need!”

“???”

“In any case, the theme had a lot of potential. I literally stuffed the rest of the mass with it, even the tiny motifs hidden in the “machines” – the repeated themes - you’re so fond of.

Josquin relaxed a bit. The sun shining from the garden into the INPV (2) cafeteria lit up his figure, and the students, watching from the windows, laughed and elbowed each other.

“But why did you call it “...*même* Hercule?”

“I simply wanted to make the collection of your complete masses more coherent by including the principal theme from *Hercules* as well. It’s often difficult to spot, sometimes extremely difficult, in various keys, with added rests...but the whole thing is always there, like in the superius of the *Gloria* and the “complaint machines” in the bass of the *Agnus 2.*”

Josquin bent over the score, more and more interested:

“This notation is wonderful, with the four voices one above the other. In my day, we had to count the beats and really pay attention. When it’s printed like this, you can take it easy...even have a snooze from time to time!”

And then with great enthusiasm:

“Look here, the *Chascun me crie* theme segues into *Hercules* through your *Christe* machine! And here in your *Qui tollis* the *Hercules* theme is sung by two tenors a fifth apart...like church bells ringing! And the mirror image *Chascun me crie* theme, followed by the real theme of the *Cum Sancto Spiritu!* And the same thing in the *Osanna*, which you illustrated with the *Chascun me crie* theme...and the symmetry of the *In excelsis Deo*. Are there more?”

“Yes, the fun is in hunting for them!”

I smiled at his excitement, and said,

“Another thing I enjoyed was paying homage to Bach in *Agnus I* and to you in *Agnus 2*. When the two are superimposed at the

beginning of *Agnus*<sup>3</sup>, I pay homage to the two greatest polyphonists.”

“Yes, you’ve mentioned this Bach fellow to me before...”

“And I even parodied my own work in the *Sanctus*, using the “couscous” and the main theme from my *Petits Z’oiseaux Mass.*”

But Josquin was no longer listening. He had suddenly noticed the laughing young faces at the windows. He drew himself up and became a true Maestro once more.

“Maurice, this is very good, you’ve done the work of an honest artisan. You’ve written in the Franco-Flemish style, and done the best you could with what you have.”

He winked and slipped away.

I opened my eyes. My scores were before me, and there were the singers, waiting patiently. The pitch pipe sounded an “A” and the first

notes of the *Kyrie* from *Hercules* could finally plunge me into a marvelous fountain of youth.

Maurice Bourbon, 5 September 2012

- (1) An homage to Harold Lloyd (*Monte là-dessus, Safety Last*, 1923)
- (2) Institut National de Polyphonie Vocale, see *Messes Bourbon* (Editions de l'Homme armé HA01, 2009)