



## FRANCESC VALLS

### *Missa Scala Aretina*

La Grande Chapelle

Director: **Albert Recasens**

Soloists: **María Eugenia Boix, Alicia Amo, Rupert Enticknap, Gabriel Díaz Cuesta, Gerardo López Gámez, Thomas Hobbs et al.**

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Textos en español

English commentary

Notes en français

Mit deutscher Textbeilage

Comentaris en català



FRANCESC VALLS (ca. 1671-1747): *Lauda Ierusalem*, a 10, *Sancta et immaculata*, a 8\*, *En el misterioso circo*, a 4\*, *De lamentatione Ieremiae prophetae*, a 8\*, *Surrexit Pastor bonus*, a solo\*, *Domine vim patior*, a 4, *Plorans ploravit*, a 4, *Ave Maria*, a 8\*, villancico a santo Tomás de Aquino: *Sombras cobardes*, a 12\* *Missa Scala Aretina*, a 11 (*Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei*)

**World Premiere Recording  
(sacred works\*)**

The *Missa Scala Aretina* by Francesc Valls is considered to be one of the most important works of Spanish music history. Written in the polychoral tradition and based on Guido d'Arezzo's hexachord, and named after him, the work was composed for the cathedral of Barcelona, possibly to celebrate the closing of the Catalanian Parliament in January 1702. It owes its fame to the heated controversy over aesthetics which arose as a result of one of its musical passages. At one point the controversy involved over 50 musicians including Alessandro Scarlatti, and against the political backdrop of the Spanish War of Succession (1700-1714). La Grande Chapelle tackles the fascinating challenge of rediscovering this unique work with authentic forces and presents us with a number of excellent unpublished pieces from Valls' huge musical production.

Valls's musical activities were centred in the Cathedral of Barcelona. On 17 December 1696, a few months after having competed successfully for the post of *maestro de capilla* at the church of Santa María del Mar, he was named substitute *maestro de capilla* of the cathedral at Barcelona on the retirement of his predecessor Joan Barter. On the death of the latter in 1706 Valls assumed the full position. After his retirement in 1726 he dedicated himself to writing his monumental compositional treatise *Mapa armónico práctico*, which he finished in 1735. During his thirty years of service at the cathedral Valls was immensely active, composing the greater part of the more than six hundred works that are currently known, most of these in sacred genres, whether set to Latin or Spanish texts.

Nevertheless, his best-known work is the *Missa Scala Aretina* of 1702, famous for having prompted a storm of polemics. Even if the origin of the controversy may have been aesthetic (the unprepared ninth in the second-soprano entry of the "Miserere nobis" of the *Gloria*), various writers have pointed to its political undercurrent: the dispute only unfolded many years later, between 1715 and 1720, and those who intervened in the controversy had close connections with others on one or the other side. Valls was even the victim of a reprisal on the part of the Bourbon faction by being expelled from his post, presumably for having sided with the Hapsburg Archduke Charles (Valls was named in the list of those banished from their posts, the 'Officials Ecclesiàstichs extrañats per orde del Rei', of April 1719). Álvaro Torrente has advanced the view that the mass might have been composed in 1702 for the closing ceremony of the Catalan court, which was presided over by Felipe V, and Josep Rafael Carreras i Bulbena suggested that the mass might have been used to celebrate the victory of the Imperial troops in the Battle of Almenar in 1710 by the Archduke in Barcelona.

The ensemble La Grande Chapelle has aimed to rediscover Valls's great work by taking account of the personnel available at the Cathedral of Barcelona at the start of the eighteenth century: eleven solo voices, two violins, two trumpets, double bass, bassoon, harp and two organs. These are much smaller forces than those used, for example, by John Hoban in the first modern performance of the work in the Queen Elizabeth Hall in April 1972, subsequently recorded by the same conductor with the London Oratory Choir and Thames Chamber

Orchestra (CRD Records 3371, 1980), or in the version directed by Gustav Leonhardt with the Koor en Barokorkest van de Nederlandse Bach Vereniging (Deutsche Harmonia Mundi 88725460312, 1993). Relying on the materials provided by manuscript M1489/1 in the Biblioteca de Catalunya and having examined other works by the composer and information relating to practices in the cathedral, I have opted to dispense with the oboes and reinforcement of the violin parts (both later additions) so as to obtain a more balanced relationship between the various forces – three choirs (the first of which is SAT only) and the fourth 'choir' of violins and *clarines*. The use of one to a part throws the transparency of the individual lines into relief (there are many passages involving imitative counterpoint) and underline contrasts between the various voice parts.

However important this new interpretation of the *Missa Scala Aretina* may have been, undoubtedly more so were the six 'modern premieres' of works by Valls. These were the responsory *Sancta et immaculata* (for eight voices), the *tono al Santísimo En el misterioso circo* (a 4), the *lectio De lamentatione Ieremiae prophetae* (a 8), the motet *Surrexit Pastor bonus* (solo soprano with violins), the anthem *Ave Maria* (a 8) and the villancico for Saint Thomas *Sombras cobardes* (a 12) all transcribed by Mariano Lambea (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Institució Milá i Fontanals), habitual collaborator with La Grande Chapelle. We also included two motets from the *Mapa harmónico práctico* that exist in different performing editions, *Plorans ploravit* and *Domine vim patior* (both a 4), which demonstrate the composer's great harmonic daring. In his Latin-texted works Valls, like his fellow Spanish composers, upheld the polychoral *stile antico* tradition, solemn and austere in flavour, though this does not preclude passages of great creative power. In his works to Spanish texts, the villancico and the *tono*, and in the solo Latin motet, on the other hand, he turns to modern instrumental language and aims to express the texts more vividly. Valls had no doubt become familiar with these newer ways thanks to his contacts with Italian and Austrian musicians during the period when the court of Archduke Charles was settled in Barcelona (1705-1713).

Albert Recasens. Excerpt from *Communications*, en *Eighteenth-Century Music*, 11/1, March 2014, p. 145-146.