

EGIDIUS KWARTET

*Peter de Groot -altus, Marco van de Klundert-tenor,
Hans Wijers -baritone, Donald Bentvelsen -bass,
with Bas Ramselaar or Job Boswinkel-bass*

RAVAGED CITY

Polyphonic laments, an indictment

In 586 BC, the prophet Jeremiah bewails the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. His gloomy texts are timeless because war and destruction are of all times. During the turbulent sixteenth century, impressive polyphonic settings of these laments were written. 500 years ago, these polyphonic lamentations appeared in print for the first time. In 1506, The Italian printer Petrucci published two books of Jeremiah's polyphonic lamentations. This was the beginning of the development of a much-loved genre in that century, which reached its climax in the expressive lamentations by Orlandus Lassus. The quartet sets these old sorrowful laments in a broader context. Between the lamentations, we hear scraps of one Da Costa's *Battle of Nieuwpoort*, the sound of gas bombs during the first World War, Reverend Buskes after the bombing of Rotterdam, President Truman on Hiroshima, Reverend Martin Luther King on Vietnam and a CNN reporter describing the events in New York on 11 September 2001. Thus, the lamentations are given a modern perspective, creating a moment of reflection and remembrance, both in musical and ethical terms.

Music:

*Lamentations by Alexander Agricola, Cristobal de Morales,
Jacob Arcadelt, Orlandus Lassus*



Programme

Alexander Agricola	Lamentatio Jeremiae	<i>Petrucci 1506</i>
Christobal de Morales (1500?-1553)	Officium Defunctorum <i>Taedet animam meam</i>	<i>Avila, bibl. del Coro 1526</i>
Jacob Arcadelt (1505?-1567?)	<i>i. Res-Sordes eius</i> <i>ii. Zain - Vidisti Domine</i> <i>iii. Caph-Defecerunt</i>	<i>Le Roy & Ballard 1557</i>
Interval		
Orlando di Lasso (1532?-1594)	Feria quinta in Coena Domini	<i>München Ms 2745 ca. 1585</i>
	<i>i. Lamentatio Prima Primi Diei</i>	
	<i>ii. Lamentatio Secunda Primi Diei</i>	
	<i>iii. Lamentatio Tertia Primi Diei</i>	

LAMENTATIONS FOR A RAVAGED CITY

The Lamentations (Thrênoi, Threni, Lamentationes) of the prophet Jeremiah were written after the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Fall of Judah in 586 BC. The text was written down by eye witnesses and the final compilation was made during the captivity in Babylon. Thus, Jeremiah was certainly not the only author of the lamentations, and some specialists even believe that the prophet himself did not actually have anything to do with the text editing.

THE ATTRACTION OF THE TEXT FOR COMPOSERS.

The text of the lamentations is emotionally charged, distinctively rich in metaphor and written in a style using many twists of rhetoric. Since the text was written down by eye witnesses, it shows a close rapport with the grief, powerlessness, bitterness and supplication of the people of Jerusalem.

It is precisely this quality, the linking of dramatic elements with meditative fragments together with the incantation of the Hebrew letters which undoubtedly attracted the attention of composers in the Middle Ages and, mainly, the Renaissance. Otherwise, how can we explain the fact that a text used only once a year (in Holy Week) - compared with the Mass, for example - has inspired so many composers?

LAMENTATIONS IN THE OFFICE OF HOLY WEEK.

From the Middle Ages, parts of the lamentations have been used at a certain point in the Office of Holy Week, namely during the Matins of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Saturday.

The Matins, or Office of Readings, took place before dawn, and were made up of three parts: three Nocturns. Each Nocturn consisted of three psalms and three readings ("*lectios*"). The lamentations of Jeremiah were used as the readings of the first Nocturn of the last three Holy Week Matins, making a total of nine *lectios* dedicated to the lamentations.

There is another interesting feature of the use of lamentations during the Matins. At the end of each reading, the lamentation verses finished with the verse "*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, convertere ad dominum deum tuum*". This was not a biblical text, but was used as a refrain, repeated after each reading. The number (and choice) of verses used for each reading varied considerably from region to region until the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Choice, number and order of the lamentation verses depended on local traditions and preferences. After the Council, which tried to introduce a kind of rule, there was still room for a certain amount of local discretion and tradition, as the listener can see from the three lamentations being performed this evening.

STRIPPED OF FESTIVE TRAPPINGS.

Thanks to the bleak nature of the text and the lamentations' place in the liturgy (at night, before dawn, during the darkest days of the Ecclesiastical year), it is obvious that the polyphonic laments emanate a distinctively unique quality. Stripped of all festive trappings, these compositions return to the essence of polyphony, where the minutest detail, the tiniest effect, works wonders.

Nicola Vicentino (1511-1572) writes the following in his tract "*L'antica Musica ridotta alla moderna prattica*" (Roma 1555) on the preservation of the meditative nature of the lamentations: "... each singer must take care to avoid all ornamentation when singing the lamentations, as otherwise the mood of mournfulness would be changed into one of optimism (book IV, chapter 42). Each of the three lamentations this evening demonstrates that in spite of sharing a common, identical character, the styles can still be dissimilar.

AGRICOLA.

Agricola's lamentations can be found in the famous publication by the pioneer of music printing, Petrucci, in Venice in 1506. For the first time in musical history, a publication is dedicated wholly to lamentations (by Agricola, Van Weerbeke and Tinctoris, amongst others). The publisher obviously saw a profit in bringing this much-loved genre onto the market.

MORALES.

Apart from the lamentations of Jeremiah, the despondent texts from the book of Job were also used at this time of the ecclesiastical year. Stripped of absolutely anything at all that might distract from the text, the sickly Cristobal de Morales composed sinister, homophonic music of an impressive simplicity, which so clearly tries to distract attention from the notes that, in so doing, it almost draws attention to itself even more. This was the style that Charles V's son, Philip II, admired above all.

ARCADELT.

The sixteenth century sees a deviation from the strict pattern of Jeremiah's lamentations. One example of advanced eclecticism can be found in the lamentations by Arcadelt, in which the letters no longer correspond with the text which originally followed, and in which verses from various chapters are jumbled up.

LASSUS.

The Good Friday lamentations by Orlando di Lasso represent a high point in lamentation literature and within the framework of his own production. They were printed in Munich in 1585 and dedicated to the abbot of the Benediktbeuren monastery. The Hebrew initial letters are composed in an extended melisma style and are reminiscent of acclamations. The highly diverse style of composition conveys the text in a most expressive way. These lamentations are a model specimen of Lasso's capability.

Paul Van Nevel/Peter de Groot