

Texts & Translations

Prophetiae Sibyllarum

Prologue

Carmina chromatico quae audis modulata tenore,
Haec sunt illa quibus nostrae olim arcana salutis
Bis senae intrepido cecinerunt ore Sibyllae.

Polyphonic songs which you hear with a chromatic
tenor,
these are they, in which our twice-six sibyls once
sang with fearless mouth the secrets of salvation.

I. Sibylla Persica

Virgine matre satus, pando residebit asello
lucundus princeps, unus qui ferre salutem
Rite queat lapsis; tamen illis forte diebus
Multi multa ferent, immensi facta laboris.
Solo sed satis est oracula prodere verbo:
Ille Deus casta nascetur virgine magnus.

The son of a virgin mother shall sit on a crook-backed
ass,
the joyful prince, the only one who can rightly bring
salvation to the fallen; but it will happen in those days
that
many shall tell many prophecies of great labor.
But it is enough for the oracles to bring forth with a
single word:
That great God shall be born of a chaste virgin.

II. Sibylla Libyca

Ecce dies venient, quo aeternus tempore princeps,
Irradians sata laeta, viris sua crimina tollet,
Lumine clarescet cuius synagoga recenti:
Sordida qui solus reserabit labra reorum,
Aequus erit cunctis, gremio rex membra reclinet
Reginae mundi, sanctus, per saecula vivus.

Behold the days will come, at which time the immortal
prince,
sowing abundant crops, shall take away their crimes
from men,
whose synagogue will shine with new light;
he alone shall open the soiled lips of the accused,
he shall be just to all; let the king, holy, living for all
ages,
recline his limbs in the bosom of the queen of the
world.

III. Sibylla Delphica

Non tarde veniet, tacita sed mente tenendum
Hoc opus; hoc memori semper qui corde reponet,
Huius pertentant cur gaudia magna prophetae
Eximii, qui virginea conceptus ab alvo
Prodibit, sine contactu maris, omnia vincit
Hoc naturae opera: at fecit, qui cuncta gubernat

He shall not come slowly (but this work must be held
with
quiet thought), he who will ever store this in a mindful
heart,
why his prophets may announce great joys of this
exalted one, who shall come forth conceived from the
virginal womb without taint of man. This conquers all
the works of nature: yet he has done this who governs
all things.

IV. Sibylla Cimmeria

In teneris annis facie praesignis, honore
Militiae aeternae regem sacra virgo cibabit
Lacte suo; per quem gaudebunt pectore summo
Omnia, et Eoo lucebit sidus ab orbe
Mirificum; sua dona Magi cum laude ferentes,
Obiicient puero myrrham, aurum, thura Sabaea.

In her tender years, distinguished with beauty, in
honor
the holy virgin will feed the king of the eternal host
with her milk; through whom all things will rejoice
with uplifted heart, and in the east will shine
a marvelous star: Magi bringing their gifts with praise
shall present to the child myrrh, gold, Sabaeen
frankincense.

V. Sibylla Samia

Ecce dies, nigras quae tollet laeta tenebras,
Mox veniet, solvens nodosa volumina vatum
Gentis Judaeae, referent ut carmina plebis.
Hunc poterent clarum vivorum tangere regem,
Humano quem virgo sinu inviolata fovebit.
Annuit hoc coelum, rutilantia sidera monstrant.

Behold, the joyful day which shall lift the black
darkness
will soon come and unravel the knotty writings of the
prophets
of the Judean tribe, as the people's songs tell.
They shall be able to touch this glorious ruler of the
living,

whom an unstained virgin will nurture at a human breast.
This the heavens promise, this the glowing stars show.

VI. Sibylla Cumana

Iam mea certa manent, et vera, novissima verba
Ultima venturi quod erant oracula regis,
Qui toti veniens mundo cum pace, placebit,
Ut voluit, nostra vestitus carne decenter,
In cunctis humilis, castam pro matre puellam
Deliget, haec alias forma praecesserit omnes.

Now my most recent words shall remain certain and true,
because they were the last oracles of the king to come,
Who, coming for the whole world with peace, shall be pleased,
as he intended, to be clothed fitly in our flesh,
humble in all things. He shall choose a chaste maiden for his
mother; she shall exceed all others in beauty.

VII. Sibylla Hellaspontica

Dum meditor quondam vidi decorare puellam,
Eximio, castam quod se servaret, honore,
Munera digna suo, et divino numine visa,
Quae sobolem multo pareret splendore micantem:
Progenies summi, speciosa et vera Tonantis,
Pacifica mundum qui sub ditone gubernet.

Once while I was reflecting, I saw him adorn a maiden with great honor (because she kept herself chaste);
She seemed worthy through his gift and divine authority
to give birth to a glorious offspring with great splendor:
the beautiful and true child of the highest Thunderer,
who would rule the world with peaceful authority.

VIII. Sibylla Phrygia

Ipsa Deum vidi summum, punire volentem
Mundi homines stupidos, et pectora caeca, rebellis.
Et quia sic nostram complerent crimina pellem,
Virginis in corpus voluit demittere coelo
Ipse Deus prolem, quam nunciet angelus almae
Matri, quo miseros contracta sorde lavaret.

I myself saw the high God wishing to punish
the stupid men of the earth and the blind heart of the rebel.

And because crimes shall thus fill our skin,
God himself wished to send from heaven into the body
of a virgin his son, which the angel shall announce to the fostering
mother, so that he may raise the wretches from the uncleanness they have
contracted.

IX. Sibylla Europaea

Virginis aeternum veniet de corpore verbum
Purum, qui valles et montes transiet altos.
Ille volens etiam stellato missus Olympo,
Edetur mundo pauper, qui cuncta silenti
Rexerit imperio. Sic credo, et mente fatebor:
Humano simul ac divino semine natus.

From the body of a virgin shall come forth the pure word eternal, who shall cross valleys and high mountains.
He, willingly sent even from starry Olympus,
will be sent into the world a pauper, who shall rule all creation
with silent power. Thus I believe and shall acknowledge in my heart:
He is the child of both divine and human seed.

X. Sibylla Tiburtina

Verax ipse Deus dedit haec mihi munia fandi,
Carmine quod sanctam potui monstrare puellam,
Concipiet quae Nazareis in finibus, illum,
Quem sub carne Deum Bethlemica rura videbunt.
O nimium felix, coelo dignissima mater,
Quae tantam sacro lactabit ab ubere prolem.

The truthful God himself gave me these gifts of prophecy,
that I might proclaim in song the holy virgin
who shall conceive in Nazareth's bounds
that God whom Bethlehem's lands shall see in the flesh.
O most happy mother, worthy of Heaven,
who shall nurse such a child from her holy breast.

XI. Sibylla Erythraea

Cerno Dei natum, qui se dimisit ab alto,
Ultima felices referent cum tempora soles
Hebraea quem virgo feret de stirpe decora,
In terris multum teneris passurus ab annis,
Magnus erit tamen hic divino carmine vates,
Virgine matre satus, prudenti pectore verax.

I behold the son of God, who sent himself from on high,
when the joyful days shall bring the last times.
He whom the comely virgin shall bear from the Hebrew lineage,
he who shall suffer much on earth from his tender years on,
he shall nevertheless be here a great seer in godly prophecy,
the son of a virgin mother, truthful and of a wise heart.

XII. Sibylla Agrippa

Summus erit sub carne satus, charissimus atque,
Virginis et verae complebit viscera sanctum
Verbum, consilio, sine noxa, spiritus almi.
Despectus multis tamen ille, salutis amore,
Arguet et nostra commissa piacula culpa.
Cuius honos constans, et gloria certa manebit.

The highest and dearest shall be born in the flesh the son
of the true virgin, and the holy word shall fill the womb
of the maiden through the pure intention of the nurturing spirit;
although contemptible to many, he, for love of our salvation,
will censure the sins committed by our guilt;
his honor shall remain constant and his glory certain.

Endless Morn of Light **John Milton (1608–1674)**

1. At a Solemn Music
Blest pair of Sirens, pledges of Heav'ns joy,
Sphear-born harmonious Sisters, Voice, and Vers,
Wed your divine sounds, and mixt power employ
Dead things with inbreath'd sense able to pierce,
And to our high-rais'd phantasie present,
That undisturb'd Song of pure content,
Ay sung before the saphire-colour'd throne
To him that sits thereon
With Sainly shout, and solemn Jubilee,
Where the bright Seraphim in burning row
Their loud up-lifted Angel trumpets blow,
And the Cherubick host in thousand quires
Touch their immortal Harps of golden wires,
With those just Spirits that wear victorious Palms,
Hymns devout and holy Psalms
Singing everlastingly;
That we on Earth with undiscording voice
May rightly answer that melodious noise;
As once we did, till disproportion'd sin

Jarr'd against natures chime, and with harsh din
Broke the fair musick that all creatures made
To their great Lord, whose love their motion sway'd
In perfect Diapason, whilst they stood
In first obedience, and their state of good.
O may we soon again renew that Song
And keep in tune with Heav'n, till God ere long
To his celestial consort us unite,
To live with him, and sing in endless morn of light.

2. On Time

Fly envious Time, till thou run out thy race,
Call on the lazy leaden-stepping hours,
Whose speed is but the heavy Plummets pace;
And glut thy self with what thy womb devours,
Which is no more than what is false and vain,
And merely mortal dross;
So little is our loss,
So little is thy gain.
For when as each thing bad thou hast entomb'd,
And last of all, thy greedy self consum'd,
Then long Eternity shall greet our bliss
With an individual kiss;
And Joy shall overtake us as a flood,
When every thing that is sincerely good
And perfectly divine,
With Truth, and Peace, and Love shall ever shine
About the Supreme Throne
Of him, t'whose happy-making sight alone,
When once our heav'nly-guided soul shall clime,
Then all this Earthy grosnes quit,
Attir'd with Stars, we shall for ever sit,
Triumphing over Death, and Chance, and thee O
Time.

Thoughts from Donna Fournier, Rebecca Myers, and Kile Smith.

From Donna:

The two works for six viols by William Byrd and William Lawes are excellent examples of the early and late viol consort repertory. You'll hear in William Byrd's Fantasia no.2 the beautiful imitative vocal nature of the lines as well as playful rhythms and opportunities for joyful improvisation. The consort set by William Lawes, born sixty years after Byrd, allows us to hear the transition to a truly instrumental style of consort writing. The range for each instrument is expansive, with many leaps and virtuosic passage work. But perhaps the most stunning feature of the Lawes is the harmonic language with its many dissonances and unconventional voice leading which to many ears sound as if it could have been written in this millennium.

From Rebecca:

The combination of voices and viols in the music of the Renaissance is one that feels incredibly natural. The unique timbre of the viola da gamba and voice showcases a variety of colors and expressive palettes. In 2021, Variant 6 premiered a new work, *Ave Maris Stella*, by Kile Smith, with Piffaro, The Renaissance Band. We love singing Kile's music because of his excellent writing for the voice, his natural and idiomatic text setting, and his deep understanding of the influence of early music.

When considering what to feature with Kile's new work, the Lassus *Sibyllarum Prophetiae* seems an excellent pairing. This transformative work is incredibly chromatic and otherworldly. This gives the work a sense that it's very much ahead of its time. The unorthodox texts are taken from a collection of oracles written in Greek hexameters ascribed to the Sibyls, prophetesses who spoke divine revelations supposedly in a frenzied state.

Our hope is that the pairing of this very unique ancient music - combined with the new sounds created by Kile Smith - will encourage a sense of wonder and give you some respite from the heaviness of the modern world.

From Kile:

The two Milton poems, in their illuminating of eternity, act as stage lights, mixing color to highlight character as well as clarity. "At a Solemn Musick" implores us to use music and text in the highest manner: copying the angels in heaven. This accesses our state before the Fall; we will literally be in tune with heaven, until the time God sees fit to take us there.

The trouble, though, is that pesky "until the time." At the unflagging tempo of a ticking clock, "On Time" charges time itself to get on with its duty of eating up everything worldly and vain and to consume, finally, itself. Only then will we live timelessly with truth, peace, and love.

The character of viols, sweet or aggressive, is always on a human scale, and is therefore, to my ears, sweeter or more violent than modern instruments. Their colors bloom best when they have lines that move, and so *Endless Morn of Light* has grown into a neo-Baroque landscape that balances well with the six vocal soloists.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to the anonymous donor for their commissioning donation.

Margaret Humphrey for hosting our rehearsals and housing our out-of-town artists.

Members of the Philadelphia area viol playing community for their donations supporting The Sylvan Consort and this project.

The Variant 6 Board of Directors for their support, input, and guidance this season.

Variant 6's 2024-25 Season is supported by The Presser Foundation, The Philadelphia Cultural Fund, and our generous donors.

