

## PROGRAM NOTES

To understand how the musical institutions of France in the Grand Siècle were set up and functioned is also to situate our perceptions as modern listeners in another environment and a different conception of the world. As a result, we can savor all the more the exceptions, the extraordinary situations and atypical career paths that deviate from the norms of the time. An example may be found in the very heart of Paris, in the Rue du Chaume. There a parallel musical life, outside the standard framework, gradually took shape from the mid-1660s onward.

While many princes had the resources to maintain a musical establishment on the model of the King's, the Hôtel de Guise offered a more original configuration. The aim here was to organize around the figure of Marie de Lorraine, Duchesse de Guise, the presence of an art that was essential to her well-being.

Marie was the granddaughter of Henri, Duc de Guise, "le Balafre," the instigator of the Catholic League, and when she was just sixteen years old had followed her father into the Italian exile imposed on them by Richelieu. On her return to Paris twelve years later, she spared no effort to restore and maintain the grandeur of the House of Guise.

Her independence and her artistic and intellectual choices make her the epitome of a strong-willed woman. Patronage was a long tradition in the Guise family: many were artists who benefited from it—among them Pierre Corneille, Malherbe, La Fontaine and Charpentier. In addition to these "guests," the House of Guise employed a substantial domestic retinue that employed numerous artists. The Duchess recruited from families "belonging to" the Guises a pool of faithful servants, some of whom possessed quite exceptional talents.

In the late 1660s, a certain Marc-Antoine Charpentier, who had just returned from a long period of residence in Italy, was offered an apartment, and Marie de Guise was to remain his protectress for nearly twenty years. Charpentier found at the Hôtel de Guise a situation in no sense comparable to that of a court composer. He enjoyed relative liberty that gave free rein to his taste for experimentation and innovation. In addition, his protectress herself had exceptionally eclectic artistic tastes. However, the constraints on Charpentier were also different from those at court: the team of musicians at the Hôtel de Guise changed over the years, obliging him to work sometimes with unusual forces.

Over the past few years, the Ensemble Correspondances has been following in the footsteps of that team, with each of the members of our ensemble taking the role of one of the members of the crew from the Hotel de Guise, the original interpreters (Talon, Brion, Isabelle, Grand-Maison, Carlié, Beaupuis, Bossan, and Charpentier himself) of this music. To rediscover the particularities of these interpreters by "reincarnating" them from one work to another is a rare and fine undertaking for a musician.

Mademoiselle de Guise's influence was also seen in the texts she had set to music. It is possible to trace through Charpentier's *Mélanges* the various events that had an impact on the life of the Guise family. Thus the tragic death in 1675 of the boy Louis-Joseph, the last male heir of the line, marked a watershed. From then on, the figure of the Christ-child occupied an important place in the family's piety, be it in religious services or the significance accorded to the festival of Christmas.

It was in this context that the *Pastorale sur la naissance de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ* (H483) emerged. The genre of the pastorale, *a fortiori* in the French language, was rarely employed to evoke the Nativity. Here, once again, the constraint imposed on the composer engendered a disconcerting work: at the intersection of the sacred and secular genres, of the popular and the learned, of ingenuousness and gravity. The shepherds, the principal protagonists of the pastoral genre, are present in Charpentier's work, but bland scenes of *galanterie* are here replaced by a depiction of the coming of the Savior.

Each Christmas for at least three years, from 1684 to 1686, Charpentier offered Mlle de Guise a pastorale performed by the musicians of the Hôtel. In 1685 and 1686, he reworked the Pastorale (H483), producing two different versions (H483a and H483b) of the second part of the work. Each of these successive versions, far from

going back over the same *topos*, sets a distinct subject to music. We thought it appropriate to devise a coherent montage of the three versions, thus making it possible to hear Charpentier's composition in its entirety for the first time on disc and concert.

In counterpoint to this pastoral universe, the concert presents another facet of the Christmas season in the Grand Siècle: the *Antiennes 'O' de l'Avent* ("O" antiphons for Advent). These short pieces, the product of a long tradition, were incorporated into the liturgy in the week before Christmas. They seem to have been conceived as a coherent whole, alternating with instrumental *noëls* (exemplified here by *Or nous dites Marie*). All the antiphons share the same rhetorical device: expectation, characteristic of the Advent season, giving way to an impatient yearning for Christ to come (*Veni*). The brevity of these pieces makes them models of eloquence, concision, and beauty.

In the *Antiennes*, as in the *Pastorale H. 483*, Charpentier's inspiration is equal to the poetry of the texts: in both we find the same delicacy, but also outbursts of mystical ecstasy, woven together with a sensibility very much out of the ordinary. The naïveté a modern gaze might see in them is very quickly forgotten, and we are touched by this sincerity, this state of grace in which intrigues have no place: we find ourselves genuinely moved by the mystery of a birth.