



Antonio ZACARA da Teramo (c1350/60 - 1413 or later)

Ferito già d'un amoroso dardo [5:08]

Movit'a pietade [4:16]

Benché lontan me trovi in altra parte [4:56]

Plorans ploravi perché la fortuna [8:31]

Nuda non era, preso altro vestito [5:37]

Le temps verra tam-toust après [4:08]

Spinato intorno al cor (instr) [4:34]

Un fiore gentil m'apparse [4:25]

Rosetta che non canbi may colore [6:32]

Spinato intorno al cor [5:58]

Currentes (Kristin Mulders (soprano), Kjetil Almenning (tenor), Hans Lub (medieval fiddle), David Catalunya (clavisimbalum), Jostein Gundersen (recorder)/Jostein Gundersen
rec. 8-10 October 2010, Hoff Church, Norway. DDD

LAWO CLASSICS LWC 1026 [54:10]

One has to look closely at the frontispiece of this disc to track down the name of the composer to whom it is devoted: Antonio Zacara da Teramo. The last part of his name refers to the town where he was born. The name 'Zacara' is in fact a term of abuse in the dialect and means "a splash of mud". This refers to his severe physical handicap, called phocomelia, a congenital disorder which stunted his growth and resulted in missing fingers. His physical disorder is clearly visible in his portrait in the *Squarcialupi Codex*, in which several of his compositions are preserved. It didn't stop him from making quite a career as a scribe and composer. His life was by no means easy, though, and that was not just due to his physique.

Zacara lived at the time of the *Papal Schism* which lasted from 1378 to 1417 (more about this can be found [here](#)). In the early 1390s he was a member of the chapel of Pope Boniface IX. He was also employed as copier of the apostolic writings by the Papal Chancellery and as teacher of the children at a hospital. After some years he decided to devote himself completely to music and became a singer in the chapel of Pope Innocent VII. After having lost his wife he also lost his only son during a revolt against the Pope. Zacara wrote a remarkably personal madrigal to express his sadness, *Plorans ploravi*. When Gregory XII was elected Pope, some cardinals elected Alexander V in Pisa as Antipope. Zacara had followed them, and as a result he lost his position in Rome. He moved to Florence where he stayed for a number of years. After a while he wanted to return to his former position as singer in the Papal chapel. Since his relationship with the Pope in Rome was severely damaged he associated with Alexander V who died suddenly. He then auditioned for his successor, John XXIII, who resided in Bologna.

The political upheavals connected to the Papal Schism left their mark in Zacara's oeuvre.

Some of his songs have politically subversive texts. The programme on this disc includes a remarkable piece which also refers to the schism: *Le temps verra tam-toust après*. It expresses hope for an end to the conflict: "Very soon the time will come when the faith of Christians will be ordered anew." It ends with a dialogue between Zacara and John XXIII. Zacara composed a relatively large and versatile oeuvre of secular and sacred pieces. His music found wide dissemination and is preserved in various manuscripts. The strong contrasts within the body of his secular songs have raised doubts as to the authenticity of some of them. Some songs are also different in form from what was common in the *ars subtilior*, the dominant musical style of his time in Italy.

There are difficulties with performance of this repertoire. As the ensemble's director, Jostein Gundersen, writes in the booklet, composers left few clues as to how their music was to be performed. This leaves considerable freedom to the performers, and modern interpreters need to invest much energy and time in trying to find out how this music was performed at the time. One of the controversies among experts is the use of instruments: when and where, which and how many? In this recording a 'liberal' stance is taken. Only some pieces are performed with the same number of performers as the number of parts: either two or three. In other cases an instrument plays *colla voce* or even adds a part of its own. There is also much ornamentation in the playing of the instruments. With one exception all the pieces are performed with voice(s) and instruments. Some songs have survived without a text or with an incomplete text. In those cases where some sort of reconstruction was impossible, the textless parts are played.

Not for nothing has the term *ars subtilior* been invented for this repertoire. This is highly complicated music which requires great technical skill from the performers, but also a great deal of concentration. *Plorans ploravi*, for instance, includes very long melismas which have to be sung *legato*, without breaking them up in a baroque manner. As strong as the sentiments in this song are, there is no such thing as text expression. It requires a more or less instrumental performance of the vocal lines. The two singers, Kristin Mulders and Kjetil Almanning, are absolutely convincing in this department. They have fine and very agile voices which are perfectly suited to the repertoire. The blend with the instruments is immaculate. The ensemble may take some liberties in regard to the use of instruments, but it is always decent and tasteful and the instruments never overshadow the voices. Fortunately they didn't include any percussion as that would have been at odds with the essential subtlety of this music.

Zacara da Teramo is definitely one of the most intriguing composers of around 1400. Currentes delivers captivating performances which may inspire the listener to look for more recordings with music by him or from his time. I hope to hear more from this ensemble.

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Captivating performances of music by one of the most intriguing composers of around 1400.