

Sicut Cervus, 1594, Palestrina: A Vocal Performance

Sicut Cervus was composed by one of the most celebrated Renaissance composers, Giovanni Pierluigi de la Palestrina. Palestrina spent most of his life in Italy in various clerical positions and wrote both secular and ecclesiastic pieces, though like so many of his contemporaries, he never took Holy Orders. Palestrina wrote 104 masses, “and composed in every other liturgical genre of his day, as well as nearly 100 madrigals.” (Dickey, 2017)

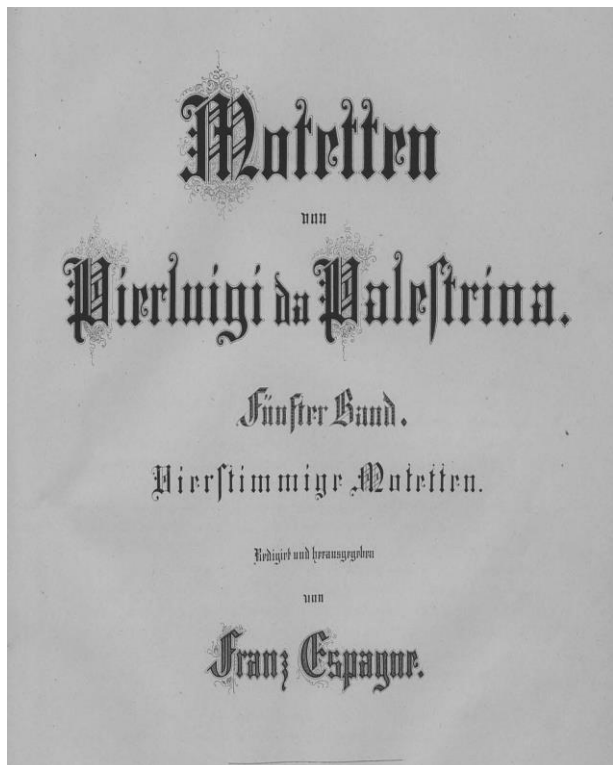


Figure 1 Giovanni Pierluigi de la Palestrina
(BandPalestrina, 2017)

Flamma Chorum has chosen to perform this piece as if meeting with friends for a social gathering in an Italian city, around the year 1604, when this piece was officially published. This piece of sacred music would have been available in the book *Motecta Festorum Liber Secundus Motectorum : Quae Partim Quinis, Partim Senis, Partim Octonis Vocibus Concinuntur*, which translates to 2nd Book of Motets, where part five, or six, or eight words are sung. In spite of the book being published in 1604, the song Sicut Cervus, was composed between 1525-1594 in Italy. The quest to find the extant piece of music was a difficult one. Many Universities were

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called and emails exchanged, it took almost a month but we did successfully find the extant copy of the bass and soprano parts, as well as an early translation of all parts, courtesy of Franz Espagne. Espagne's translation is written in German, yet all of the redactions from the extant piece are in its original Latin. (Espagne, 1875) Please find the extant copy at the end of this documentation.



The image shows a musical score for 'Sicut Cervus' by Palestrina. It is labeled 'Prima Pars. 10.' and is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The score is written for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The lyrics are in Latin: 'Sicut cervus desiderat ad fontes aquarum, sic ut cervus desiderat ad fontes aquarum, sic ut cervus desiderat ad fontes aquarum.' The score is a vocal redaction, meaning it is intended to be sung without instrumental accompaniment. The notation includes various musical symbols such as clefs, notes, rests, and bar lines.

Figure 2 and 3 Motecta Festorum, 1875 Redaction

According to Richard Fuller, keyboardist and worship leader for St. Marys Church in Scarborough, Renaissance church music is described as choral polyphony. (Fuller, 2010) Often times, these songs were referred to as a motet, the simplistic definition of a motet is “a short piece of sacred choral music, typically polyphonic and unaccompanied.” (Manning, 2017) Polyphony refers to having more than a single part sung and “choral polyphony was intended to be sung a cappella.” (Manning, 2017) This performance of Sicut Cervus will be sung with no musical accompaniment in order to keep the original intention of vocal beauty relevant.

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| Original Latin | Psalm 42 |
|--|---|
| Sicut cervus desiderat ad fontes aquarum, ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus. (Psalms, 2017) | As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God (Psalms, 2017) |

Sicut Cervus is a song written using direct wording from Psalm 42 as often songs used in mass settings are. In a beautiful description, author Timothy Dickey describes how this particular piece may have been to the 16th century person:

“To a sixteenth century Catholic mind, the Psalm text "Sicut cervus desiderat ad fontes aquarum" would evoke two extremely important liturgical situations. The first comes once a year, during the Easter Vigil. The Church's celebration of Christ's Resurrection took place on the night before Easter, with a splendid array of liturgical fireworks. The dark penitence of Lent and Holy Week end with the lighting of "new fire," the chant Exultet, the grand Litanies of the Saints, and a service that resounds with "Alleluias." During this service, new converts to the faith would be examined and brought forth for Holy Baptism, and would thus celebrate their first Communion on the day of Christ's victory. Sicut cervus serves as the Tract on this brilliant feast day, sung during the procession to the baptismal font. In this context, the Psalm text resonates with the sacramental waters of Baptism as well as the living water of the Eucharist.” (Dickey, 2017)

In order to enhance the vocal performance, care was taken to present an authentic representation of how the piece may have been sung. As one can see in paintings from the time period, music was an important aspect to social function. When looking at the paintings, one can see the importance of music to the livelihood of a social gathering. Not only that, but when searching, one often comes upon entire family portraits, such as the



Figure 4 Musicians 1502-1550, Belgium

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Van Berchem Family Portrait. Here, the entire family gathers around a center of musicality, as if they all share in the love and art of song.

To maximize authenticity, each choir member is outfitted in clothing indicative of Italian or English dress from the years between 1550-1570. It was important to look the part of

those who may have originally sung the song so as to transport the listener back in time.



Figure 5 Van Berchem family portrait, 1561 (Floris)



Figure 6 Concert of Sacred Musicians 1530 (Burgkmair)

In many works of art created during the 16th century, one can see many musicians gathered around a single book of music while others show the preference for a lectern or music stand. For this performance, due to the size of our choir, we have opted to not gather around a single book of music,

but instead to use a double-sided lectern

like the one you find pictured on the 16th century wood panel painting entitled Concert of Sacred Musicians. If one looks closely they can see that the singers and page turners gather towards the front of the stand, while other musicians stand behind.

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This piece was practiced for a 4-month time period in which Latin pronunciation was extensively studied and honed. The timing and running notation proved to be very challenging and was practiced using single voices, various parts together and as an entire choir. Due to the varied musical training of members, some of whom can read music, some of whom cannot, every practice has been a learning experience. Below you will find a copy of the modernly redacted piece for ease of following along.

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Sicut cervus

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525-1594)

Prima pars

Si - cut cer - vus de -
Si - cut cer - vus de - si - de - rat ad fon -
Si - cut cer - vus de - si - de - rat ad fon - tes a - qua - rum,
Si -
- si - de - rat ad fon - tes a - qua - rum, a - qua -
tes a - qua - rum, si - cut cer -
si - cut cer - vus de - si - de - rat ad fon - tes
- cut cer - vus de - si - de - rat ad fon - tes a - qua - rum,
13
- rum, si - cut cer - vus, de - si - de - rat ad
vus de - si - de - rat ad fon - tes a - qua - rum de - si - de - rat ad
a - qua rum
Si - cut cer - vus de - si - de - rat ad fon - tes de - si - de -

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fon - tes a - qua - rum
fon - tes a - qua -
de - si - de - rat ad fon - tes a - qua - rum i -
- rat ad fon - tes a - qua - rum i - ta

25

i - ta de - si - de -
rum i - ta de - si -
ta de - si - de - rat i - ta de - si - de -
de - si de - rat

31

- rat, i - ta de - si -
de - rat i - ta i -
rat i - ta de - si - de - rat i - ta de - si - de - rat
i - ta de - si - de - rat

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37

de - rat a - ni - ma me -
ta de - si - de - rat a - ni - ma
i - ta de - si - de - rat
i - ta de - si - de - rat de -

43

a ad te De - us
me - a ad te De - us a - ni - ma me - a
a - ni - ma me - a ad te De -
si - de - rat a - ni - ma me - a ad te De -

49

a - ni - ma me - a ad te, De -
ad te De - us ad te De -
us a - ni - ma me - a ad te De -
us a - ni - ma me - a ad te De -

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The image shows a musical score for a vocal performance of 'Sicut Cervus' by Palestrina. It consists of four staves, each representing a different vocal part. The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The second and third staves have a soprano clef (C1) and a key signature of one flat. The fourth staff has a bass clef and a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are: - us. us ad te, De - us. - us ad te, De - us. - us ad te, De - us.


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29 29

CANTVS

IOAN, PETRALOYSII
PRAENESTINI
Motetorum Quatuor Vocibus.
LIBER SECVNDVS.

NVNC DENO IN LVCEM AEDITVS
De Conventu Minimorum Penitentium



1 in 4
SR
18

VENETIIS, Apud Haredem Hieronymi Scoti. M D XCVI.

Prima Pars. 17 37 CANTVS 37

S

Icut cervus desiderat ad fontes aqua-
rum a quarum Sicut cervus desiderat ad fon-
tes a quarum Ita de fi-
derat Ita de siderat Ani-
ma mea ad te De us anima mea ad te De-
us.

Del Palestrina. A 4. Lib. 2. C


Extant Soprano and Bass Parts (Palestrina, 1604)

29 29

CANTVS

IOAN, PETRALOYSII
PRAENESTINI
Motetorum Quatuor Vocibus.
LIBER SECVNDVS.

NVNC DENO IN LVCEM AEDITVS
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Del Palestrina. A 4. Lib. 2. C

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