

Inviolata (after Lusitano)

Anon.

Roderick Williams

[illegible]

Inviolata is an act of homage set on top of another act of homage. When the motet by Josquin des Pres (c. 1450–1521) first appeared in print around 1519, he set the bar high for all composers (and there were several) who followed in his wake. His five-part polyphonic decoration of the ‘*Inviolata, integra et casta es Maria*’ plainsong is in three sections and includes a double canonic cantus firmus running throughout at the fifth. This demonstration of technical expertise feels effortless in Josquin’s hands.

Vicente Lusitano (c. 1520–1561), a Portuguese composer possibly of African descent, took up the challenge and more; he decided to retain the double canon but add extra voices to create an eight-part texture. Lusitano’s neglected place in history has garnered a lot of interest recently and Rory McCleery with the Marion Consort have been powerful advocates for his music. Rory invited me to compose my own response to Lusitano’s *Inviolata* setting. I would be adding a third layer on top of Josquin’s original, as seen through Lusitano’s eyes and then my own.

While I did consider constructing my own eight-part polyphonic texture in kind, I acknowledge that I am no Josquin. Besides which, the harmonic rules that governed Josquin and Lusitano barely apply in my century, which makes the exercise largely redundant. This is something I explore a little by adding my own *musica ficta* (modern-day accidentals) to Part One of Lusitano’s original, before my 21st century harmony takes the music in a different direction.

Instead, thanks to a suggestion from my older brother (who happens to be an expert practitioner of Medieval and early Renaissance polyphony), I thought to go back a stage further even than Josquin’s setting and consider the plainsong itself. This was the original melody and text that inspired the whole chain of compositions and I wondered whether it could be my basis for an exploration of plainsong, homophony, organum and polyphony, a sort of mini-history lesson in music.

Added to this commission was the circumstances of its premiere as a recording. It was devised for a project in which each individual consort voice was recorded separately in order to be played from an individual speaker. The resulting sound installation was arranged in an otherwise empty room, giving an audient member complete freedom to roam and experience the voices individually at point-blank range or together as part of the full consort. This gave me an opportunity to play with sound and space, having singers at times whisper text into one’s ear, as though hearing scraps in the darkness of an abbey cloister. Mixing English with Latin also allowed me to explore the passionate emotion of this Marian text and the extraordinary position Mary holds within the Catholic faith.

What Josquin or Lusitano might make of it we shall never know but the homage to their versions is present within my own.

Roderick Williams, February 2022

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