

GAMBA MUSIC CLUB

ORLANDUS LASSUS

Musica, Dei donum optimi

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Orlandus Lassus (Orlande de Lassus, Orlando di Lasso)
(b. Mons 1532; d. Munich 14 June 1594)

Legend has it that as a choir boy at the church of Saint-Nicolas at Mons the beauty of Lassus's voice caused him to be twice abducted and finally led him to be taken into the service of Ferdinando Gonzaga, Viceroy of Sicily in 1544. By the age of 23 he had already obtained an extensive and varied experience of life with a variety of patrons. It was a sign of his strength of character that in spite of the distractions of court life he found time for the serious study of musical composition.

In 1555 his residence in Antwerp saw his first two publications printed in Venice and Antwerp. In 1556 he dedicated a publication to Antoine Perrenot, Bishop of Arras and it was probably through this patron that Lassus was recommended to the notice of Albert V, Duke of Bavaria. He moved to the court at Munich initially as one of the singers or chamber musicians. In 1558 he married Regina Weckinger and they were to have 4 sons and 2 daughters.

Lassus continued to publish a variety of works, then in 1562 a more important work emerged which showed the master in full possession of all the resources of his art. From 1563, if not earlier, Lassus became full *Kapellmeister* at Munich.

In 1567 Lassus travelled to Venice to engage new singers and instrumentalists for the court. The full complement of the musical staff at that time consisted of 90 members. Lassus continued to publish many works with dedications to Duke William, Albert's son, with whom he stood on a more confidential footing than with his father, which is shown by the large number of preserved letters.

Lassus was always productive and delighted many during his visits and trips to other courts. The French King, Charles IX, is reported to have offered to engage him as a chamber musician with an annual salary of 120 livres. Lassus declined this offer and remained in Munich where he was held in high regard. In 1579 Duke Albert died and under Duke William the court's finances were in an embarrassed condition so he was obliged to reduce the court musicians to 17, but this did not prevent Lassus continuing with numerous publications. 'Musica Dei donum optimi' was published in 'Cantiones sacrae' a 6 in 1594 just after Lassus died on 14 June 1594.