

Performance of “Ich Weiss Mir Ein Meidlein” by Orlando Di Lasso, 1583

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“Ich Weiss Mir Ein Meidlein” is a madrigal composed by Orlando Di Lasso in the year 1583. It is a piece written for 4 part harmony, Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass, without accompaniment. In 1556 Orlando Di Lasso was court appointed as the maestro for Albrecht V, Duke of Bavaria where he remained until his death in 1594. Over the course of his life Orlando Di Lasso wrote over 2,000 songs both religious and secular.

I will be performing this piece in German, as it was intended. In period, this piece would most often have been performed a capella by four to eight vocalists. This is a secular piece, written for performance for the Bavarian Court. Many aristocrats and upper-middle class members of society learned to read music as it was culturally considered part of a well-rounded education. As such, this could have been performed by a nobleman’s daughter at a dinner gathering or by a 4 to 8 part group of musicians with the court as a form of entertainment.

During the mid to late 16th century, madrigals became a widespread form of popular music. The madrigal form of music originated in Italy in the early 16th century but was spread throughout European countries, sometimes under a different title such as ‘chanson’ for the French. Orlando Di Lassus advanced the madrigal, along with many other forms of musical composition, within Germany due to his patronage within the court in Munich.

Because this piece could be performed by different groups of people, there is not a specific type of garb or outfit worn for its performance. I am presenting myself as an upper-middle class soloist, wearing garb from 16th century Germany in the style of Lucas Cranach the Elder’s paintings. Lucas Cranach was court painter to the Electors of Saxony during the 16th century. Not only did this region abut Bavaria, Cranach’s patron, Frederick III, Elector of Saxony’s wife is the daughter of Albert III, Duke of Bavaria. I conjecture the fashion would easily cross-pollinate to both regions, especially as notable worthies are connected between the two courts.

I pulled from multiple paintings by Lucas Cranach the Elder as sources for my creation of this garb and have attached two photos as reference.

While conducting my research I came upon the book “A Performer’s Guide to Renaissance Music” by Jeffery Kite-Powell. In it, the author details the sought after sound and tonality for Renaissance vocalists. According to Kite-Powell “Renaissance music calls for purity of tone, a focused, clear sound without excessive vibrato, the ability to sing lightly and with agility, and the command of a wide range of dynamics...” (ADD SOURCE page 4). Because of this description

I decided to practice this piece using proper diaphragm and breathe control as well as proper vowel and consonant pronunciation to provide a clear sound. While it is difficult for a first soprano to completely remove the use of vibrato, my goal is to perform this piece with a 'bell like quality' rather than 'operatic'. Unfortunately, as we do not have the ability to record the musical performances during the Renaissance, many scholars offer conjecture as to what the 'historical sound' truly is. I am basing my performance sound on information from "A Performer's Guide to Renaissance Music".

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SOURCES

- "List of Works by Orlande De Lassus." http://imslp.org/wiki/List_of_compositions_by_Orlande_de_Lassus#Publications N.p., n.d. Web.
- Toft, Robert. *With Passionate Voice: Re-Creative Singing in 16th-Century England and Ital.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- <http://study.com/academy/lesson/songs-of-the-renaissance-madrigals-and-vocal-parts.html>
- <http://www.mozartsroses.com/facts-and-fun-about-madrigals.html>
- <http://imslp.org/wiki> Sheet music for "Ich Weiss Mir Ein Meidlein"



Painting by Lucas Cranach the Elder, 16th century Germany



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