

Palestrina – The Song of The Songs (2003)

Written by bluesever

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CD 1. 1. *Osculetur me osculo oris sui* 2. *Trahe me post te curremus* 3. *Nigra sum sed Formosa* 4. *Vineam meam con custodivi* 5. *Si ignoras te* 6. *Pulchrae sunt genae tuae* 7. *Fasciculus myrrhae* 8. *Ecce tu pulcher es* 9. *Tota pulchra es amica mea* 10. *Vulnerasti cor meum* 11. *Sicut lilium inter spinas* 12. *Introduxit me rex in cellam* [play](#) 13. *Laeva eius sub capite meo* 14. *Vox dilecti mei* 15. *Surge propera amica mea* 16. *Surge amica mea* 17. *Dilectus meus mihi* 18. *Surgam et circuibo civitatem.*

CD 2.

1. *Adiuro vos filiae Ierusalem* 2. *Caput eius aurum optimum* 3. *Dilectus meus descendit* 4. *Pulchra es amica mea* 5. *Quae est ista quae progreditur* 6. *Descendi in hortum meum* 7. *Quam pulchri sunt gressus tui* 8. *Duo ubera tua sicut duo hinnuli* 9. *Quam pulchra es* 10. *Guttur tuum sicut vinum optimum* 11. *Veni dilecte mi.*

Stanze sopra la Vergine (Petrarca) Il primo libro de madrigali a cinque voci (1581). Spiritual madrigals from The First Book of Madrigals for Five Voices.

12. *Vergine bella, che di sol vestita* 13. *Vergine saggia, e del bel numer'una*

[play](#)

14. *Vergine pura, dogni part'intiera* 15. *Vergine santa, dognigratia piena* 16. *Vergine solal mondo senza esempio* 17. *Vergine chiara e stabile in eterno* 18. *Vergine, quante lagrimho gia sparte* 19. *Vergine, tal e terra e postha in doglia.*

The Hilliard Ensemble: 1. Gillian Fisher, soprano 2. Lynne Dawson, soprano 3. David James, countertenor 4. Michael Chance, countertenor 5. Rogers Covey-Crump, tenor 6. John Potter, tenor 7. Paul Hillier, baritone 8. Michael George, bass. Recorded in 1984.

Palestrina published the work in 1584 under the undemonstrative title of "Fourth Book of Motets", but it is clear from the preface in which he dedicated them to Pope Gregory XIII that he himself was quite aware of their exceptional character: "I have made use", he writes, "of a somewhat more lively style (genere aliquanto alacriore) than I am wont to use in other ecclesiastical songs, for I felt that the subject itself demanded it". The subject, of course, is the mystical union of Christ and the soul, as symbolized in the erotic imagery of the ancient and sometimes obscure Hebrew wedding-song that found its way into the Bible under the title of "The Song of Songs" or "The Song of Solomon". Not surprisingly, its religious relevance has

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always been something of a stumbling-block to the literal-minded; in the middle ages it was usually taken as typifying the union of Christ with his Church, while certain specific verses were taken out of context for use in the cult of the Virgin Mary—"Tota pulchra es", for example, and "Quae est ista quae progreditur" among those which Palestrina has chosen. But from what Palestrina himself says it is clear that his cycle of motets was intended as a celebration neither of the Virgin nor of the Church, but as a spiritual exercise of the kind advocated by Palestrina's contemporary St Philip Neri, the founder of the Oratorians. As such its erotic imagery falls into the same tradition as that of those other sixteenth-century saints, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross—a Roman Catholic expression of the striving for individual union with God that we meet again so often in Bach's cantatas. For this reason it seems to me misleading of the notes which accompany these records to try to impose some kind of detailed sexual narrative on the sequence of verses Palestrina has chosen to set; both his choice of verses and the way in which he has set them makes it clear that this is a meditation of the most idealized kind. ---
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