

IX. Amore Langueo (Midwest Premiere)

I first became aware of this piece in late 2006 when it appeared on a CD by the Schola Cantorum of Oxford. I was immediately astounded by its beauty and awed by its complexity. The 'wall of sound' it created was not the layering of massive, static chords as we might find in the minimalist music of John Tavener or Henry Gorecki, but rather the interweaving of numerous vocal lines, no two being identical, that created a tapestry of sonority. Although the music is clearly written in the English choral idiom, it is strikingly original. I was determined then and there to present this piece to St. Louis, and asked Francis for a copy of the manuscript. On reading through this, though, I realized that our choir had further to go before it could tackle this Everest of a piece, so instead I asked Francis to write a new, shorter work for us. This composition, When David Heard, was generously commissioned for us by Gailya and John Barker, and it has subsequently proved most successful on both sides of the Atlantic. A few years later Professor Kathryn Miller surprised her husband Dan Hanson with another SLCC commission from Francis, Good Day, Sir Christēmas, which you can now hear on our new CD, Saint Louis Firsts. Finally, however, we are ready to embrace Amore Langueo, and I am most grateful to Gailya and John, and Kathy and Dan, for making possible Francis's visit here today, so that he—and you—may hear in person what the distinguished British conductor Jeremy Summerly has described "some of the most simple and directly affecting English music of the twentieth century."

Francis Pott (b. 1957)



Francis Pott

Francis Pott himself has provided the following program note:

The so-called 20th century English musical 'renaissance' saw a reawakened interest in the most glorious genres of the 16th century, but usually stopped short of reinventing its imitative methods. If a work such as Bax's *Mater, Ora Filium* shows awareness of the composite effect of 16th century polyphony, the informing instinct is nonetheless an orchestral one of its own time, using 'block' doublings of triadic material in a fairly parallel fashion. This is a tendency which *Amore Langueo* seeks to avoid by borrowing from early models both their outward manner and something of their technique: no easy task, given the need to expand harmonic language and acceptable dissonance well beyond 16th century limits.

The text comes from two separate versions of a strikingly powerful mediaeval poem (much longer than the extracts used here). Both follow the so-called 'macaronic' practice of adding a Latin refrain at intervals throughout an English text: in this case, just the two words of the title ('I languish for love'), sometimes prefaced by *quia* ('since' or 'because'). I treated these Latin words as a constant, sometimes obsessive undercurrent rising at times to anguished outbursts. The arresting imagery of the poem speaks for itself; but the intention in treating the Latin in such a way is to see the stricken and enigmatic figure, waiting for ever on his lonely hill, as a Christ perpetually returning to Golgotha to be re-crucified within the atrocities of mankind as they re-enact themselves down each successive age.

The narrative parts of the text (before Christ speaks) spur the music to a considerable climax before a semi-chorus (treated much as though it were a single 'Everyman' presence) utters the words *I am True Love, that false was never*. The two choirs interrupt with increasingly anguished repetitions ('*Amore langueo*'), but the narrative of the semi-chorus remains meekly accepting until it reaches the word *die*. Another climax follows in which finally the two choirs resume the English text ('*Long thou and live thou never so high...*'). The soloists respond ('*My love is in her chamber...*'), and this most beautiful passage of the text is set to music that seeks to match its anguished tenderness. A final elevated climax is heard before the music dies gradually away to silence, briefly recalling the music of the opening. The music seeks not so much to end as to recede beyond hearing.

Amore Langueo [1989] was commissioned by and written for the Schola Cantorum of Oxford and their director at that time, the conductor and pianist Howard Moody, with whom they performed it on tour across the USA and at many British venues, including St John's, Smith Square, London.

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In the vale of restless mind, upon a hill I found a tree;
Under this tree a man sitting: *Amore languet*. [I am faint with love]
From head to foot wounded was he;
His heart-blood I saw bleeding: *Amore languet*.

"I am true love that false was never,
My sister, man's soul, I loved her thus,
That I suffered this pain piteous.
I crowned her with bliss, and she me with thorn,
I brought her to worship, and she me to scorn.
I led her to chamber, and she me to die."

"I sit on a hill to see far.
Now from my sight she may not be; in my side have I made her a nest.
Look on me, how wide a wound is there! *Amore languet*."

"My love is in her chamber, hold your peace,
Make no noise, but let her sleep.
My babe suffer no disease,
I may not hear my dear child weep.
What shall I do now with my spouse,
But abide her of my gentleness?
Her chamber is chosen, there is no more.
Look out on me at the window of kindness:
Dear soul, go never me fro!
Long though and love though never so high,
Yet is my love more than thine may be, *Quia amore languet*." [for I am faint with love]
(Anonymous English, 15th century)

SAINT LOUIS FIRSTS CD

Our new compact disc is finally here and should make
an ideal gift to any lover of choral music. We've called it *Saint Louis Firsts*
because all of its eleven tracks were written initially for us. The selections are
both sacred and secular, originate on three continents,
and include everything from carols to a movie soundtrack.
If you've admired any of our commissions in recent years, this CD is for you.
For more information, please see the VoiceMail newsletter
or visit the ticket desk.

Correction

In our new CD, *Saint Louis Firsts*, we inadvertently omitted the name
of one of our splendid sopranos, and so we now take this opportunity
to put the record straight: please add Christine Guthrie to the list of singers
on the disc. Also, note that the two soprano soloists of Judith Bingham's
Aquileia are Erin Caughlan and Jill Clayton.