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Siren Test Concerts

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Jan Sixti of Lerchenfels

JAN SIXTI OF LERCHENFELS

Singer to Rudolf II and Provost of Litoměřice

In Rudolfinian times, not all singers and musicians could make a living through music. They often sought to apply themselves to other professions in order to ensure future income. One example of the successful career of a former imperial singer who did not give up on music after the conclusion of his engagement in the court chapel, is Jan Sixti of Lerchenfels (ca. 1565–1629).

Sixti's biography is unclear. He was born in Prague, his father perhaps a member of the Old Town municipal council. In 1574, he was enrolled in the Jesuit convict of St Bartholomew in the Old Town of Prague (other sources claim he was enrolled in 1582 at the eponymous convict in Plzeň). Ten years later, he became a singer (alto) in the ensemble of Rudolf II. He was probably still active there in 1593 as court chaplain, receiving his wages until the year 1612. He was also a singer of the Marian congregation at the Clementinum, where, in 1593, he also held the position of the musical prefect of the sodality (another term for a male-only congregation). In 1594, he departed for his studies in Olomouc as a papal alumnus (i.e. the recipient of a direct scholarship from the Roman Curia), first defending a bachelor's thesis on the subject "Whether Vocal or Instrumental Music is More Powerful and Sweet", and then a doctorate with the title "Is It True That Poets Fabricate Copiously?", finally being consecrated as a priest a year later. Sixti did not give up on music during his studies in Olomouc, becoming

a prefect of the choir of the Jesuit church and a member of the congregation of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He was also active as a poet in the circle around the Olomouc professor of poetry Johannes Clingerius, with whose help he probably published a poetic description of the Letohrádek Hvězda (which translates as Star Summer Palace) in Prague.

After his return to Prague, he was still listed as a court chaplain and singer, but in truth, he applied himself more to developing his career as a clergyman. In 1601, he received a coat of arms and the nobiliary "of Lerchenfels", a year later, he was named the Archdeacon of Plzeň, and he continued collecting positions: canon at St Vitus' Cathedral in Prague, Stará Boleslav, Budyšín (Bautzen), and Vyšehrad in Prague, where he was named dean in 1613. Through his loyalty, hefty diplomacy, and appropriately timed occasional prints, he managed to curry the favour of three successive Holy Roman Emperors – Rudolf II, Matthias, and finally also Ferdinand II. In 1617, he was awarded the rank of the Litoměřice provost as a special demonstration of Ferdinand's

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A depiction of the seven liberal arts; the swan symbolises music, copper engraving
(*Emblemata VII artes liberales*, Olomouc: Georg Handelius 1597)

Title page of the second edition of the Star Summer Palace (*Stella Boemica*, Prague: Tobias Leopoldus 1617)

favour. He also operated a private printing press in Litoměřice, having bought it from the estate of the deceased Prague printer Tobiáš Leopold. Its operation served Catholic propaganda, but Sixti also used it to publish his own occasional prints.

He was knighted in 1623 and died in Litoměřice six years later. Sixti took a great liking to the eight-year-old Bohuslav Balbín (later a famous historian and proponent of the Czech language), whom he also remembered in his will (though Balbín never ultimately received the inheritance). In his *Bohemia docta*, Balbín has the following to say of Sixti: “He was a highly educated man and wrote much prose and poetry. This, however, was not enough, so he set his own poems to music.”

The Star, the Swan, and Philippe de Monte. Sixti as an Author in Latin and Czech

Linked to the youth and studies of Jan Sixti is Latin poetry, which he wrote himself at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, and which he also received from numerous friends. Again and again, we encounter music, which was of paramount importance to him at the time, and through which he was perceived by those around

him. In a congratulatory print for the Olomouc graduates, which takes the forms of the symbols of the seven liberal arts, Sixti was grouped with *Musica* and its symbolic swan, which signifies song and poetry. In another occasional poetic print, which is dedicated to Sixti on his graduation, his schoolmate Franciscus Mollerus from Vienna (also a singing colleague from both the imperial choir and the Clementinum congregation, where he replaced Sixti as cantor in 1594), showers him with praise and describes the procession of musicians waiting to congratulate Sixti:

Sixti crowns his temples with laurels, oft the musician of the Emperor himself. All musicians applaud this honour, those who have mixed with the angels in heaven, and also those who are still nurtured by Mother Earth: Philipp de Caesareo Monte, the current Capellmeister, Orlando di Lasso, known around the world, Josquin, Regnart, Clemens Non Papa, the three Sayves, Vaet, Porta, Pinellus, Stabilis, Vecchi, Sale, Camillus, Clavius, Gabriel, Praenestinus, Marenzius and Iovanellus, Luython, Wert, Victoria, Asula and Handl.

On the woodcut depiction of Poetry, who is crowning Jan Sixti with a laurel wreath on the occasion of his graduation, the accompanying



A woodcut of Poetry giving Sixti a laurel for being awarded his doctorate (Franciscus Mollerus, *Melicum poema*, Olomouc: Georg Handelius 1597)

inscription refers to Sixti as *Musicus*, rewarded by poetry by verse and also crowned by her.

Philippe de Monte, on his way to a musical feast at the Letohrádek Hvězda, is described by Sixti in his poem *Stella Boemica*, first published in 1597 under the pseudonym Julius Torzarrellianus, republished again twenty years, slightly edited and under his own name.

Philipp de Caesareo Monte recently walked accompanied by the imperial choir to a beautiful palace in the shape of a star...

In the 1617 version, the character is replaced with the Capellmeister of Emperor Matthias, Christopher Strauss.

After the conclusion of his studies, Sixti only wrote poetry occasionally. His poems, which include those of the *poesis artificiosa* type (poetry based on formal play that often involves both text and image), betray the training of Johannes Clingerius. One of Sixti's last poetic prints is *Luscinia coelestis* (*The Celestial Nightingale*) from 1599; an epicedium for Mikuláš Popel of Lobkovicz: As for Sixti's last extensive poetic work, this was the occasional poetry print *Stella stellae* (*The Star of the Star*), with which he celebrated Ferdinand II and his victory at the Battle of White Mountain in 1620.

As part of his career as a clergyman, Sixti was famed as a popular preacher. Several of his sermons were published in print in Czech, such as the funeral oration for Kryštof Popel



Copper engraving of the Lobkovicz coat of arms from an epicedium by Mikuláš Popel of Lobkovicz (*Luscinia coelestis*, Prague: Václav Marin of Jenčice 1599)

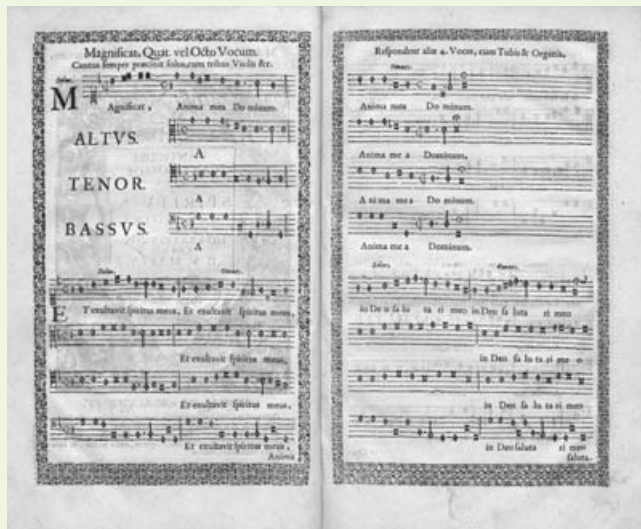
of Lobkovicz or Zdeněk of Šternberk. He also translated religious prints about the lives of the saints from German to Czech, including treatises on St Norbert, St Catherine, and St John the Apostle. Furthermore, he translated the medieval benedicamen *Johannes postquam senuit* (*After John Aged*) from Latin to Czech (the benedicamen was a form popular in the Middle Ages – settings of the *Benedicamus Domino*, often involving early forms of polyphony).

Sixti the Musician

Sixti is an example of a broadly educated person, devoted to the ruling Habsburg dynasty and the Catholic institutions that educated him, supported him existentially, shaped him, and supported him financially. Numerous mentions of music as the dominant interest of his life confirm the fact that he was a talented musician. His disposition, supported by his being a singer at the court since childhood, turned him into a sought-after and capable performer capable not only of singing but also of directing an ensemble. His musical education included the foundations of composition and music theory. He made use of this too, particularly towards the end of his life, when, as the owner of a printing press and provost of the Litoměřice chapter, in 1626, he published a minor occasional print, *Trino et uni laus, honor, virtus, gloria, triumphus et victoria* etc., with which he



Depiction of the symbol of the Star in the *Stella stellae* print (Prague: s. t., 1621)



An extract from the notation of *Magnificat anima mea Dominum* (*Trino et uni laus*, Litoměřice: s. t., 1626)

celebrated the victory of the Catholic League, under the leadership of Johann Tserclaes, Count of Tilly, over the Protestant army of Danish king Christian IV at the Battle of Lutter.

In addition to its dedication and several laudatory texts, the Litoměřice print also contains nine notated compositions to which Jan Sixti claims authorship. The most extensive of these is the four-voice *Magnificat, quatuor vel octo vocum* (*Magnificat for four or eight voices*), written in a simple homophonic style, alternating with an almost monotonous regularity between choral passages with sections for the solo voice and a simple instrumental accompaniment. The piece cannot be considered a particularly original work, let alone an exceptional one. Rather, it is an example of a successful school exercise with which the adept of composition could proven his knowledge of homophonic voice leading. Even so, the piece is dedicated to the Empress Eleonora Gonzaga, wife of Emperor Ferdinand II.

The second longest piece in the collection is the laudatory hymn *Tē Deum laudamus ... harmonia quatuor vocum*, which, according to the introductory dedication, was composed by Jan Sixti in the 1590s. Despite the employment of short passages suggestive of imitative technique, it is, again, a rather declamatory piece, composed in a style that attempted to respond to the transformation of musical style

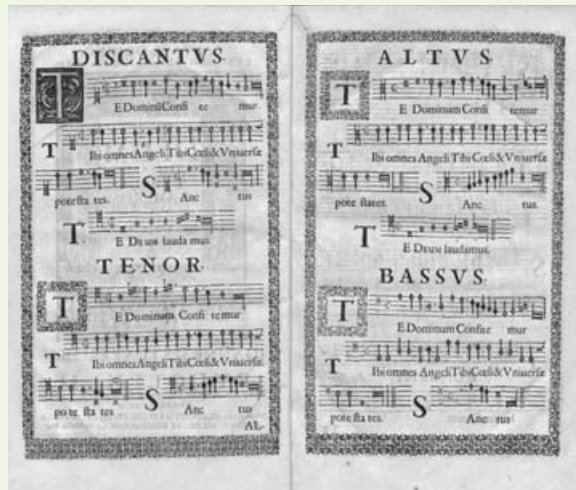


Title page of the print *Trino et uni laus, honor, virtus, gloria, triumphus et victoria* etc., (Litoměřice: s. t., 1626)

around the year 1600. It must be said, however, that it does so without providing any original contribution. The published version includes settings of only the odd lines of the hymn. We can therefore assume that the even lines were to be interpreted chorally.



Title page of the composition *Te Deum* (*Trino et uni laus*, Litoměřice: s. t., 1626)



An extract of the notation of *Te Deum* (*Trino et uni laus*, Litoměřice: s. t., 1626)



Victoriosi duces (*Trino et uni laus*, Litoměřice: s. t., 1626)

The remaining pieces in Sixti's anthology are contrafacts, created by adding new text to pieces of Italian origin well known at the time, described as lauda (spiritual songs). The exception to the rule is *Amor vittorioso*, a popular homorhythmic madrigal by Giuseppe Gastoldi from his 1591 collection *Balletti a cinque voci*, with new lyrics and in a new arrangement. Sixti provided this piece, with its simple melody and distinctive chorus, with several new texts: the most important is a collection of four stanzas in four languages (Latin, Czech, German, and Italian) that were used in Bohemia at the time and which celebrate the victory of the empire in the Battle of White Mountain. Then, there are three spiritual texts: the first, in Latin, is intended for the celebration of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, the second, in Czech, celebrates the resurrection, and the third, also in Czech, the birth of Jesus Christ.

Jan Sixti of Lerchenfels is an excellent example of an average poet and musician who significantly expressed his political and confessional positions and institutional relations in both his music and poetry, making him one of the few pre-White-Mountain Catholic intellectuals who deserve the attention of both researchers and the general public. His life and work are an excellent reflection of this complex time of religious strife and the beginnings of the Thirty Years' War.