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The Play of The Risen Christ

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THE NEW YORK PRO MUSICA
John Reeves White, Musical Director

THE PLAY OF THE RISEN CHRIST

8:30 P.M., March 10, 1970
Cannon Memorial Chapel
University of Richmond
“The Play of the Risen Christ,” which begins the “Manuscript 927” of the Tours Library in France, has proven to be one of the most interesting and valuable survivors of thirteenth-century drama. The anonymous composers, in attempting to bring together all of the events surrounding the Resurrection, created some of the most poignant medieval poetry and music one can encounter.

The problems of reconstructing this play have been somewhat greater than those in the “Play of Daniel” and the “Play of Herod.” The Tours manuscript has several lacunae and at times the scribe, while copying the music, managed to scramble the chronology of some of the events. By following the Biblical accounts and borrowing three short passages from the thirteenth-century Easter Play in Cividale “Manuscript C1,” it has been possible to revive this play after 700 years of silence.

The play opens with the lament of the three Marys, “Almighty Father most high, gentlest ruler of the angels, what shall we three miserable ones do? Alas! how great is our sorrow!” Pilate sends his soldiers to guard the tomb so that the disciples will not be able to steal the body. The Marys purchase some ointment from the merchants before going to the tomb. The archangel Michael, who has overcome the soldiers and rolled away the stone, meets the Marys at the empty tomb. He tells them of the resurrection, and sends them to bring the disciples from Galilee.

Meanwhile, the fearful soldiers return to Pilate and tell him about the visitation of the archangel. Pilate, fearing an uprising among the populace, gives a bribe to the soldiers and commands them to keep secret the news of the resurrection.

Mary Magdalen, not comprehending the meaning of the angel’s message, returns to the tomb and sings her poignant lament, “O Master! O would that I might see thee with these eyes.” When Jesus does appear, she mistakes him for a gardener and recognizes him only when he says her name, “Maria.”

The disciples and the Marys return together, singing a hymn of praise, and Jesus appears to them. Later, doubting Thomas joins the gathering, but refuses to believe their joyous news until he touches with his own hand the marks of the spear and nails on the body of the risen Christ. The play concludes with the dramatized presentation of the Easter sequence, “Victima Paschali Laudes,” which recapitulates the major events of the resurrection and presents the sacred relics to the disciples. Then follows the final hymn, Te Deum Laudamus, which also ends “The Play of Daniel” and “The Play of Herod.”

The various medieval Easter Plays are all historically descendant from the “Quem quaeritis” trope sung before the Introit for the Mass of Easter Sunday. In the tenth century, this trope was moved to Easter Matins, the service that begins in the late hours of the night and ends at dawn. It was then slowly expanded as various scenes were added according to the Biblical accounts and acted out in costume. “The Play of the Risen Christ” is one of the latest and most detailed of innumerable thirteenth-century Easter dramas.
THE PLAY OF THE RISEN CHRIST

CAST OF CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

Mary Magdalen .......................................................... Elizabeth Humes
Mary Jacobi .............................................................. Joan Fuerstman
Mary Salome ............................................................. Mary Strebing
Pilate ................................................................. Edward Pierson
Soldiers to Pilate ........................................... Robert Kuehn, Neil Raber, Stanley Norsworthy
The Archangel Michael ......................................... Ray DeVoll
Merchant ............................................................. Mark Pearson
Merchant's Apprentice ........................................ Daniel Collins
Jesus ................................................................. Mark Pearson
Peter ............................................................... Robert Kuehn
John ................................................................. David Evitts
Andrew .............................................................. Stanley Norsworthy
James ............................................................... Neil Raber
Bartholomew ........................................................ Edward Pierson
Thomas .............................................................. Daniel Collins

PRODUCTION STAFF FOR THE PLAY OF THE RISEN CHRIST

Musical Direction ........................................... John Reeves White
Stage Direction ................................................ Ross Allen
Editors ......................................................... Ron Reinoehl, William Earle Nettles
Scenic Design .................................................. Donald Beaman
Costume Design ............................................... Anne Hollander
Lighting Design ............................................... Len Alexander
Musicological research ................................ Ron Reinoehl
Scenic Design .................................................. William Earle Nettles

Costumes executed by Diego
Lighting equipment by Bash Stage Lighting

PRODUCTION STAFF FOR THE NEW YORK PRO MUSICA

Musical Director ........................................... John Reeves White
General Manager ............................................... Len Alexander
Administrative Assistant ................................... Sue Simms
Company Manager .............................................. Frederick Horstmann
Research Associate ........................................... J. Evan Kreider

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