

A Voice in Turmoil - Musical Settings of Catullus's *Odi et Amo*:
Opportunities Grasped and Missed

The briefest of Catullus's poems is perhaps his most famous, and yet it presents particular challenges to the composer who would put it to music. This paper documents four such attempts, made over four centuries, and discusses their various strengths and weaknesses. Such value judgments are based upon certain criteria, the chief of which assesses whether the composer is demonstrating sufficient comprehension and fluency with the language to complement the poet's message. However, there are other factors that contribute to a thorough evaluation of such a musical setting. Within the stylistic parameters of a given period, does the composer reflect, adapt or ignore Catullus's own musical elements, from overall rhythm to individual elements of sound, such as assonance and onomatopoeia? Is the best use made of the musical forces mustered to present the new version of the poem?

Each attempt to set Catullus 85 is introduced with a short biographical note on the composer, followed by a recorded excerpt of the setting. These composers range from the 16th century Bohemian, Jakob Handl, to the German-Swiss, Carl Orff, who is followed by two contemporary composers - from the USA, Dominick Argento and from Latvia, Ugis Praulins.

Following these sound samples, the paper poses a new question: how much do these modern artists owe to their ancient forbear? Would Catullus have objected to their use of his creation, or might he have reveled in their attention? Should we regard these composers as successors to Publius Licinius Calvus, the poet's 'sparring partner', or to the overblown Suffenus of Catullus 22?

Works Cited (and from which brief excerpts will be played)

Jakob Handl: Odi et Amo (Saint Louis Chamber Chorus)

Carl Orff: Catulli Carmina (Niederaltaicher Scholaren)

Dominick Argento (Dale Warland Singers)

Ugis Praulins: Odi et Amo (Riga Dom Choir, Latvia)

This 15 minute paper requires the use of a CD player (with speakers), and will be supported by a handout provided by the presenter.