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*Schütz Recounts His Career*

With the publication of his third book of *Symphoniae sacrae* in 1651, Heinrich Schütz (1585–1672) made this formal request to be relieved of his duties as chapel musician to the Elector of Saxony. His career, as he relates it, reveals much about the musical climate of the early Baroque. Italy was regarded everywhere as the center and seat of musical innovation. Schütz played a leading role in bringing the new styles pioneered by Gabrieli and Monteverdi to northern Europe.

With the present most submissive tribute of my little work, now brought out under Your Highness' exalted name, I am prompted to touch somewhat upon the rather toilsome life I have led from youth until now. I beg with deep devotion that Your Highness will not be wholly undisposed to receive this letter with favor and to examine it at your leisure.

Not long after I had come into this World (in the year 1585, on St. Burckhard's day), indeed already in my thirteenth year, I left my late parents' house in Weissenfels and have always lived abroad from that time forward. First, I served for several years as chorister at the Court Chapel of my Lord the Landgrave Moritz in Cassel, but was kept at School and brought up to learn Latin and other tongues as well as Music.

And as it was never my late parents' wish that I should make music my profession then or later, I betook myself at their prompting to the University of Marburg after I had lost my treble voice, my intention being to pursue, besides music, those other studies in which I had made a beginning, pick a definite profession, and afterwards gain in it an honorable station. But this purpose of mine was soon unsettled (doubtless through the will of God), for my Lord the Landgrave Moritz came to Mar-

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burg one day (he may perhaps have observed, while I was employed as chorister at his court, that nature had endowed me with some aptitude for music) and recommended to me the following course of action: since at that time a very famous if elderly musician and composer [Giovanni Gabrieli] was still alive in Italy, I was not to miss the opportunity of hearing him and gaining some knowledge from him. And the aforementioned Princely Highness ordered that a yearly stipend of 200 thalers be presented to me for the journey. Then (being a young man, and eager to see the world besides) I quite willingly accepted the recommendation with submissive gratitude, whereupon I set out for Venice in the year 1609, against my parents' wishes. On my arrival (and after I had stayed with my master for a while), I soon observed the weightiness and difficulty of the study which I was undertaking in composition, and how unfounded and poor a beginning I had made in it till then; and I repented very much, therefore, that I had turned away from those studies which are common at the German universities and in which I had already made some progress. Nevertheless, I resigned myself to be patient and to apply myself to the task that had brought me there. Wherefore I put aside all my previous studies from then on and studied only music with all possible diligence, to see how far I might succeed in it. Then with God's help I made such progress in it, in all modesty, that three [actually two] years after (and one year before I returned from Italy) I had my first small musical work [a book of madrigals] printed there in the Italian tongue, to the particular acclaim of the most distinguished musicians then at Venice, and sent it thence to my Lord the Landgrave Moritz (to whom I also dedicated it in submissive gratitude). Having published my aforesaid first small work, I was exhorted and encouraged not only by my preceptor Gabrieli, but also by the other most distinguished musicians there, to persevere in the study of music, for I should enjoy excellent successes therein. And as I remained one more year after this (although at my parents' expense) in order to learn somewhat more from these studies, it happened that my above-mentioned preceptor died in Venice, whom I accompanied to his place of rest. On his deathbed, he had arranged out of special affection that I should receive one of the rings he left behind as a remembrance of him; this was indeed presented and handed to me after his death by his Father Confessor, an Augustinian monk (from the cloister at which Dr. Luther once sojourned). The grant I had received from my Lord the Landgrave Moritz in Marburg was ended, for whoever wished to learn from that supremely gifted man might not absent himself longer than I had.

Now when I left Italy for the first time in the year 1613 and returned to Germany, I privately resolved to hold back for a few years the good musical foundations I had by then acquired and hide them until I should have schooled them somewhat further, whereupon I could bring honor upon myself through the publication of a meritorious work. Now, too, I did not lack for counsel and inducement from my parents and kinsfolk

whose opinion, briefly, was that I should endeavor to use my qualities, slight as they were, and seek advancement by other means, and treat music as a secondary matter. At length I was prevailed upon to heed their repeated, ceaseless admonitions and was on the point of seeking out the books I had previously put aside. But as God the Almighty ordained (who without doubt had set me apart from birth for the profession of music), I was engaged to come here to Dresden and serve at the impending Princely baptism of my Lord and Duke August, the present administrator of the Magdeburg Archbishopric, in the year 1614. And having come here and undergone an examination, I was forthwith most graciously offered the direction of your music in Your Highness' name. Whereupon my parents and kinsfolk, and I too, felt the presence of the unalterable will of God; and so my wandering was at an end. And I was prompted not to reject the honorable condition I had been offered but to accept it with most submissive gratitude and to vow I would take charge of the direction with all the diligence at my disposal. Your Highness will, I hope, recollect in some measure what my slight, yet not careless, functions have been since the year 1615, that is, for over 35 years. And I do indeed praise the charity and mercy God has shown me so far in that, besides my private studies and the publication of various musical works, I have waited most submissively on Your Highness from the beginning of my direction at many and sundry solemnities which have occurred the while, such as imperial, royal, electoral, and princely meetings at home and abroad, but more especially your own beloved children's weddings one and all, no less than their Christian baptisms. Now I most heartily wish that I could continue having charge over Your Highness' court chapel in the manner practiced by me until now; but I cannot by any means trust myself or venture to serve it fittingly any longer, nor uphold at my present age the rather good name I gained in younger years: not only because of the ceaseless studying, traveling, writing, and other constant labors in which I have, in all modesty, been engaged since youth, but also because old age has now come upon me, and my sight and vital strength have waned.

For as my strength declines still further, it may befall me as it did a not badly qualified old cantor living in a noted place. I knew him well, and he wrote to me over a period of time and complained bitterly that his young town councilors were most displeased with the antiquated style of his music, and would, therefore, gladly be rid of him; that therefore they had explicitly told him to his face, at the Town Hall, that a Thirty Years' Tailor and a Thirty Years' Cantor were quite useless in this world [Schütz makes sardonic reference to the Thirty Years' War, which had ended three years previously], for it cannot but be that the young world tends soon to tire of the old customs and fashions, and to change them.