

# UConn COLLEGIUM MUSICUM

## Johann Joseph Fux as Janus A Mass from Imperial Vienna, ca. 1730 (Excerpt)

### Notes on the Program

In ancient Roman religion and myth, Janus is the god of beginnings, duality, passages, and endings. He is typically depicted with two faces — one looking forward, the other backward. The month of January is named for him, since it marks the passage from an old year to a new one. Looking “backward,” or being aware of music history, is essential to the practice of “classical” music, but this was not commonplace until the nineteenth century. Before that time, music of the past was often rejected, even though the stated goal of many musicians was to reproduce the purported effects of the music of ancient Greece and Rome.

Johann Joseph Fux (1660–1741) was exceptional in that he revered old music enough to study it in detail, but he was also quite forward-looking. Like other church musicians during the baroque period (roughly 1600–1750), he composed in two styles: the *stile antico*, which represented the music of the sixteenth century, and the *stile moderno*, which represented the latest musical fashions. Today, Fux is best known among musicologists for his treatise *Gradus ad Parnassum* (“Steps to Mount Parnassus”) which explained the *stile antico*, particularly the music of Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (ca. 1525–1594). Fux’s treatise was so successful that it was read by the likes of Haydn and Beethoven two generations later. But Fux was also a celebrated composer in his own time, serving three different Holy Roman Emperors in Vienna. He was far more famous during his lifetime in the German-speaking world than J. S. Bach, for example, and Bach’s son claimed his father’s admiration for Fux was above that of all other composers.

Our program for the Young Performer’s Festival is an excerpt of a full program we performed last April: a liturgical reconstruction of a mass the way that Fux could have celebrated it at St. Stephen’s Cathedral, Vienna, where he was *Kapellmeister*, in about 1730. Our overall goal is to consider what this music meant to Fux and the other people who made and heard it, but also to explore several aspects of his musical practice. First, we aim to demonstrate the Catholic Latin mass as it might have been performed at St. Stephen’s. Second, as part of the performance practice of such a mass, we aim to contrast *a cappella* works of the *stile antico* — such as the motets on our program by Felice Anerio (ca. 1560–1614), Palestrina, and (in our original program) Fux’s own five-voice *Asperges me* — with the *stile moderno* works embodied by Fux’s mass, which features trumpets, strings, and organ continuo. Another feature of such a mass was plainchant, most likely performed in a relatively medieval way, since churches of substantial age were exempt from reforms that changed the sound of plainsong. Third, we aim to show how instrumental music could also have been incorporated into such a mass, and how music by a complex web of composers could have contributed: Johann Heinrich Schmelzer (1623–1680) was Fux’s predecessor in the role of imperial *Kapellmeister* whose son stood as witness to Fux’s marriage.

## Historical and Liturgical Context

The starting point for our concert is a score of the *Missa Sancti Joannis Nepomucensis* in an autograph manuscript (i.e., in Fux's own handwriting). This is extremely rare: no other autograph manuscripts of scores by Fux exist. An edition of the mass was edited by Ramona Hocker and Rainer J. Schwob and published by the Austrian Academy of Sciences in 2016; the following summary owes much to their helpful introduction. (The piece was virtually unknown until this edition appeared, and our performance in April seems to have been the North American premiere of the work.) The manuscript's title page reveals nothing about a possible commissioner, occasion, or first performance, but the saint, John of Nepomuk, whose feast day the mass celebrated, was increasingly revered throughout the 1720s. This reverence was reinforced by the imperial Habsburg monarchy, which fostered the beatification and canonization of John of Nepomuk in 1721 and 1729, respectively.

At first, John of Nepomuk would seem to be a strange figure for an eighteenth-century Holy Roman Emperor to support. An imperial predecessor, Wenceslaus IV, had ordered John's execution in 1393. Like many late-medieval rulers, Wenceslaus, who was King of Bohemia and Germany as well as presumptive emperor, sought to maintain order in his kingdoms through control of abbots and bishops. John had been made a cathedral vicar in the service of Johann von Jenstein, the Archbishop of Prague. John's transgression against Wenceslaus was that—during the long Papal Schism that was then underway—he had helped the archbishop appoint an abbot who supported the pope in Rome rather than the Wenceslaus's favored one in Avignon. While the archbishop and his retinue were able to escape, John had no intercessor among the nobility and was sentenced to torture and death by drowning in the Vltava River. According to a subsequent legend, Emperor Ferdinand III dreamed of John as a Catholic warrior the night before the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620—a battle that resulted in Bohemia becoming Catholic and Ferdinand being crowned its king. His cult slowly spread from St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague, where his remains still lie, throughout Bohemia and eventually to Vienna. Emperor Charles VI (1685–1740) recognized the political importance of binding Austria and Bohemia with closer religious ties than they had previously had, leading him to urge John's beatification and eventual canonization by Pope Benedict XIII in 1729.

While the canonization led to Fux's polyphonic setting of the mass ordinary (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei), the proper chants (Introit, Gradual, Tract, Offertory, and Communion) would likely have been the standard chants for the veneration of one martyr saint, as it was very unusual for new plainchant to be composed in the eighteenth century. We have relied on the standard plainchant book published by the monks of Solesmes, the *Liber Usualis*, as our source for these chants. Because the date of John's martyrdom, March 20, fell during the penitential season of Lent, the Tract *Desiderium animae* was to be sung instead of an Alleluia; we have substituted a polyphonic setting of this text by Anerio. Palestrina's setting of the *Pater noster* is likewise substituted for its plainchant counterpart. The instrumental music that we interspersed—by turns festive and contemplative and exemplified here by Schmeltzer's *Harmonia*—reflects the increased use of such supplemental music in both the Protestant and Catholic liturgies.

—Eric Rice

**About the Director:** Musicologist and conductor **ERIC RICE** is Professor and Head of the Music Department at the University of Connecticut, where he teaches music history and directs the Collegium. He is the 2019 recipient of Early Music America's Thomas Binkley Award for excellence in performance and scholarship. He also directs Ensemble Origo, hailed by *The New York Times* as "a fine, flexible ensemble," creating concerts and recordings that reflect early repertory's original context. His books are *Music and Ritual at Charlemagne's Marienkirche in Aachen* and *Young Choristers, 650-1700*, and his articles have appeared in numerous journals. He holds degrees from Columbia and Bowdoin College.

**About the Ensemble:** During J. S. Bach's lifetime (1685–1750), a *collegium musicum* was a group of amateur musicians, primarily university students, who met to rehearse and perform for pleasure. The term is commonly used today to refer to ensembles of instrumentalists and singers that perform early music in a historically-informed way.

Founded by the late Dr. Bruce Bellingham in 1976, the UConn *Collegium* consists of around twenty-four singers and fifteen instrumentalists. Its purpose is to promote an understanding of the music of the late Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Baroque period with regard to style, performance practices, and cultural milieu through rehearsal and performance. Students have access to UConn's extensive collection of period instruments.