

## Preface

Buxtehude's *O clemens, o mitis, o coelestis Pater* (BuxWV 82) is one of the most beautiful and intimate vocal works for a relatively small formation. Like *Laudate pueri* (BuxWV 69)<sup>1</sup> and *Mit Fried und Freud* (BuxWV 76),<sup>2</sup> it is a piece for one or two singers and an instrumental ensemble that is best made up of instruments of the viola da gamba family.

This work is a setting of a composite text that is based on Luke 15 and various Psalm verses. Liturgically, this piece cannot be assigned to any specific date in the church year. On the contrary, it undoubtedly had its place in church services that had to do with confession and penitence. The Latin text reads:

O clemens, o mitis, o coelestis Pater,  
peccavi in te et in coelum ipsum,  
non sum dignus qui filius tuus dicar,  
o clemens, o mitis, o coelestis Pater.

Paterna enim tua bonitate et leni imperio  
ad meam perditionem turpiter abiisus sum.  
Fac me, Pater, sicut unum ex mercenariis tuis,  
o clemens, o mitis, o coelestis Pater.

Pasce et recrea me, coelestis, tua gratia,  
ut sic confortatus tibi in tua domo  
cum puritate et iustitia  
per omnes vitae meae dies  
inservire et ministrare possim,  
o clemens, o mitis, o coelestis Pater.

English translation:

Oh gracious, oh gentle, oh heavenly Father,  
I have sinned against you and against heaven itself,  
I am not worthy to be called your son,  
oh gracious, oh gentle, oh heavenly Father.

For from your fatherly kindness and from your gentle dominion  
I have shamefully strayed, to my own undoing.  
Make me like one of your hired servants,  
oh gracious, oh gentle, oh heavenly Father.

Comfort and enliven me again, oh heavenly one, through your mercy,  
so that I, thus strengthened, in your house can be,  
in purity and justness,  
all the days of my life  
at your service,  
oh gracious, oh gentle, oh heavenly Father.

The work is preserved in two manuscripts in the Dübén Collection:

**S1: S-Uu Vok. Mus. i hskr. 84:39-42**, score in tablature. Title: "O clemens, o mitis / o Coelestis Pater / Sop: solo è 4 strom: / Dit: Buxteh." The score contains four instrumental parts, a vocal part, and a figured bass part.

**S2: S-Uu Vok. Mus. i hskr. 51:18**, individual parts. Title: "Motetto à cinq: voc: / O Clemens ò mitis o Coelestis / pater. / Soprano solo Con quatre viole / di Sign: / Dieterico Buxtehude." The parts are labeled: "Soprano" (soprano clef), "Violino" (treble clef), "Violetta" (soprano clef), "Violetta 2<sup>da</sup>" (alto clef), "Viola 4<sup>ta</sup>" (bass clef), "Continúo" (figured), "Basso continuo" (figured; except for small differences, identical to the

<sup>1</sup> Dieterich Buxtehude, *Laudate pueri Dominum – Chiaccona für 2 sopranos, 6 viols, and b.c.*, ed. G. and L. von Zadow (Heidelberg: Edition Güntersberg, 2007), G123.

<sup>2</sup> Dieterich Buxtehude, *Mit Fried und Freud – Funereal Music for soprano, bass, and strings*, ed. G. and L. von Zadow (Heidelberg: Edition Güntersberg, 2007), G110.

other continuo part). This set of parts also includes a part for “Hautbois” containing the music of the violin part transposed a tone lower; this part was not employed for our edition.

The exact date of composition is not known. Kerala Snyder gives 1675 as the year in which the manuscript in the Düben Collection was copied.<sup>1</sup> The string parts (“quatre viole”) are for soprano, alto, tenor, and bass instruments, which because of their narrow ranges could be performed on various types of instruments. The term “Violetta” was generally employed for instruments on middle parts. It could thus indicate the smaller instruments of the viola da gamba family (treble and tenor viols, according to today’s usage) or violas da braccio. An instrumentation with four viols or with violin and three viols probably corresponds closest to Buxtehude’s intention.

Kerala Snyder suggests designating the work a “sacred concerto,” since the term “motet” is usually reserved for compositions without instruments.<sup>2</sup> We have nevertheless decided to retain the original term “Motetto.”

Our new edition has been prepared for practical use, but follows the two sources as closely as possible. In cases of doubt, we have given preference to the older source (S1). The clefs found in S2 have been retained for the most part; only the original soprano clef has been replaced by treble clef. This also makes it possible to have the string parts played by a modern string quartet. We had at our disposal three models for the bass figuring (S1 and the two bass parts of S2), which differ from one another in various details. In such cases, we selected the variant that seemed the most sensible to us.

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Titelblatt der Quelle Q2  
 Title page of the source S2

<sup>1</sup> Kerala J. Snyder, *Dieterich Buxtehude: Organist in Lübeck*, rev. edn. (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007), p. 339.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.