

## MICHAEL PRAETORIUS (1571–1621) and a *Flowering* of Lutheran Worship



### Praise for Praetorius through the Ages

“I have not heard or experienced anything like it before or since. ... [A] person’s heart could have literally leaped for joy. ... I think there were many people there who had not heard such music in their lifetime.” — *Gottfried Staffel, Naumburg town warden, c. 1622, recalling performances of Praetorius’s music, directed by Praetorius, in 1614*

“Extremely outstanding music... [E]veryone, whether in high station or low, was delighted with it and marveled at it.” — *Matthias Hoe von Hoeneegg, preacher, 1614, referring to the same performances*

“Widely renowned, accomplished, and outstanding musician highly gifted by God” — *Michael Altenburg, pastor and composer, 1620*

“He strove to elevate music and to accomplish much within that field, and the work itself proves the craftsman in that regard.” — *Peter Tuckermann, pastor, 1621*

“Truly heavenly choir music...so well-arranged and well-performed on many different occasions and in many different ways” — *Burckhard Grossman, court official, 1623*

“In the practice of music at the time he basically had no equal.” — *Andreas Werckmeister, organist, 1705*

“The premier maestro in Protestant North Germany at the turn of the seventeenth century” — *Hans Haase, musicologist and university professor, 1971*

“The *de facto* musical teacher of the [German] nation [at the time]” — *Kurt Gudewill, musicologist and university professor, 1971*

“Michael Praetorius (1571–1621) was one of the most versatile, wide-ranging, and prolific German composers of the seventeenth century. [He was a]lso important as a theorist... Praetorius is the most often quoted and excerpted writer on performance practice.” — *Oxford University Press, 2004*

“[His] sacred music is uniquely, strikingly robust, and a key aspect of its robustness is his jaw-dropping, spine-tingling sound architecture.” — *Your presenter, in Heaven Is My Fatherland, 2021*

## Praetorius's Motto

Raptus amore chely, patiens durissima vinco.  
Nulla salus mundo; dulcis mihi patria coelum.

Enraptured by love for the lute, I patiently overcome the most difficult hardships.  
There is no salvation with the world; heaven is my sweet fatherland.

Note that “*Raptus amore chely*” is an anagram of Michael Praetorius (when you take the *y* as two *i*'s). The closing words—“*mihi patria coelum*”—come fairly close to forming a second anagram of his name, but more importantly, they share the same first letters, in order, as Praetorius's initials (Michael Praetorius of Creuzburg). Sometimes Praetorius would sign his name as *Mihi Patria Coelum*.

## Translations of lyrics of samples referred to in the presentation

“Puer Natus in Bethlehem” (Cp. *Christian Worship* 348 & 371)  
*Polyhymnia Caduceatrix & Panegyrica* (1619), no. 12

(Note how this arrangement alternates between the original Latin stanzas, interspersed with a German ritornello or refrain, and the corresponding German hymn stanzas.)

*First Latin set of stanzas:*

Puer natus in Bethlehem,  
unde gaudet Hierusalem. Alleluia.

A child is born in Bethlehem,  
which causes Jerusalem to rejoice. Alleluia.

*Ritornello:*

Singet, jubiliret, triumphiret unserm Herren,  
singet, jubiliret, triumphiret unserm Herren,  
dem König der Ehren.

Sing, shout, exult before our Lord,  
sing, shout, exult before our Lord,  
the King of glory.

Reges de Saba veniunt,  
aurum, thus, myrrham offerunt. Alleluia.

Kings come from Sheba  
offering gold, incense, and myrrh. Alleluia.

*Ritornello*

Hic jacet in praesepio  
qui regnat sine termino. Alleluia.

Here lies in a manger  
the One who rules without end. Alleluia.

*Ritornello*

*Transition stanza:*

Mein Herzenskindlein,  
mein liebstes Freundlein,  
O Jesu.

My precious, cherished child,  
my precious, dearest friend,  
O Jesus!

*First German set of stanzas:*

Ein Kind geborn zu Bethlehem,  
des freuet sich Jerusalem. Hallelujah.

A child is born in Bethlehem,  
at which Jerusalem rejoices. Hallelujah.

Die Kön'ge aus Saba kamen dar;  
Gold, Weihrauch, Myrrhen  
bracht' sie dar. Hallelujah.

The kings from Sheba came there;  
Gold, incense, and myrrh  
they brought there. Hallelujah.

Hie leit es in dem Krippelein,  
ohn' Ende ist die Herrschaft sein. Hallelujah.

Here it [the child] lies in the manger  
whose dominion is without end. Hallelujah.

*Second Latin set:*

In hoc natali gaudio  
benedicamus Domino. Alleluia.

In this birthday celebration joy  
let us bless the Lord. Alleluia.

*Ritornello*

Laudetur Sancta Trinitas.  
Deo dicamus gratias. Alleluia.

Let the Holy Trinity be praised.  
Let us give thanks to God. Alleluia.

*Ritornello*

*Transition stanza*

*Second German set:*

Für solche gnadenreiche Zeit  
sei Gott gelobt in Ewigkeit. Hallelujah.

For such an occasion rich in grace  
God be praised into eternity. Hallelujah.

Lob sei der Heil'gen Dreifalt'keit  
nun und in alle Ewigkeit. Hallelujah.

Praise be to the Holy Trinity  
now and into all all eternity. Hallelujah.

“In Dulci Jubilo”

(Cp. *Christian Worship* 363)

*Polyhymnia Caduceatrix & Panegyrica* (1619), no. 34

(Note that this hymn, in its original form, is in macaronic verse, with its lines alternating between the vernacular [German] and *Latin* [italicized].)

*In dulci jubilo*

nun singet und seid froh.  
Unsers Herzens Wonne  
leit *in praesepio*  
und leuchtet als die Sonne  
*matris in gremio.*  
*Alpha es et O.*

In sweet jubilation  
now sing and be glad.  
Our heart's bliss  
lies in the manger  
and shines like the sun  
in his mother's lap.  
You are the Alpha and the Omega.

*O Jesu parvule,*  
nach dir ist mir so weh.  
Tröst' mir mein Gemüte,  
*O puer optime.*  
Durch alle deine Güte,  
*O princeps gloriae,*  
*trahe me post te.*

O little Jesus,  
I am aching for you.  
Bring comfort to my mind,  
O child most excellent.  
In all your kindness,  
O prince of glory,  
draw me after you.

*O Patris caritas!*  
*O Nati lenitas!*  
Wir wären all' verloren  
*per nostra crimina,*  
so hat er uns erworben  
*coelorum gaudia.*  
Eya, wär(e)n wir da!

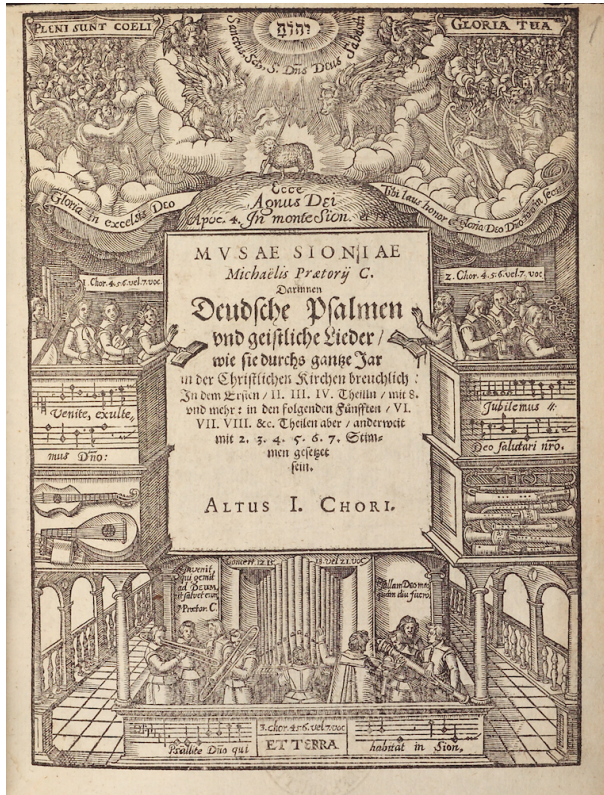
Oh, love of the Father!  
Oh, tenderness of the Son!  
We would have all been lost  
on account of our offenses,  
so he has won for us  
the joys of heaven.  
Oh, that we were there!

*A brass and percussion intrada precedes the final stanza.*

*Ubi sunt gaudia?*  
Nirgend mehr denn da,  
da die Engel singen  
*nova cantica,*  
und die Schellen klingen  
*in Regis curia.*  
Eya, wär(e)n wir da!

Where can joys be found?  
Nowhere more than there,  
where the angels are singing  
new songs,  
and the bells are chiming  
in the court of the King.  
Oh, that we were there!

## Description of Praetorius's two most decorative title pages



Separately positioned choirs sing and play in alternation on earth, while the heavenly choirs of saints (right) and angels (left) also sing back and forth to God in heaven (represented by the Tetragrammaton and the lamb), who is flanked by the four cherubim. Beneath the lamb, it reads: “Behold the Lamb of God on Mount Zion. Revelation 4 and 14.” The heavenly choirs sing the *Sanctus* and the *Gloria in Excelsis*. The earthly choirs sing Psalm 95:1 and 9:11. On the left side of the organ is written: “The one who sighs to God finds that God saves him. M. Praetor. C.” On the right side is Psalm 146:2. Praetorius is probably depicted as the director at the bottom, or possibly as the organist. Praetorius is indicating that his arrangements are meant to imperfectly replicate and prepare for what is taking place perfectly in heaven.



At the top it reads: “Third [voice part]. Come to the wedding of the lamb who was slain from the beginning” (Matt. 22:4; Rev. 13:8). The bottom reads: “Let us rejoice and be glad, for the wedding of the Lamb has come” (Rev. 19:7). At the bottom center Praetorius kneels at the cross, with his motto—“Heaven is my fatherland”—beneath him. The inscription to his left reads: “Give your servant the ability to die well if I am unable to live well, O Christ, you who are able to give both.” To his right: “Come to my aid, O Christ, in the throes of death.” Above: “My love is the Crucified.” The inscription on the organ at the lower right reads: “They were singing a song to the Lamb” (Rev. 5:9, 12; 14:3).



## Description of Praetorius's portrait

Elegiac couplets surround the portrait on three sides. Left: "I am battered all over the place, but you, O Christ, bring me help when I call, | Because in grace you humble me, but you also impart help." Right: "The Lord disciplines me, yet the shadow of death has by no means overwhelmed me; | I rejoice that the Lord presses me hard but also helps me." Bottom (lines reversed to make sense in English): "This is Michael Praetor the musician, before whose face / the chorus of Muses and music as a whole rises out of respect." The Latin words in the four corners of the portrait read: "Save me, O Lord, God of my salvation." The description encircling the portrait reads: "Michael Praetorius of Creuzburg in

Thuringia, Organist and Choral Music Director in the Court of the Duke of Brunswick. Age 35, in the year of Christ 1606." F. I. A. stands for *Faxit Iehovah* [or *Iesus*] *Amen*, "May the Lord [or Jesus] grant it. Amen," probably referring to the text of the canon. For the canon or round at the top, see the separate handout.

## Links referred to in the presentation

Dr. Carol Williams playing "Lo Ballo dell'Intorcica [The Twisting Dance]" by Antonio Valente on the 1610 Compenius/Praetorius Organ in Frederiksborg:

<https://youtu.be/oNX0gOTLWDo?t=18>

Listen for the 8' crumhorn stop when she plays the lower manual, and note the manually operated bellows.

Voices of Music performing six dances from Praetorius's *Terpsichore*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4JWYIY3icUg>

Eduardo Antonello performing "La Canarie [The Canary Islands]" from Praetorius's *Terpsichore*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYbpLwh0kYw>

## Other Resources

The King's Singers sing Praetorius's original four-part setting of what we know as "Behold, a Branch Is Growing": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7y05TrzeHo>

Seven free Praetorius choral settings in English, for two to five parts: <https://bachtochurch.org/the-collection>

Most of the volumes of the *Gesamtausgabe* (complete edition) of Praetorius's musical works (for research purposes only, not for republication): [https://imslp.org/wiki/Gesamtausgabe\\_der\\_musikalischen\\_Werke\\_%28Praetorius,\\_Michael%29](https://imslp.org/wiki/Gesamtausgabe_der_musikalischen_Werke_%28Praetorius,_Michael%29)

Praetorius's complete organ works (public domain):  
<https://s9.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/4/42/IMSLP321463-PMLP92361-Praetorius.pdf>

Concordia Publishing House ([cph.org](http://cph.org)) recently published a set of three volumes of hymn settings by Praetorius for SAB choir. They also offer one volume of easy SATB settings. Search on their site for "Praetorius Chorale".

*Heaven Is My Fatherland: The Life and Work of Michael Praetorius* (2021)

Call Wipf and Stock Publishers' customer service department (541-344-1528) for a generous discount. Otherwise you can order it online at [wipfandstock.com](http://wipfandstock.com) or [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) and pay regular price.

Corrigenda and improvements for *Heaven Is My Fatherland*:

<https://redbrickparsonage.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/corrigenda-heaven-is-my-fatherland-1.pdf>

Martin Luther's "Praise of Music," which Praetorius included in a collection of his works: <https://redbrickparsonage.wordpress.com/2021/02/15/martin-luthers-praise-of-music-german/>

### **Must-Have Praetorius Albums**

*Praetorius: Christmette* by the Gabrieli Consort & Players, directed by Paul McCreesh: <https://www.amazon.com/Praetorius-Christmette-Gabrieli-Consort-Players/dp/B00DNIIVHC/> (formerly called *Praetorius: Mass for Christmas Morning*; 141 global ratings on Amazon between the original and reissued albums, 125 of which are 5 stars)

*Praetorius: Polyhymnia Caduceatrix & Panegyrica* by Musica Fiata and La Capella Ducale, directed by Roland Wilson: <https://www.amazon.com/Praetorius-Polyhymnia-Caduceatrix-Panegyrica-Christmas/dp/B0000029VM/> (limited stock)

*Praetorius: Dances from Terpsichore* by Ensemble Bourrasque, directed by Westra Aros Pijpare: <https://www.amazon.com/Praetorius-Terpsichore-Westra-Aros-Pijpare/dp/B00000FY7N/> (no longer available new)

All of these can also be downloaded on iTunes, but for the choral albums, you will miss having the booklet with the lyrics and translations.