

CHARLIE BARBER

MICHELANGELO
DRAWING
BLOOD



for voices and period instruments



Genesis and Revelation

- the music and background of *Michelangelo Drawing Blood*

Inspired by Michelangelo's sketches for the large-scale but never completed fresco *The Battle of Cascina*, **Michelangelo Drawing Blood** explores the musical and aesthetic world of the renowned renaissance artist. Taking Michelangelo's sketches as a starting point, the music and libretto explore all aspects of the creation of the unfinished mural, including the artist's daily life, the religious environment that surrounded him, the artistic techniques he employed and finally, the subject matter of what was to be the work's focal point: a group of bathing Florentine soldiers surprised by the attacking Pisan army.

Michelangelo is the true icon of a pivotal period in art history that saw composers of sacred music build ever more complex polyphonic structures around plainchant and other monophonic melodies both sacred and secular. Scored for an ensemble of period instruments that in some variety would have been familiar to Michelangelo, the work draws on the musical processes employed by Franco-Flemish composers working in Italy during the sixteenth century and unites them with modern compositional procedures. The score also makes use of structural forms of the late Renaissance and early Baroque courtly dances such as the ground bass and the Passacaglia. It is arranged in a loose palindrome structure, with



pairs of movements such as the Prologue and Epilogue and *chiaroscuro* and *Separating Darkness from Light* based on the same material.

Thematic ideas that relate directly to Michelangelo's work as an artist appear in several ways throughout the piece. Michelangelo lived and worked during a period of constant development within art and architecture. The realistic representation of depth and perspective, for example, was one of the major rediscoveries of Renaissance painting, having been replaced for centuries by the stylised depictions of the Middle Ages. In **Inverted Image** (track 5) the subtitle *camera*



obscura refers a scientific device that had been known since antiquity and began to be used by artists, possibly as early as the fifteenth century to aid detailed and realistic depictions of their environment. The device consists of a box or room with a hole in one side that allows light from an external scene to pass through it, striking a surface inside where it is reproduced, upside-down, but with colour and perspective preserved.

Michelangelo - Sonnet XXX (excerpt):
Come luna da sè sol par ch'io sia;
Chè gli occhi nostri in ciel veder non sanno
Se non quel tanto che n'accende il sole.
*I am like the moon, alone,
which our eyes cannot see in the heavens
except that it is illumined by the sun.*

Another development of Renaissance art was the so-called **chiaroscuro** effect, referred to in track 2, which denotes the use of stark contrast between light and darkness in painting in order to establish depth.

The Battle of Cascina is featured in two of the pieces: **Bathing in the River Arno** and **Sounding the Alarm**. The subject matter of war and battle and the sense of impending danger and violence is symbolised through the use of the Latin hymn *Dies Irae* ("Day of wrath"), the sequence for the Roman mass of the dead.

Texts from the Roman Catholic mass and office, such as the hymn **Kyrie Eleison** ("Lord have mercy – Christ have mercy – Lord have mercy"), which is set here to a new melody, are employed throughout the work, echoing the religious climate



of Renaissance Florence. The **Gloria**, set to an original canon, is a hymn of praise, whilst the **Alleluia** setting is based on a melody that would have been sung at Eastertide following the *Deus Autem Noster*.

Michelangelo strongly believed that he was divinely inspired and a conduit to God in creating his art, and the text of the antiphon **Deus autem noster** ("Our God is even in heaven: whatsoever He has wished, He has made", is used here to echo this idea. It is again picked up in **Separating Darkness from Light**, which takes its title from a panel in the Sistine chapel

that depicts God separating night and day; this time a verse from Psalm 18 ("The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament sheweth His handy-work") is used to denote the divinity of the artist.

These sacred texts are combined with fragments of Michelangelo's own jottings, poems and sonnets. **Still Life Supper** is based on a shopping list scribbled on one of Michelangelo's sketches: *Pani due, un bochal di vino, una aringa, torregli, una insalata* ("Two breads, a pitcher of wine, a herring, filled pasta, a salad").



At the heart of the work, meanwhile, stands Michelangelo's own concept of 'releasing a sculpture' that lies concealed within a solid block of marble, an idea which he presents in a section of sonnet number 151, used in both versions of **Releasing the Sculpture**:

Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto
che un marmo solo in sé non circonscriva
col suo soverchio; e solo a quello arriva
la man che obbedisce all' intelletto.

Not even the best of artists has any conception that a single marble block does not contain within its excess, and that is only attained by the hand that obeys the intellect.

Ascension uses a few lines from Michelangelo's sonnet number 30 that seems to echo images of flying figures that are a recurring theme in his drawings:

Volo con le vostr'ale senza piume; col vostr'ingegno al ciel
sempre son mosso

*I fly with your wings, having none of my own;
with your spirit toward heaven I am always moving*

Finally, the **Epilogue** features a short poem that perhaps offers us the most personal insight into the artist's innermost thoughts and feelings:

Caro m'è 'l sonno, e più l'esser di sasso,
mentre che 'l danno e la vergogna dura:
non veder, non sentir m'è gran ventura;
però non mi destar, deh! parla basso.
*Slumber is sweet, but it were sweeter still
To turn to stone while shame and sorrow last,
Nor see, nor hear, and so be freed from ill;
Ah, wake me not! Whisper as you go past!*

Taking a metaphorical scalpel to his life, **Michelangelo Drawing Blood** probes into the forces that drove his genius – an obsession with human anatomy, a passionate response to the male body and an equally intense Christian faith. The process of creativity and the act of creation, from the book of Genesis to the revelation of figures entrapped in stone, is explored through a series of episodes both imagined and real.

Maja Palser, March 2013



CHARLIE BARBER

Composer Charlie Barber has a deserved reputation for creating and producing innovative performance and touring projects. He has worked in a wide variety of musical genres: orchestral and chamber works, film, video, music-theatre and dance.

His music draws on a wide range of influences and models bringing these together in a highly personal synthesis. Although the music of the American minimalists in the late 70s formed a starting point for his own music, equally important was the use and deconstruction of the music of the past and the influence of World music.

An important and crucial element has been his work across a number of different artforms, including dance, film, installation and performance art. This has resulted in a rich series of collaborations with artists in other disciplines.

His recent recordings and touring projects include: **Ludwig**, a musical tribute to Beethoven; music for Jean Cocteau's **Blood of a Poet**, a surrealist classic of early cinema; **Boulevard of Broken Dreams** for string quartet; **Salomé**, for percussion quartet and voices written to accompany the 1923 film starring Alla Nazimova; and **Afrodisiac**, an exploration of ritual, love and magic through the cultures of Africa and the African diaspora.

CHARLIE MICHELANGELO BARBER | DRAWING BLOOD

for voices and period instruments

MUSICIANS:

James Hall	- countertenor
László Rózsa	- bass recorder
Michael Clark	- timpani, percussion and dulcimer
Jamie Akers	- theorbo
Ibrahim Aziz	- bass viol
Gwyn Daniels	- trombones
Choir	- voices of Opera'r Ddraig

PRODUCTION:

Executive producers	- Charlie Barber James Clarke & Jim Unwin
Engineers	- James Clarke & Jim Unwin
Assistant engineer	- Nick Faris

CD mixed and mastered by
James Clarke and Jim Unwin

Recorded and mixed at Ty Cerdd Studio,
Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff
October 2012 – March 2013

1 Prologue – Kyrie & Ground	5:43
2 chiaroscuro	3:39
3 Deus autem noster # 1	3:46
4 Passacaglia	3:28
5 Inverted Image (camera obscura)	3:35
6 Releasing the Sculpture # 1	3:20
7 Gloria	4:16
8 Bathing in the River Arno	3:56
9 Deus autem noster # 2	3:10
10 Alleluia	3:47
11 Still Life Supper	2:35
12 Sounding the Alarm	5:26
13 Perspective	4:03
14 Releasing the Sculpture # 2	3:20
15 Ascension	3:10
16 Separating Darkness from Light	4:04
17 Epilogue – Kyrie & Ground	6:19