

Giovanni Pierluigi da

Palestrina

Sicut cervus

Motet for four voices

(SATB A^b)

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (c. 1525 - 1594, Rome) is one of the most celebrated and studied composers in the history of Western music. He wrote primarily sacred music for the Catholic Church, though he composed a few secular pieces as well. He was a master of contrapuntal writing and his influence in composition and teaching is quite evident to the present.

Sicut cervus desiderat ad fontes aquarum is certainly one of Palestrina's most famous motets. Its popularity is due to several qualities in the composition, including consistent balance of the parts and shared motivic activity, and clarity with which the various musical gestures are written. The music is full of interest, in what one can anticipate, and what is surprising. Each voice is provided two entrances, at relatively consistent intervals of time, until freer polyphony after 8. "Ita" is treated somewhat differently, with new entrance pitches, groupings, and intervals of imitation. Note the "false" entrance of the alto after 13. The final "Ita" begins a remarkable series of entrances at the 5th below, and the music leads directly to the next text phrase, "anima," without an interlude and with overlap of text setting. Palestrina divided the phrase of text into two, "ita desiderata" and "anima mea," and found an artful way of revealing both in the polyphony clearly while maintaining the continuity of the text.

Palestrina was a master of text setting. The linear nature of the vocal lines, and the progression of phrases is a defining feature of this motet. The notes "flow" in that the notes progress in predominantly stepwise motion, with skips and leaps for emphasis (generally upwards) and deemphasis (downwards) according to syllabic stress. The construction of each phrase is deliberately shaped, rising to emphasis and then falling back slightly in the texture to provide space for other voices. The overlap of musical ideas from "Ita desiderat" to "anima mea" is particularly artful in the simultaneous singing of the words "soul" and "desires."

This edition features the absence of bar lines, so we can sing the music with some notion of how Palestrina's singers would have encountered it. Of course, they would have sung from part books, rather than full score. There is one instance of a tie, partly to accommodate page layout but also because at that point the polyphony is seamless to the point that avoiding a tie in a modern edition is impossible. This score includes "bar" numbers throughout, generally associated with major points of entry or musical motives. There are also brackets over the primary musical motivic gestures at the onset of each phrase of text.

Most of Palestrina's music was written with choirs of men in mind, or possibly men and boys, therefore most of the music seems relatively low for modern SATB choirs. The precise pitch level is not exactly known, and ensembles now frequently perform the music at a pitch that is comfortable, and perhaps relatively close to the intended range. This edition is pitched at A flat, higher than many groups perform it but it seems to work well with many singers, not too low for sopranos and not too high for basses. The range and register of the voice parts in *Sicut cervus* lends particularly well to a slightly higher pitch level to accommodate higher voices of modern sopranos and altos.

— Jeff Buettner

Sicut cervus

Psalm 42:1

*As the deer longs for running waters,
so my soul longs for you, my God.*

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina
(1525-1594)

②

Si - cut cer -

Si - cut cer - vus de - si - de rat ad

Si - cut cer - vus de - si - de rat ad fon - tes a - qua -

Detailed description: This system contains the first three staves of the musical score. The top staff is a vocal line starting with a whole rest followed by a half note 'Si', a quarter note 'cut', and a half note 'cer'. The second staff continues with a whole note 'Si', a half note 'cut', and a quarter note 'cer', followed by an eighth-note melody for 'vus de - si - de rat ad'. The third staff continues with a quarter note 'Si', a half note 'cut', and a quarter note 'cer', followed by an eighth-note melody for 'vus de - si - de rat ad fon - tes a - qua'. The bottom staff is a bass line with whole rests.

③

④

vus de - si - de rat ad fon - tes a - qua - - - -

fon - tes a - qua - - - - - rum,

- rum, _____ Si - - cut cer - vus de -

Si - cut cer - vus de - si - de rat ad fon - tes a -

Detailed description: This system contains the next four staves. The top staff continues the vocal line with an eighth-note melody for 'vus de - si - de rat ad fon - tes a - qua'. The second staff continues with an eighth-note melody for 'fon - tes a - qua - - - - - rum,'. The third staff continues with a whole note '- rum,' followed by a whole note 'Si', a half note 'cut', and a half note 'cer', followed by a quarter note 'vus' and a half note 'de -'. The bottom staff continues with a half note 'Si', a half note 'cut', a quarter note 'cer', and an eighth-note melody for 'vus de - si - de rat ad fon - tes a -'.

⑤

rum, si -

si - cut cer - vus de - si - de - rat ad fon - tes a -

si - de rat ad fon - tes a - - qua - - - -

qua - rum, si - - cut cer - vus de - si - de

⑥

⑦

⑧

cut cer - vus de - si - de - rat ad fon - tes a - -

qua - rum, de - si - de - rat ad fon - tes a -

- - rum, de - si - de - rat ad

rat ad fon - tes, de - si - de - rat ad

⑨

10

11

qua - rum:

qua - rum:

fon - tes a - qua - rum: i - ta de -

fon - tes a - qua - rum: i - ta de -

12

i - ta de - si - de - rat,

i - ta de - si -

- si - de - rat i - ta de - si - de - rat,

- si - de - rat,

13

14

i - - - ta
 - de - rat, i - - - ta,
 i - - - ta de - si - - de - rat, de - si - de -
 i - - ta de - si - - - - - de -

15

16

de - si - de - rat a - ni -
 i - ta de - si - de - rat
 rat, i - ta de - si - de - rat
 rat, i - ta de - si -

17 18

ma me - a ad te De - - -

a - ni - ma me - a ad te De - us,

a - ni - ma me - a ad

- de - rat, de - si - de - rat a - ni - ma

19 20

- - us, a - ni - ma me -

a - ni - ma me - a ad te De -

te De - - - us,

me - a ad te De - - us, a - ni - ma

21

22

- a ad te De - - - -
 - us, ad te De - us,
 a - ni - ma me - a ad te De - -
 me - a ad te De - - us, ad

23

- us.
 ad te De - - - - us.
 - us, ad te De - - - - us.
 te De - - - - us.