

A Poem for Advent IV, also in memory of Ronnie Corbett (1930-2016)

Four Candles

It's no joke. Prope est Dominus – the Lord is nigh.
But Michael Haydn's Anthem on the Gradual for Advent IV
Is missing, not so “Prope” after all, not at hand,
Hidin' unfiled and unfulfilled somewhere in the silence of the library.
Still, Alma Redemptoris Mater – Sweet mother of our redeemer –
Palestrina's Motet is a more than worthy vessel for our praise.

Victoria – composer, not queen and empress – guides our worship
With Ave Maris Stella – Hail star of the sea –
Exploring parts of our voices few other Masses reach.
Great arcs of melody rise and fall,
Accidentals accentuate its wavelike undulations,
Sharps going up to the peaks, naturals and flats coming down.
While the Tenors go their own sweet way singing
Ave maris stella Dei mater alma atque semper virgo felix coeli porta.

It may be Advent but this is wild music, sensual, not penitential,
Like the impetuous young Mary who said “Ave?” Ok!
Behold one hand-made by the Lord,
Be it unto me according to Thy word.

Richard Barnes – Sat 19 Dec 2015 and Thurs 31 March 2016.

