



REVIEW: EDITION

## Six Settings Of ‘Ave Regina Coelorum’ (ZWV 128)

Jan Dismas Zelenka (1679–1745), ed. Frederic Kiernan  
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Michael Driscoll

Performing Arts Department, Brookline High School, Brookline, MA, USA  
[mdriscoll@alum.wpi.edu](mailto:mdriscoll@alum.wpi.edu)

The music of Jan Dismas Zelenka (1679–1745), held in high regard by his contemporaries, dwelt in near-total obscurity until the middle of the twentieth century and remains relatively unknown outside of a small circle of enthusiasts. From the late 1950s to the early 1960s Camillo Schoenbaum edited fifteen instrumental works for Bärenreiter, producing the first modern editions of Zelenka’s music available to the public. Instrumental music, however, represents only a small fraction of the composer’s oeuvre, which is dominated by over 150 sacred vocal works composed primarily for the Dresden court chapel. Beginning in the early 1980s Carus and Breitkopf & Härtel, largely under the editorship of Thomas Kohlhase and Wolfgang Horn, began publishing a number of Zelenka’s sacred vocal works, with the Carus publications intended primarily as performing editions and those of Breitkopf functioning as scholarly editions (although Breitkopf has recently made performing editions of these works available). Many works, however, remain unavailable in modern versions. Frederic Kiernan’s meticulously prepared edition of Zelenka’s six ‘Ave regina coelorum’ settings is a welcome addition to the scholarship on this composer.

Relatively little is known about Zelenka’s early years, other than the fact that he was born in the Bohemian village of Louňovice, southeast of Prague. He moved to Prague prior to 1704 and then arrived in Dresden in 1710 or 1711, where he was employed by the Hofkapelle (the Catholic chapel of the royal court) as a violone player. In 1714 Zelenka was promoted to the post of church composer, and between 1716 and 1719 he studied composition in Vienna under Imperial Kapellmeister Johann Joseph Fux (1660–1741). Zelenka returned to Dresden in 1719, resuming his previous dual titles of court composer and violone player. He remained in the employment of the Hofkapelle until his death in 1745. The bulk of Zelenka’s known works were composed after 1720 and include a number of mass and requiem settings, four Vespers psalm cycles, two Te Deum settings and a number of settings of the litany, as well as several Marian antiphons, including the six ‘Ave regina coelorum’ settings.

The genesis of the present edition was Kiernan’s ‘Six “Ave regina coelorum” Settings (1737) by Jan Dismas Zelenka (ZWV 128): Context and Critical Edition’ (MMus thesis, University of Melbourne, 2013), completed under the supervision of Australian researcher and pre-eminent Zelenka scholar Janice Stockigt. The Introduction offers a wealth of information that incorporates much of the most recent scholarship on Zelenka and the Dresden court chapel. It begins with an overview of the historical, political and religious context in Dresden – the place where Zelenka lived and worked for most of his adult life – in the first half of the eighteenth century, which led to the formation of a single Catholic court chapel in staunchly Lutheran Saxony. A highly detailed, copiously referenced biography of the composer follows. Of particular note are the passages where Kiernan argues against the previously held assumption that Zelenka began gradually retreating from court life after Johann Adolf Hasse’s 1731 appointment as court Kapellmeister. As Kiernan

notes, ‘increasing evidence suggests that Zelenka was a highly regarded composer in his late years’ (xii). Kiernan also reads generous increases in Zelenka’s salary during the 1730s as indicating his high status within the court chapel (xi). Following a detailed section on the liturgical context of the ‘Ave regina’ settings and their stylistic characteristics, the Introduction concludes with information on the performing forces in Dresden, both vocal and instrumental.

Kiernan’s edition is based on the only known surviving source, the autograph located at SLUB Dresden (Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden, Mus. 2358-E-20). Kiernan notes that the SLUB card catalogue lists a set containing thirty-one parts, but these are now missing, possibly located in Russia (61–62). With the exception of the fourth ‘Ave regina coelorum’, published in 1983 (Jan Dismas Zelenka, *Ave regina coelorum g-Moll*, ed. Thomas Kohlhase (Stuttgart: Carus)), these settings are presented here in their first modern edition. Fortunately for scholars, in 2015 SLUB Dresden began producing high-resolution colour scans of the Zelenka source materials held there. These sources – primarily autograph scores – are now freely accessible online, including the ‘Ave regina coelorum’ settings.

Close examination of Zelenka’s autograph score reveals Kiernan’s meticulousness in preparing this edition. He provides clearly marked and helpful editorial suggestions that are useful for contemporary performers who may not be familiar with Dresden performance practice, particularly regarding the use of oboes and the role of the basso-continuo and basso-ripieno instruments in certain musical styles. As is the case in other repertory of the time, the composer’s autograph scores frequently do not contain written-out oboe parts. Instead, instructions written on the score indicate when the oboes play and which instruments or voices are doubled. Where Zelenka added these oboe indications (setting No. 5), Kiernan’s edition includes written-out realizations of the oboe parts. Where no such indications are included in the source, Kiernan provides suggested oboe parts based on typical Dresden performance practice (Nos 2 and 6). In situations where basso-ripieno instruments (violone and bassoon) might well have operated (Nos 2, 5 and 6), Kiernan adds a separate basso-ripieno staff above the basso continuo. One small area of disagreement is with Kiernan’s suggestion (in a footnote) that the cello should play an octave lower than written in bar 8 of the second setting (11). I think this is a misreading of a written indication in the autograph scores (‘VV: | Ottava Bassa’), which I believe relates to the violin part only, not to the continuo instruments. The music itself, however, is properly transcribed.

The six ‘Ave regina coelorum’ settings, while generally short (all but the final setting are approximately two minutes or less in duration), are written in a variety of styles and showcase a number of elements of Zelenka’s unique compositional style. In the Introduction Kiernan notes that liturgical music in Dresden followed the Viennese model, falling into three categories of increasing complexity and length (A cappella, Ordinary, Solemn) that corresponded with the rank of the liturgical occasion. Kiernan argues that these six settings mostly fall within the ‘A cappella’ and ‘Ordinary’ categories, though the larger scale of the sixth setting contains aspects of ‘Solemn’ style. The third setting is somewhat curious in its brevity (at just sixteen bars, it is the shortest of the six), and, unlike the other five, it concludes on the dominant. With the exception of this setting, the works generally progress from least complex (‘A cappella’) to most complex (‘Ordinary’ bordering on ‘Solemn’). Perhaps the third movement was intended to connect to another setting or work.

The Introduction also notes that Dresden had two main choral ensembles in operation: the *Kapellknaben*, consisting of boys on the soprano and alto parts and men on the tenor and bass parts, and the professional singers of the Hofkapelle. The music of the first four settings, most likely performed by the *Kapellknaben*, is quite accessible to a modern-day choir of moderate ability and instrumental resources. With the exception of the second, which requires violin (the viola part merely doubling the continuo line at the octave), the first four settings could conceivably be performed with continuo instruments alone. In fact, as Kiernan notes, it appears that the violin obbligato part in the second setting was a later addition, with the original violin part intended to join the viola in doubling the continuo line. The final two settings are more challenging for the singers, and

they call for two violins and viola along with continuo instruments. Although the fifth setting explicitly calls for oboes and the style of the sixth suggests that oboes would have been present, both can be performed without oboes, which double other instruments or voices.

Given the rather short duration of most of these settings, they would probably not function well in a modern-day concert performance as individual pieces, but might be better performed in sets. As previously noted, the first four settings require similar vocal and instrumental forces and could therefore be performed together. Likewise, the final two settings could be linked. One further option would be to use the G major dominant conclusion of the short third setting as a segue to the G major fifth setting. I believe the segue indications written in Zelenka's manuscript at the ends of Nos 2, 3 and 5 could suggest that two or more of these settings were performed together; the missing set of parts might solve this question.

During the Second World War the musical manuscripts from the Dresden court were moved to storage for safe keeping, with the scores stored in one location and the parts stored in another. It is generally acknowledged that the parts were taken to Russia at the end of the war, so the majority of sources located at SLUB Dresden today are autograph scores. Perhaps one of the most tantalizing and exciting developments in research on Zelenka and the music of the Dresden court as a whole is the 2018 agreement between SLUB Dresden and the Russian State Library to begin digitizing 250 music manuscripts that were originally held in Dresden. It is not yet clear, however, if any Zelenka-related items are among those. These sources might well provide a wealth of new information and could help confirm many assumptions that have been drawn largely from the autograph scores located at SLUB Dresden.

**Michael Driscoll** is Director of Choirs at Brookline High School in Brookline, Massachusetts, a position he has held since September 2003. At Brookline High School Driscoll directs three choirs, advises four student-directed vocal ensembles and teaches Advanced Placement Music Theory and class piano. He has been Music Director of the Andover Choral Society, based in Andover, Massachusetts, since 2013.