

Historical Biographical Narrative: Josquin des Prez

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Josquin des Prez, my great-great-great-great grandfather, whom I've heard a lot about from my great grandfather, was an extraordinary man whose talents were undeniably some of the most important in the Renaissance. My great grandfather told me that Josquin's love of satire was to be neither underestimated nor understated, and that the great composer was a genius in many aspects of his life: including, most certainly, his immeasurable humor. I've listened repeatedly to Josquin's great works (for there are many), and it's impossible for them to ever get old. His musical genius will live on, influencing modern music just as it influenced later music from the Renaissance. Here is a story that will demonstrate how Josquin des Prez was truly viewed by society.

"Have you not even heard Heinrich Isaac's compositions?" the assistant directed at his master, almost pleadingly. "He's really not that bad."

"I'm not *suggesting* that Isaac is a bad composer. He supersedes des Prez in more ways than one, certainly. I want des Prez anyway, because his genius will complement the chapel's greatness in ways I cannot yet think to imagine."

"But Isaac is more contemporary, and surely the congregation will appreciate his contributions more than anything des Prez would be able to produce."

"It seems to me that this argument isn't about which composer you prefer in terms of music, anymore. Otherwise, you'd have given in a long time ago. What is this *really* about?"

"Des Prez just isn't *friendly* enough. Isaac is so much easier to get along with. Everyone whom he would meet would be gratified by the respect given to them. Isaac is also cheaper and more willing to do what he's told."

"I'd say I rather *prefer* a man with a bit of rebellion left in his heart. You're not going to convince me otherwise, so I suggest you drop it there and send a message out immediately. I want to hire Josquin des Prez."

And, just like that, Duke Ercole I of Ferrana had won that argument. Alfonso was a good assistant, but sometimes he just didn't *see* what a man truly needed to be successful. Ercole needed a good composer for his chapel in the prominent city of Ferrara, and it simply wouldn't suffice to have anything but the best. Josquin des Prez, as Ercole thoroughly believed, *was* the best.

Alone in his small office, on the night of the second of January, 1503, des Prez worked on another of his chansons, reluctantly labouring for Louis XII under the light provided by the small candlestick that rested upon his wooden desk. He didn't *dislike* working for the then-king of France, but it didn't particularly please him, either. The king had recently *forgotten* to pay des Prez's stipend, and des Prez was not enthralled with the fact that he had to write an entire motet (entitled, rather bluntly, "Remember thy promise unto thy servant") just to remind Louis that the payment was overdue. Des Prez was searching for more employment opportunities, so when he felt a cool breeze as the door to his office flew open, he was not hesitating to see who had interrupted his writing.

It was a messenger, with a small green envelope in his hand.

"For you, sir. This is a message from Italy."

Des Prez thanked the messenger and sat down to open the envelope. Its contents were intriguing to him, and he was excited to find that Ercole was offering him 200 ducats to move to Italy and write music for his chapel.

Under his new employer, des Prez wrote some very important compositions, changing the entire music style of the Renaissance ever so slightly with each piece. Many of his compositions