

CAMBRIDGE TAVERNER CHOIR

Owen Rees *director*

Stephen Layton *guest conductor*

P R O G R A M M E

MUSIC FOR THE MASS AND
COMPLINE ON PASSION SUNDAY

Sunday 5 April 1992, 8.15 pm

Jesus College Chapel

CAMBRIDGE TAVERNER CHOIR
Owen Rees director

sopranos

Josie Dixon
Helen Garrison
Bernadette Nelson
Caroline Preston Bell
Margaret Simper
Rachel Sutton
Sally Terris
Tanya Wicks

altos

Tim Cronin
Simon Goddill
Rupert Preston Bell
Peter Smith
David Trendell

tenors

Paul Baumann
Stephen Lawrence
Finlay Lockie
Tom Salmon
David Thomson

basses

James Durran
Damian Kerney
Gary Snapper
Paul Watson

Stephen Layton *guest conductor*

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We should like to thank the Master, Fellows
and Chaplain of Jesus College for their
kind permission to sing in Chapel.

P R O G R A M M E

MUSIC FOR THE MASS AND COMPLINE ON PASSION SUNDAY

Introit motet: Deus misereatur	Robert Johnson
Kyrie: Deus Creator	chant
Gloria: Western Wynde Mass	John Taverner
Credo: Western Wynde Mass	Taverner
Preface	chant
Sanctus: Western Wynde Mass	Taverner
Pater noster and Peace	chant
Agnus Dei: Western Wynde Mass	Taverner

INTERVAL

At Compline:	
Media vita (antiphon to Nunc dimittis)	John Sheppard
Marian antiphon after Compline:	
Ave Dei Patris filia	Johnson

P R O G R A M M E N O T E S

The greatest sacred works of the greatest Tudor composers - such as John Taverner (c.1490-1545) and John Sheppard (c.1515-1559) - can, of course, be appreciated simply as isolated artistic objects. However, our appreciation of them will always be deepened if we are aware of the types of liturgical celebrations which they were intended to serve. The reconstruction of such contexts usually involves a great deal of speculation: although we know a certain amount about the careers of both Taverner and Sheppard, very rarely can we be certain when (and hence for which institution) a particular piece was composed. The uncertainties surrounding Taverner's most famous setting of the Ordinary of the Mass - known as the *Western Wynde* - are more acute than usual. Firstly, although the title shows that the tune on which the setting is based once carried a secular and vernacular text (making it a very unusual source of borrowed material for a Mass by an English composer), the tune itself has not been traced outside its use in this Mass and in the similarly-based Masses by Tye and Sheppard. The way in which Taverner employs the borrowed melody is remarkable; the Mass is effectively a set of 36 masterful variations, the tune being present almost continuously in one voice or another, but given a multitude of different "colours" through the counterpoints of the free voices. It is not surprising that - like other works of Taverner - this setting provided the stimulus for other English composers (namely Tye and Sheppard, as already mentioned) to attempt Mass settings based on the same melody.

There are further areas of uncertainty concerning Taverner's *Western Wynde* Mass. Although scholars have proposed several conflicting dates and contexts for its composition, we have no idea when it was written or for which institution. Nor do we know - since the use of a secular cantus firmus provides no liturgical clues - at which season it was performed (if indeed Taverner conceived it with any such idea of seasonal appropriateness). In tonight's concert we have surrounded the

four sections of the setting with sufficient additional material (plainchant and a motet) to give some sense of its original context. The imagined context, then, is a sung Mass on Passion Sunday celebrated according to the Sarum Rite at some time in the 1530s. We begin with a setting by Robert Johnson of a psalm recited as part of the bidding prayers before Mass in the Sarum Rite; a motet on this text would hence have been a suitable polyphonic opening to such a service.

In the second half of the concert the imagined context is the final part of the celebration of the Office (ie Compline) on the evening of the same day - Passion Sunday. Sheppard's *Media vita* is a setting of the antiphon to the canticle *Nunc dimittis* (heard in chant), which - with its elaborate responsory structure - creates one of the most imposing and extended liturgical works of the whole Tudor period. Sections for a reduced number of voices alternate with the rich texture of the full choir with its English high trebles.

Owen Rees

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The little-known 16th-century Scottish polyphonist, Robert Johnson (c.1500-c.1560), was a contemporary and fellow countryman of the better-known composer, Robert Carver, and should not be confused with the 17th-century Robert Johnson, an English lutenist of some fame.

It is probable that Johnson came originally from Duns in the Scottish borders. He seems to have attended the local "sang schall" (song school) and grammar school where he trained as a priest: "there were no seminaries for the training of priests. In burghs, clerical students were trained for the priesthood in the song school and grammar school, and through service in the church" (Dennis McKay: *Parish Life in Scotland, 1500-60*).

It is clear that Johnson held fairly strong Protestant views from an early stage, as he was exiled from Scotland for heresy sometime in the 1520s. The Reformation movement did not reach Scotland until the 1560s, and it seems that Johnson was forced to flee for his life. After a period in York, he settled in London where he spent the remainder of his life, possibly in the service of the Royal Family, for he seems to have had connections with Windsor Castle. It has been suggested that he was the Succentor at St George's Chapel, Windsor, and may have been chaplain to Anne Boleyn for the last few years of her life.

Johnson's *Deus miseratur* was "set in England ten or xii yeiris before reformation", or so wrote Thomas Wode on the side of this piece which he included in his *St Andrew's Psalter* of 1562-92. It must be borne in mind that he was probably referring to the Scottish Reformation which places the composition of this work in the late 1540s. *Deus miseratur* is a setting of Psalm 66 (Psalm 67 in the Book of Common Prayer) which was recited as part of the bidding prayers before Mass in the Sarum Rite. It was also used in the Procession to beg for Fine Weather and as an Introit to the Mass for the Propagation of the Faith (the first verse only). These days, it is often used as one of the Psalms in the Marriage Service.

It is possible that Johnson composed his Marian Antiphon *Ave Dei Patris filia* when he first arrived in England as a "show-piece" to impress the English. It is very likely that it was based on Fayrfax's popular setting of the same words. Both settings are for five voices and are divided into a number of clearly defined sections. Each section sets an appropriate portion of text and is characterised by different vocal textures. It seems that Johnson may have been deliberately imitating the style peculiar to the English votive antiphon with its clear variations in texture, especially since his setting of *Ave Dei Patris* is so different from any of his other Latin works.

Margaret Simper

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Forthcoming concerts in Jesus College Chapel:

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