

CANTIONES SACRÆ
Latin polyphony by William Byrd and Robert Parsons

PROGRAMME

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|---|---|----------------------------|
| 1 | Laudibus in sanctis Dominum | William Byrd (1542/3-1623) |
| 2 | Mass for five voices:
Kyrie
Gloria
Credo
Sanctus
Agnus Dei | Byrd |
| 3 | Infelix ego | Byrd |

INTERVAL OF 15 MINUTES

- | | | |
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| 4 | Magnificat | Robert Parsons (c. 1530-1570) |
| 5 | Ave Maria | Parsons |

The Cambridge Taverner Choir

director: Owen Rees

*sopranos: Diana Baumann, Josie Dixon, Helen Garrison, Bernadette Nelson, Caroline Preston Bell,
Margaret Simper, Rachel Sutton, Sally Terris, Tanya Wicks*

altos: Tim Dalosso, Toby Gee, Simon Godsill, Rupert Preston Bell

tenors: Paul Baumann, Tim Freeman, Finlay Lockie, Philip Mills, David Thomson, Matthew Woolhouse

basses: James Durrant, Jeremy Sadler, David Salmon, Gary Snapper, Paul Watson

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The Chapel Royal of the Tudor monarchs attracted many of the finest English musicians of the age, among them the two composers represented in tonight's concert - Robert Parsons and William Byrd. Parsons belonged to the last generation of Englishmen to produce substantial quantities of music for the Latin liturgy before its final abandonment under Elizabeth I. He became a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal in 1563, but died just seven years later (being drowned in the Trent at Newark), probably at a relatively early age. It was the young Byrd who succeeded to his place in the Chapel Royal, and Byrd was certainly influenced by the music of his predecessor.

Parsons' setting of the Magnificat (the canticle at Vespers) performed here belongs to a continuous English tradition of such settings stretching back at least to the period of the Eton Choirbook in the late fifteenth century. Typically, only the even-numbered verses are set to polyphony, the others being performed in chant. The grand festal style of the polyphonic sections is that of pre-reformation English music: the piece is scored for trebles and means, two countertenor parts, 'tenor', and bass (the same disposition and vocal ranges as in, for example, Taverner's *Missa Gloria tibi trinitas*). This basic texture is varied as a means of structural articulation, both by reducing the number of voices present, and by dividing single voice-parts into two (the technique known as 'gimel', and heard at its most spectacular in the 'Esurientes' verse, with divided trebles, means, and basses). The piece also has its share of technical artifice: at 'Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper' in the doxology, the upper three voices are in canon. The melodic writing displays the energy and elaboration typical of the pre-reformation English style, and the closing measures introduce the types of harmonic pungency achieved through false relations which is another of its characteristics. Tonight's performance of this undeservedly little-known work is the first to employ a new edition by Peter Lynan.

The festal style heard in Parsons' Magnificat was one of a great variety of compositional avenues open to the mature William Byrd. As late as 1591 he published in his second book of *Cantiones sacræ* (that is, Latin motets) a quite extraordinary essay in this style - *Infelix ego*. Byrd here sets the first section of a famous exposition on Psalm 50, *Miserere mei Deus*, written by Girolamo Svonarola in prison shortly before his death in 1498. The vividness of the text inspired Byrd to produce music of great rhetorical power and immediacy, but the almost madrigalian touches (such as the deliberately *risqué* counterpoint at 'scandalum') are combined with the vocal scoring (with high trebles) and melodic elaboration of the older English style. The piece reaches its climax towards the end of the third section, where Savonarola finally introduces the first verse of Psalm 50 itself: Byrd draws these words out in a wonderfully expansive conclusion to the piece, one which shows his knowledge of continental music through a quotation of Josquin's *Miserere mei Deus*.

At the head of the same motet collection of 1591 Byrd placed a piece which - though equally expansive and again cast in three sections - represents a very different version of the *cantio sacra*. *Laudibus in sanctis* sets a paraphrase of Psalm 150; Byrd's response to this text is no less vivid and imaginative than in the case of *Infelix ego* (as witness, for example the move to triple metre at the mention of 'joyful dancing'), but here the style and texture are strikingly modern, and fully deserve the epithet 'madrigalian'.

Soon after the publication of the 1591 *Cantiones sacræ* Byrd moved away from London in order to be near the homes in Essex of his principal catholic patron, Sir John Petre. Within the next five years he published separately three settings of the Ordinary of the Mass, of which the five-voice Mass was the last to appear. This work, like the other two Masses, is unusual in being freshly composed rather than based on some pre-existent material. Whether partly as a consequence of this original conception, Byrd displays a remarkable responsiveness to the varied texts of the five sections of the Mass, employing the rich repertoire of textures and techniques which he had developed through his work within the genre of the *cantio sacra*.

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Since its first performance in 1986, the **Cambridge Taverner Choir** - under the direction of Owen Rees - has established itself as one of the few specialist Renaissance choirs outside London. The choir's performances have been concentrated in Cambridge, where it has given regular concerts, in Jesus College Chapel, of programmes which set Renaissance polyphony in illuminating thematic, liturgical, and physical contexts, aiming to recreate more fully the grandeur and excitement of the music of the Tudor Age in England and the 'Golden Age' of Spain and Portugal.

The choir, whose members are ex-choral scholars and choristers of Cambridge University, has broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and appeared in the Cambridge Festival and Cambridge Early Music Festival, and in 1993 releases two CD recordings of music from Renaissance England and Portugal.

Next concert:

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TEXTS

Laudibus in sanctis Dominum celebrate supremum;
Firmamenta sonent inclyta facta Dei;
Inclyta facta Dei cantate sacraque potentis
Voce potestatem sæpe sonate manus.
Magnificum Domini cantet tuba martia nomen:
Pieria Domino concelebrate lyra.
Laude Dei resonent resonantia tympana summi:
Alta sacri resonent organa laude Dei.
Hunc arguta canant tenui psalteria corda,
Hunc agili laudet læta chorea pede.
Concava divinas effundant cymbala laudes,
Cymbala dulcesona laude repleta Dei.
Omne quod ætheris in mundo vescitur auris,
Halleluia canat, tempus in omne Deo.

(In holy praises celebrate the Lord most high;
Let the heavens echo the glorious acts of God;
Sing the glorious acts of God, and with holy voice
Ever sound his power and handiwork.
Let the martial trumpet praise the great name of the Lord:
Let the Muses' lyre join in celebration.
Let the loud timbrel resound in praise of the most high God:
Let the high organs resound in praise of holy God.
Praise him with the psaltery's nimble string;
Praise him with joyful dancing feet.
Let the hollow cymbals pour out his holy praises;
Let the sweet-sounding cymbals be filled with the praise of God.
Let everything in the orld that lives and breathes
Sing Halleluia endlessly to God.)

Infelix ego omnium auxilio destitutus, qui cœlum terramque offendi. Quo ibo? quo me vertam? ad quem confugiam? quis mei miserebitur? Ad cœlum levare oculos non audeo, quia ei graviter peccavi; in terra refugium non invenio, quia ei scandalum fui. Quid igitur faciam? desperabo? Absit. Misericors est Deus, pius est salvator meus. Solus igitur Deus refugium meum; ipse non despiciet opus suum, non repellet imaginem suam. Ad te igitur, piissimie Deus, tristis ac mœrens venio, quoniam tu solus spes mea, tu solus refugium meum. Quid autem dicam tibi, cum oculos levare non audeo? verba doloris effundam, misericordiam tuam implorabo, et dicam:
Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnum misericordiam tuam.

(Unhappy I, bereft of all help, who have offended heaven and earth. Where shall I go? Whither turn? To whom flee? Who will have pity on me? I dare not lift my eyes to heaven, for I have sinned greivously against her; I find no refuge on earth, for I have become an outrage to her. What then shall I do? Shall I despair? No! God is merciful, and my Saviour is righteous. Therefore God alone is my refuge; He will not despise his own creation; He will not reject that which is in His own image. To Thee, therefore, most righteous God, sad and sorrowing I come, since Thou alone art my hope and my refuge. But what shall I say to Thee, since I dare not lift my eyes? I shall pour forth words of sorrow, I shall implore Thy mercy, and say:
Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy great mercy.)

Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum: benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui.
Amen

(Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. Amen.)

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