

**Music from the
Chapel Royal
of
Mary Tudor**



**Cambridge Taverner
Choir**

**Chapel of Jesus College Cambridge
Sunday 17 April 1994
8.15 p.m.**

Mass of the Resurrection at the court of Mary Tudor

Kyrie: Deus creator omnium	chant
Missa Cantate: Gloria	John Sheppard (c. 1519-1559/1560)
Sequence: Victimæ paschali laudes	chant
Missa Cantate: Credo	Sheppard
Preface	chant
Missa Cantate: Sanctus & Benedictus	Sheppard
Lord's Prayer and Peace	chant
Missa Cantate: Agnus Dei	Sheppard

INTERVAL OF 15 MINUTES

Media vita	Sheppard
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The Cambridge Taverner Choir

director: Owen Rees

sopranos: Josie Dixon, Helen Garrison, Caroline Preston Bell,

Margaret Simper, Rachel Sutton, Sally Terris, Tanya Wicks

altos: Toby Gee, Martin Neill, Rupert Preston Bell, Peter Smith

tenors: Philip Mills, Vijay Rangarajan, Edwin Simpson, David Thomson

basses: James Durran, Frank Salmon, Gary Snapper, Paul Watson

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

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The middle decades of the sixteenth century form a period of religious instability unparalleled in English history. Under the first of Henry VIII's children to ascend the throne - Edward VI (ruled 1547-1553) - the church underwent a protestant reformation of increasing radicalism, with English replacing Latin as the language of the liturgy and restrictions on the amount and elaboration of sacred music. However, Edward's sister Mary (who succeeded him in 1553) remained faithful to the Catholic religion of her mother, Catherine of Aragon, and set about the restoration of all that the reformers had altered or destroyed. Her Chapel Royal - the largest and most prestigious sacred musical institution in the country - must have formed the model of the restored Latin liturgy and of the elaborate musical style which was associated with the important feasts of the calendar.

Among the most eminent composers belonging to the Chapel Royal was John Sheppard, who was born probably in the second decade of the century, and who died shortly after Queen Mary's own death in 1558. Sheppard had previously been *informator choristarum* (master of the choristers) at Magdalen College, Oxford, and it is difficult to determine which parts of his surviving output were composed there or at the Chapel Royal. Of the five surviving Mass Ordinary settings by Sheppard, the most elaborate is intriguingly entitled 'Cantate' in the only source (which dates from the late sixteenth century). The explanation for this title remains obscure, since the

melodic material which recurs throughout the Mass has yet to be identified. (This material occurs sometimes in long note-values in the tenor part, and elsewhere is distributed throughout the texture.) Nor, given the date of the source, can we assign the work to a particular period, although scholars have generally placed it within Mary's reign on the basis of its style. That style demonstrates clearly the extent to which English sacred polyphony remained distinct from its continental counterpart in the mid-sixteenth century. Although the five voice-parts frequently imitate one another, the melodic language is extraordinarily exuberant, with frequent wide leaps and an abundance of decorative figures, the combination of which in fully-scored sections brings about the pungent clashes which are a prominent feature of Sheppard's style. An extreme example of melodic elaboration - a written-out trill which occurs at several points in the contratenor parts - is perhaps the most unusual feature of the Mass.

The work is faithful to English tradition also in its scoring (making use of the high treble, together with mean, two contratenors, tenor, and bass) and in the way in which it is structured - essentially by contrasting sections which are fully-scored with others in which a variety of three- and four-part combinations are employed. Full scoring is often reserved for climactic points in the text, such as 'gratias agimus tibi' in the Gloria, 'Et resurrexit' in the Credo, and 'Osanna' in both Sanctus and Benedictus.

Whenever it was composed, the 'Cantate' Mass would surely have been performed in the Chapel Royal of Mary Tudor, and it was certainly designed to decorate a major feast. We have chosen to place it in the context of Mass of the Resurrection (i.e. High Mass on Easter Day) according to the Salisbury Rite restored by Mary. The first part of the concert is by no means a complete reconstruction of Mass: rather we include sufficient plainchant to provide a sense of the impact which polyphony must always have made when growing out of a chant context. Within the Use of Salisbury the Kyrie was normally troped (that is, extended through the addition of text), which may be why English composers did not set it polyphonically as a part of their Mass cycles. The Kyrie *Deus creator omnium* was sung on principal double feasts (the highest rank - such as Mass of the Resurrection) and major double feasts.

The single work in the second part of the concert belongs to the Lenten season, being a setting of the antiphon to the canticle *Nunc dimittis* at Compline (the last Office of the day) on the third and fourth Sundays in Lent. The canticle itself is performed in chant, and surrounding it Sheppard constructed an extraordinarily grand polyphonic elaboration of the plainchant (placed, where present, in the tenor, and laid out in breves). At the opening the rising motive of the chant (the first voice to enter) is taken up in turn by the other five voices to produce a marvellous natural crescendo. After the chanting of the *Nunc dimittis* comes a series of verses scored for a reduced number of voices - the first two for the lower parts and the third employing *gimel*, with divided trebles and means (underpinned eventually by the basses to produce a strikingly 'hollow' scoring). Between these verses ever shorter parts of the opening full section are repeated.

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NEXT CONCERT:

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Mundy: Vox patris caelestis

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