

CAMBRIDGE TAVERNER CHOIR

Owen Rees *director*

John Taverner MISSA MATER CHRISTI

and music by
Thomas Tallis



Sunday 3 December 1995
Jesus College Chapel, Cambridge
8.15 p.m.

PROGRAMME

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Mater Christi sanctissima	John Taverner (c. 1490–1545)
Introit: Rorate cœli desuper	chant
Gloria: Missa Mater Christi	John Taverner
Collect: Deus qui de beatæ Mariæ	chant
Credo: Missa Mater Christi	Taverner
Sancte Deus	Thomas Tallis (c. 1500–1585)

INTERVAL of 15 minutes

Preface	chant
Sanctus: Missa Mater Christi	Taverner
Pater noster & Pax Domini	chant
Agnus Dei: Missa Mater Christi	Taverner
Communion: Ecce virgo concipiet	chant
Ave rosa sine spinis	Tallis

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The Cambridge Taverner Choir
director Owen Rees

<i>sopranos</i>	<i>altos</i>	<i>tenors</i>	<i>basses</i>
Diana Baumann	Toby Gee	Paul Baumann	James Durran
Josie Dixon	Simon Godsill	Philip Mills	Frank Salmon
Bryony Fisher	Nicholas Perkins	Edwin Simpson	Gary Snapper
Helen Garrison	Rupert Preston Bell	David Thompson	Paul Watson
Caroline Preston Bell			
Margaret Simper			
Sally Terris			

We are most grateful to the Master, Dean of Chapel, and Fellows of Jesus College, for their kind permission to perform in the chapel.

John Taverner may have come from Lincolnshire, but we have no knowledge of his life until 1524 or 1525, when he was a lay clerk at the collegiate church of the Holy Trinity at Tattershall in that county (the church where the Cambridge Taverner Choir gave its inaugural concert). In 1525 he was invited to become master of the choristers of a prestigious new foundation in Oxford: Cardinal College, the brainchild of Cardinal Wolsey. Taverner took up his duties there in 1526, but his stay in Oxford was to be brief, for in 1529 Wolsey fell from grace and his College went into decline, and we must presume that this was the reason for Taverner's departure in 1530. While in Oxford Taverner became associated with a Lutheran faction at the college, but escaped punishment because, as Wolsey declared, he was 'unlearned and not to be regarded'.

Taverner may have returned directly to Lincolnshire in 1530. We next have sight of him as a lay clerk in the choir maintained at Boston Parish Church by the wealthy Guild of St Mary, a choir which—like those at Tattershall and Cardinal College, Oxford—was large by the standards of the time. By 1537 he had left the choir, and thereafter there is no sign that he continued to be involved directly in church music. A year later he was responsible for destroying the rood screen in Boston Parish Church; this and other evidence shows that he played his part in the Henrician reformation. However, the widely-known claim of John Foxe that Taverner 'repented him very much that he had made songs to Popish ditties in the time of his blindness' is likely to be—at the least—exaggerated.

Taverner's Masses are remarkable not least for the variety of techniques and styles found within them. In addition to the three elaborate and florid six-voice works based upon a plainchant cantus firmus—*Corona spinea* (a performance of which opened our current season), *Gloria tibi trinitas* (with which we conclude the season in Ely Cathedral on 3 August), and *O Michael*—there are several works in relatively more concise styles. Among these are two 'parody' Masses, composed partly in imitation of an existing work by Taverner himself: *Missa Sancti Wilhelmi devotio* and *Missa Mater Christi*. The latter forms the basis of tonight's concert.

The model for the piece—*Mater Christi sanctissima*, with which the concert opens—is an antiphon votive to Mary, and would have been performed at the end of the liturgical day. It is notable for the antiphonal contrasts between two high voices and three lower voices (as at the opening), for the concise way in which the text is set (often with just one note per syllable, and several passages where all voices sing a phrase together in the same rhythm), and for the remarkable soaring cadences at 'corpora' and at the very end of the piece, these being all the more telling for the fact that they follow music of such concision.

The distinctiveness of the antiphon makes its relationship to the Mass easily audible. The antiphon's opening serves as a 'head-motive' at the beginning of each section of the Mass (albeit with subtle but telling alterations in the Sanctus and Agnus Dei), and its last cadence rounds off the Gloria, Credo, and Agnus Dei. Besides this, the antiphonal textures and concise declamation of the antiphon form the basis of those sections which have the longest texts: the Gloria and Credo. Even within the Mass, however, there is great contrast of style: in the Sanctus particularly Taverner allows his writing to expand into vast melismatic paragraphs which are reminiscent of the great six-voice Masses.

In this concert we place Taverner's Mass in the context of chants for the Feast of the Annunciation of Our Lady in Eastertide, one of the major Marian feasts on which the piece might have been performed. This is by no means a complete liturgical reconstruction, but provides sufficient chant to give some sense of the progress of the liturgy.

One aim of this season of concerts is to allow comparison between Taverner's music and that of other prominent English composers working in the same period. Tonight we focus upon Thomas Tallis (c. 1500–1585), presenting two of the five votive antiphons by him to have survived. The text of *Ave rosa sine spinis* is a 'trope' (i.e. elaboration) of the 'Ave Maria', words or phrases from which appear at the opening of each stanza except the last. The style and construction of the piece (which is conceived on a grand scale) are in many ways more conservative than those of Taverner's *Mater Christi*, with longer sections for each combination of voices (rather than the more compressed antiphony of *Mater Christi*), although the melodic and rhythmic style has

Nigra sum sed formosa, filiae Jerusalem, sicut tabernacula Cedar, sicut pelles Salomonis. Nolite me considerare quod fusca sim, quia decoloravit me sol: filii matris meae pugnaverunt contra me, posuerunt me custodem in vineis.
I am black but comely. O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mothers's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards.

O magnum mysterium, et admirabile sacramentum, ut animalia viderent Dominum natum, iacentem in praesepio. Natum vidimus, et chorus angelorum, collaudantes Dominum. Alleluia. Quem vidistis pastores, dicite, annuntiate nobis, quis apparuit? Natum vidimus...
O great mystery and wonderful sacrament, that the animals see the new-born Lord lying in the manger. We have seen the new-born child and choirs of angels praising God. Alleluia. Tell us, shepherds, whom have you seen, who has appeared? We have seen....

Stabat mater dolorosa Juxta crucem lacrimosa Dum pendebat Filius. Cujus animam gementem, Contristatam et dolentem Per transivit gladius.	<i>The sorrowful mother stood weeping by the cross while her son was hanging there. Her anguished heart, afflicted and sorrowful, was pierced with a sword.</i>	Sancta Mater, istud agas. Crucifixi fige plagas Cordi meo valide. Tui nati vulnerati, Tam dignati pro me pati, Poenas mecum divide.	<i>Blessed mother, may thou fix the blows of the crucifixion strongly in my heart. Share with me the pains of thy wounded and so worthy Son, who was born for me.</i>
O quam tristis et afflicta Fuit illa benedicta Mater unigeniti! Quae moerebat et dolebat Pia mater, dum videbat Nati poenas inclyti.	<i>Oh how sad and grief-stricken was that blessed woman, mother of the only begotten Son. How she lamented and sorrowed when she witnessed the sufferings of her illustrious Son.</i>	Fac me tecum pie flere. Crucifixo condolere Donec ego vixero. Juxta crucem tecum stare Et me tibi sociare In planctu desidero.	<i>Make me weep piously with thee, suffering the crucifixion, so that I shall conquer. I desire to stand by the cross with thee, to share with thee in lamentation.</i>
Quis est homo qui non fletet Matrem Christi, si videret In tanto supplicio? Quis non posset contristari Piam matrem contemplari Dolentem cum Filio?	<i>Who would not weep if he saw the Mother of Christ in such torment? Who would not share her sorrow, as he witnessed the mother of Christ grieving with her son?</i>	Virgo virginum praeclara, Mihi jam non sis amara: Fac me tecum plangere. Fac ut portem Christi mortem Passionis fac consortem, Et plagas recolere.	<i>Oh Virgin, of all virgins most noble, may thou now share thy bitterness with me: make me lament with thee. Grant that I may carry the death of Christ; make me join in his passion and the blows he suffered.</i>
Pro peccatis suae gentis Vidit Jesum in tormentis Et flagellis subditum. Vidit suum dulcem natum Morientem desolatum Dum emisit spiritum.	<i>She saw Jesus in agony for the sins of his people and submitting to the scourges. She saw her dear Son dying, deserted as he gave up the ghost.</i>	Fac me plagis vulnerari, Fac me cruce inebriari, Et cruore Filii. Flammis ne urar succensus, Per te Virgo, sim defensus In die judicii.	<i>Make me wounded with those blows; make me drunk with the cross and with the blood of thy Son. May I, through thee, burn with flames and be consumed, so that I may be defended in the day of judgement.</i>
Eia Mater, fons amoris Me sentire vim doloris Fac, ut tecum lugeam. Fac ut ardeat cor meum In amando Christum Deum, Ut sibi complaceam.	<i>Ah Mother, fount of love, make me feel the violence of thy sorrow, that I may grieve with thee. Make my heart burn with love for Christ my God, that I may be pleasing unto him.</i>	Christe cum sit hinc exire. Da per Matrem me venire Ad palmam victoriae. Quando corpus morietur, Fac ut animae donetur Paradisi gloria.	<i>Oh Christ, when thou comest forth from thy present torment, grant through the Mother, that I shall bear the victor's palm, when my body shall die, let my soul be granted glory in paradise.</i>

Salve Regina, misericordiae vita dulcedo et spes nostra, salve. Ad te clamamus exules filii Evae. Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes, in hac lachrimarum valle. Eia ergo advocata nostra illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte. Et Jesum benedictum fructum ventris tui nobis post hoc exilium ostende. O clemens, O pia, O dulcis Virgo Maria.
Hail, Queen of mercy; hail, our life, our sweetness and our hope. We cry to you, exiled children of Eve. We send up our sighs to you, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Therefore, as our advocate, turn your merciful eyes towards us and, after this life of exile, show us Jesus, the blessed fruit of your womb. O merciful, O holy, O sweet Virgin Mary.

Christus factus est pro nobis obediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis. Propter quod et Deus exaltavit illum, et dedit illi nomen quod est super omne nomen.
Christ was made obedient unto death, even death on the cross. God therefore exalted him and gave him a name which is above every name.

Victimae paschali: Dic nobis Maria quid vidisti in via? Sepulchrum Christi viventis; et gloriam vidi resurgentis. Dic nobis... Angelicos testes, sudarium et vestes. Dic nobis.... Surrexit Christus spes mea praecedet vos in Galilaeam. Dic nobis... Scimus Christum surrexisse a mortuis vere: tu nobis, victor Rex, miserere. Alleluia.

Tell us, Mary, what didst thou see on the way? I saw the tomb of the living Christ, and the glory of his rising up again. Tell us... The Angelic witnesses, the head-cloth and the garments. Tell us... Christ, my hope, has risen from the dead, and he goes before you into Galilee. Tell us... Truly, we know that Christ has risen from the dead. Have mercy on us, triumphant King. Alleluia.

O gloriosa Domina, excelsa super sidera, qui te creavit provide, lactasti sacro ubere. Quod Eva tristis abstulit, tu reddis almo germine, intrent ut astra flebiles, coeli fenestra facta es. Tu regis alti Janua et porta lucis fulgida, vitam datam per virginem gentes redemptae plaudite. Gloria tibi Domine, Qui natus es de Virgine, cum Patre et sancto Spiritu in sempiterna secula. Amen.
O glorious Lady, high above the stars, provide for him who created thee, milk from thy sacred breasts. Nourishing thus thy offspring, thou givest back what sad Eve took away, and so that the wretched may reach beyond the stars, thou art made the window of heaven. Thou reignest as the door and shining portal to the light and those who have been redeemed give praise for the life that is given through the Virgin. Glory be to Thee, O Lord, who was born of a Virgin, and to the Father, and the Holy Ghost, for ever and ever. Amen.

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little of the floridity of Taverner's six-voice Masses, for example. *Sancte Deus* is a Jesus antiphon—possibly intended to be sung at a devotion before the great Cross in the nave. It is scored for just four voices, and is constructed as a series of short sections, several of which are preceded by held chords for the whole choir. The style is again nowhere so 'modern' as that of *Mater Christi*, but the powerful shaping of melismatic sections (and in particular the final 'amen') is a compositional craft akin to that seen, for example, in Taverner's Sanctus and Agnus Dei.

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