

CAMBRIDGE TAVERNER CHOIR

Owen Rees *director*

PROGRAMME

John Taverner

Missa Gloria tibi trinitas

Thomas Tallis (c. 1505–1585)

O nata lux

Gloria tibi trinitas (chant)

Kyrie: *Deus creator omnium* (chant)

John Taverner (c. 1490–1545)

Gloria: *Missa Gloria tibi trinitas*

Collect (chant)

In place of Gradual:

William Byrd (1542/3–1623)

Miserere (organ)

Credo: *Missa Gloria tibi trinitas* (Taverner)

INTERVAL

of 15 minutes

Quemadmodum desiderat

cervus (Taverner)

Preface (chant)

Sanctus: *Missa Gloria tibi*

trinitas (Taverner)

Pater noster & *Pax Domini* (chant)

Agnus Dei: *Missa Gloria tibi trinitas*

(Taverner)

The largest-scale works in the surviving output of John Taverner (a surviving output which is small by continental standards) are three six-voice Masses which adopt a grand florid style: *Corona spinea*, *Gloria tibi trinitas*, and *O Michael*. All three are constructed upon a chant cantus firmus placed in a single voice (although quite frequently imitated in the other parts) and usually in longer note-values than those employed by the remaining voices. The chant from which the *Missa Gloria tibi trinitas* takes its name was to become the basis for a whole repertory of textless pieces which had its origins in the four-voice setting of the words 'In nomine Domini' in the Benedictus of Taverner's Mass, where the chant, beginning with a rise and fall of a third, can be heard in the Mean (that is, the second-highest voice). We perform this chant, which would have been heard towards the beginning of the celebration of the feast of the Holy Trinity, as antiphon to the first psalm at First Vespers, near the opening of the concert.

Although the melodic and rhythmic writing in *Gloria tibi trinitas* is often extraordinarily virtuosic, especially at moments of climax such as the rising

scales setting 'Amen' at the end of the Gloria, there is a remarkable degree of variety within the Mass as a whole, and among the sections for reduced numbers of voices there occur passages of expressive simplicity: not only the famous *In nomine* just mentioned, but also for example the four-voice setting of *miserere nobis* in the second Agnus Dei. The scoring ranges from duets to motivically dense writing involving all six voices, and one hears a wide variety of vocal combinations, including the striking 'gapped' texture of treble and bass or in the *Crucifixus* section of the Credo two trebles in 'gimel' and a bass. Although the impression is often one of melodic spontaneity and variety, there are prominent examples of Taverner's love of sequence, where a motive will be repeated many times in one or more voice parts; some of the most extended examples are in the bass, as at *de celis* in the Credo where a rising sequence covers the whole range of the voice.

In tonight's concert the choir perform sufficient plainchant to give some impression of the effect that festal polyphony of this type would originally have had within the celebration of Mass. Taverner's device of employing the same basic idea for the opening of each 'movement' of the Mass becomes all the more telling when the 'movements' are thus separated. Also included is one of Taverner's greatest motets: the setting of psalm verses *Like as the heart* (*Quemadmodum desiderat*).

In June 1986 a group of singers from St Catharine's and other Cambridge colleges was assembled to take part in a special event: the performance of John Taverner's *Missa Gloria tibi trinitas* within a reconstruction of Mass for Trinity Sunday according to the Use of Salisbury, sung in the church where Taverner worked: Tattershall in Lincolnshire. The concert was organised by Alastair Harper, and conducted by John Butt. Although no future events were planned at that time, the group, under its original name chosen for this first concert, began to give concerts in Cambridge from the next academic year onwards, under the directorship of Owen Rees and administered by Gary Snapper, and the regular series of Cambridge concerts has continued ever since. The **Cambridge Taverner Choir** marked its tenth anniversary with a performance of the same Taverner Mass in Ely Cathedral Lady Chapel, and tonight's performance marks the fifteenth anniversary of the choir's



founding. A number of tonight's singers took part in the original concert. The choir take this opportunity to acknowledge the support of their extremely loyal audience.

Tudor music has remained one of the choir's principal specialisms, but the repertoire has always been wide, with particular emphasis on music from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Portugal and Spain. In 1990 the choir first performed the newly-transcribed Portuguese repertory which formed a principal subject of Owen Rees's research, and there followed in 1991 an extremely successful tour of Portugal on which this repertory was performed in its original context; after this came a broadcast of the Portuguese repertory on BBC Radio and the release of the choir's first CD recording in 1993. Recent seasons of Cambridge concerts have included a series marking the 450th anniversary of Taverner's death, and surveys of music in the great European cities and courts circa 1600 and circa 1500. The current season presents some of the greatest Mass settings of the Renaissance.

Owen Rees began his academic and conducting career as Organ Scholar at St Catharine's College, Cambridge, studying with Peter le Huray and Iain Fenlon. After a period as College Lecturer in Music at St Peter's College and St Edmund Hall, Oxford, he joined the Music Department at the University of Surrey. In 1997 he returned to Oxford, where he is Fellow in Music and Organist at the Queen's College, Lecturer at Somerville College, and Lecturer in the Faculty of Music. His published studies include work on musical sources and repertories from Coimbra, and on the music of, for example, Francisco Guerrero and William Byrd. His work as a scholar has consistently informed his work as a performer. He has conducted at festivals in the UK, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, France, and the Netherlands. Choirs under his direction have released CD recordings on the Herald, Hyperion, and Unicorn Kanchana labels, to consistently high critical acclaim.

Supported by The Williams School of Church Music