



Wednesday 12 July 2023, 7.30pm – 9.20pm
St Mary's Church, Petworth

Tenebrae – English Glories of the Sixteenth Century

PROGRAMME NOTES

Robert White	<i>Christe qui lux es III</i>
William Byrd	<i>Mass for Four Voices (interspersed with plainsong propers)</i>
Thomas Tallis	<i>O Sacrum Convivium</i>
	<i>Sance Deus</i>
	<i>Miserere Nostril</i>
	<i>Loquebantur</i>

Interval

Robert White	<i>Christe qui lux es IV</i>
William Mundy	<i>Vox Patris Caelestis</i>
Robert White	<i>Exaudiat te Dominus</i>

Christe qui lux es III and IV: Robert White (c.1538-1574)

White was among the elite of the Tudor group of mainly ecclesiastical composers who managed to serve opposing religious monarchs of the period and survive with their heads still attached. White's music might well have lain undiscovered were it not for the efforts of Charles Burney in placing them in their rightful place alongside the masterpieces of such as Sheppard, Taverner, Parsons and Byrd.

The Compline hymn: *Christe qui lux es et dies* received multiple treatments by White, all alternating plainsong with harmonised treatments. The third version of White's setting places the *cantus firmus* in the top voice and thus is immediately recognised. When the melody is concealed in a tenor voice (usually in elongated notes), there is still the effect of unity with the original chant, but it remains more subtly concealed within the musical workmanship. It might be worth noting that the term 'tenor' denotes the voice-part which literally hangs on to the original thematic line (Latin: *tenere* = to hold) and only subsequently has become the term for a particular vocal range.

The fourth version, also in five parts, places the *cantus firmus* in the second lowest part in augmentation, giving a more sonorous and grounded treatment of the same theme, again alternating with the plainchant original.

Christ, who art the light and day,
You drive away the darkness of night,
You are called the light of light,
For you proclaim the blessed light.

We beseech you, Holy Lord,
Protect us this night.
Let us take our rest in you;
Grant us a tranquil night.

Let our sleep be free from care;
Let not the enemy snatch us away,
Nor flesh conspire within him,
And make us guilty in your sight.

Though our eyes be filled with sleep,
Keep our hearts forever awake to you.
May your right hand protect
Your willing servants.

You who are our shield, behold;
Restrain those that lie in wait.
And guide your servants whom
You have ransomed with your blood.

Remember us, O Lord,
Who bear the burden of this mortal form;
You who are the defender of the soul,
Be near us, O Lord.

Glory be to God the Father,
And to his only Son,
With the Spirit, Comforter,
Both now and evermore. Amen.

Mass for four voices, interspersed with plainsong Propers: William Byrd (c.1540-1623)

It might seem curious that Byrd would compose only three settings of the Ordinary of the Mass among such a large output of other sacred choral music. Yet when the historical context is considered, it becomes clear that the discovery of such settings would have grave consequences, considering the backdrop of religious persecution during the birth-pangs of the new Elizabethan protestant repertoire. The composer was very careful to leave his own manuscript of the three settings free from compromising identification, as this music would likely have been for use in the clandestine celebrations of Mass in the recusant chapels of his patron, Sir John Petre. Byrd would doubtless never have been allowed the musical reward of hearing his creative lines soar in the acoustic freedom of lofty chancels - rather more the boxed-in chamber music of the oppressed.

Like his contemporary composer-colleagues, Tye, Sheppard and Tallis, Byrd was evidently influenced by a particular work of John Taverner - his *Mean Mass*. Byrd would almost certainly have sung this piece while a choirboy, and analysis of certain features of this four-part Mass shows a direct match with aspects of the Taverner work. In typical Tudor fashion, sections

of the longer *Gloria* and *Agnus* movements were varied with episodes in two or three voice-parts. But the influence of Taverner is clear in the rising phrase of the *Sanctus* within the interval of a fifth which then develops into a more-remarkable span of a seventh. A further remarkable effect (for the period) is the appearance at certain significant cadences of unexpected major resolutions. This juxtaposition of major and minor seems to have gone into abeyance in English music until the 20th century, and is a feature of that work which proved to be such a significant feature in the renaissance of a cappella liturgical settings: Vaughan Williams' *Mass in G minor*. The closing section of the Byrd *Agnus Dei* has been suggested by some commentators as the pinnacle of vocal writing of this era: overlapping sequences of suspensions which, while peculiarly English, show the same degree of plangent supplication as any of Byrd's continental counterparts. It might be that the composer was aligning the plight of suppressed Catholics in the treatment of 'nobis' in the final falling phrases.

O Sacrum Convivium, Sancte Deus, Miserere Nostri, Loquebantur: Thomas Tallis (1505-1585)

Tallis was steeped in the choral tradition which was already established in England in his day and the chances are that he sang as boy and man in the Chapel Royal. His prestigious appointments as a Director of Music were at Dover Priory, Waltham Abbey and Canterbury Cathedral. Like his contemporary and pupil, William Byrd, he managed to remain a Roman Catholic and survive despite the public nature of his work as composer to more than one monarch of the era. It might be said that his success in the diplomacies of survival were down to his ability to adapt to the whimsical requirements of his patrons and to be less concerned with any sense of his own style and desires as a composer.

The text of *O Sacrum Convivium* is the Magnificat antiphon for the feast of *Corpus Christi* which accentuates the sacramental affinity between the institution of the Eucharist on Holy Thursday evening and the redeeming power of the Resurrection of Christ on Easter Sunday.

*O sacrum convivium!
in quo Christus sumitur:
recolitur memoria passionis eius:
mens impletur gratia:
et futurae gloriae nobis pignus datur.
Alleluia.*

O sacred banquet!
in which Christ is received,
the memory of his Passion is renewed,
the mind is filled with grace,
and a pledge of future glory to us is given.
Alleluia.

Sancte Deus dates from the reign of Henry VIII and therefore shows much of a stylistic link with Tallis' predecessor, John Taverner. It is rather unashamedly directed towards the second person of the Trinity and the text possesses a sense of Eastern liturgy, notably in the opening phrase, oft-recurring in many Russian Orthodox motets and still used in both Latin and Greek forms in the celebration of the Passion in the Roman Rite.

*Sancte Deus, Sancte Fortis,
Sancte et Immortalis, miserere nobis.
Nunc, Christe, te petimus,
miserere, quaesumus.
Qui venisti redimere perditos,
noli damnare redemptos:
Quia per crucem tuam redemisti
mundum. Amen.*

Holy God, Holy Mighty One,
Holy and Immortal One, have mercy upon
us.
Now, O Christ, we ask thee,
we beseech thee, have mercy.
Thou who came to redeem the lost,
do not condemn the redeemed:
For by thy cross thou hast redeemed the
world. Amen.

Miserere Nostri is an outstanding work of polyphonic ingenuity, featuring a strict canon between the two highest voices at the same time as a canon between the two bass voices, this time not only in different factors of note-values but one in pitch-reflection, each mirroring the path of the other. Add to this some florid decoration, some of that in canon (with inversion!) and one of these an extra, lower voice and this texture seems to prepare the listener for the extraordinary feats of Tallis' 40-part motet, *Spem in Alium*. The unfamiliar form of the title leads many to presume an error for the more familiar *Miserere nobis*, but this phrase occurs in Psalm 122 and at the end of the *Te Deum*. This example of Tallis' sublime writing is testament to his unassailable place among the masters of the Elizabethan age.

Miserere nostri Domine, miserere nostri. Have mercy on us Lord, have mercy on us.

Like *Miserere Nostri*, *Loquebantur* is set in the unusual scoring of seven voice-parts, perhaps an aural hint at the notion of the disciples at Pentecost finding themselves fluent in many languages and the element of 'variis linguis' is represented by this large number of concurrent vocal lines. This text is technically not a motet since it is a prescribed text from the Divine Office, namely the Responsory from the First Vespers of Pentecost. The impression might conceivably be that the Apostles are heard jubilantly exercising their newly-found ability to be understood and the result a heavenly cacophony while the lines of interposed chant reminds our modern ears that the function of the setting was an ecclesiastical one within the musical routine of worship.

*Loquebantur variis linguis Apostoli
magnalia Dei.
prout Spiritus Sanctus dabat eloqui
illis, alleluia.
Repleti sunt omnes Spiritu Sancto,
et coeperunt loqui variis linguis.*

The Apostles spoke in many languages
of the great works of God,
as the Holy Spirit gave them the gift of
speech, alleluia.
They were all filled with the Holy Spirit
and began to speak.

Vox Patris Caelestis: William Mundy (c.1529-1591)

The two-part opening of this motet could easily be imagined to be the inspiration for William Byrd for the opening of the Agnus of his four-part Mass - written the year after Mundy's death. Stratospheric upper-voice gymnastics are reminiscent of the style of John Sheppard. It is a work of colossal scale for its period and is an outstanding creation. Its text is from the pen of William Forrest, combining the sensuousness of the *Song of Songs* with verses formed in homage to the Virgin Mary. It is clearly intended as a musical meditation for the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin into heaven. While this tradition, originating very much from the common belief of Catholics since around the 5th century, was formalised into a dogma only in 1950, it shows that Mundy was clearly affiliated with the Catholic leanings of Mary Tudor. Indeed, in its highly charged, physical sentiments, this work shares a manner of expression to equal anything created by continental contemporaries and as such would have been unacceptable to the reformed sensibilities of Elizabeth's ecclesiastical world.

*Vox Patris caelestis
ad sacram virginem Mariam,
Filii eius genitricem,
in eius migratione a corpore mortali
in hiis verbis prorumpens:
'Tota pulchra es, amica mea,
mihi amabilissima Annae prolis,
virgo sacratissima Maria
et macula ab ineunte conceptionis tuae
instanti vel usquam
non est in te.*

*Favus distillans labia tua
ex corde purissimo
verba mira dulcedinis spiritualis gratia.
Iam enim hiems terreni frigoris
et miseria transiit:
flores aeternae felicitatis et salutis
mecum tibi ab aeterna praeparate
olfacere et sentire apparuerunt.*

*Vineae florentes odorem caelestis
ambrosianae dulcedinis dederunt;
et vox turturis
quae mea tui dilectissimi amatoris
sola est exoptatio te amplecti,
audita est in terra nostra tali sonante gratia.*

*Surge, propera, amica mea,
columba mea, formosa mea,
de terra longinqua miseriis plena,
et veni in terram quam monstravero tibi.*

*Veni de corpore mortali, et induante,
mea corcula, vestitu deaurato*

The voice of the heavenly Father
to the holy Virgin Mary,
the mother of his Son,
as she was translated from her mortal body
broke forth in these words:
'All lovely are you, my love,
my dearest child of Anna,
most sacred of virgins, Mary,
and from the very moment of your conception
neither now or ever has any stain
been found in you.

Your lips are as a honeycomb,
distilling from your most pure heart
words wonderful in spiritual sweetness.
Lo, now the winter of earthly cold
and wretchedness is past; flowers of eternal
bliss and happiness which have awaited you
here with me from everlasting
now appear, beautiful of sight and scent.

The fruitful vines give their perfume of
ambrosia, heavenly in sweetness,
and the voice of the turtle dove,
the song of your dearest lover's only desire
to embrace you,
is heard in our land with graceful notes.

Arise and make haste my beloved,
my dove, my fair one,
from that far land full of sorrow,
and come to this land which I will show to you.

Come forth from your mortal body,

circumdata varietate caelestis gloriae.

*Veni ad me, dilectissimum amatorem tuum,
prae omnibus adamata,
et ponam in te thronum meum
quia concupivi speciem tuam.*

*Veni de Libano monte mundano quamquam
altissimo humanae contemplationis,
ad montem Sion,
ubi innocentes manibuset corde
ascendere deberent.*

*Veni ad me, Assuerum verum,
Esther, mea nobilissima,
pro populo tuo oratura
mecum in aeternum manere et delectare.
Te omnes caeli cives
summo desiderio exoptant videre.
Veni, veni, veni:
caelesti gloria coronaberis.'
Amen.*

my dear-heart, clothed in raiment of gold and
surrounded by the rainbow of heavenly glory.

Come to me, your most dear lover,
for I have loved you above all others,
and I will bestow upon you my kingdom,
for I have long desired your beauty.

Come from that earthly Mount Lebanon,
however lofty, of human contemplation,
to Mount Sion,
whither the pure of hand and heart
must ever ascend.

Come to me, your true Ahasuerus,
my Esther, my most high-born,
to pray for your people
and ever to stay and take your delight with me.
All the hosts of heaven
with great desire are longing to look upon you;
Come, come, come
and be crowned with heavenly glory.'
Amen.

Exaudiat te Dominus: Robert White (c.1538-1574)

Essentially a psalm-motet, this extended piece is a rather curious, retrospective treatment of a text which shows loyalty to earthly rulers, and it might be assumed that this was an example of a composer playing safe with his royal patrons. The chances are that it was written for Westminster Abbey or the Chapel Royal and the singers available at the time must have possessed the requisite range and stamina to do justice to this work. Passages of sparse texture contrast with rich, seven-part writing which, despite the conservative nature of the style, is impressive and exciting.

*Exaudiat te Dominus in die tribulationis:
protegat te nomen Dei Jacob.
Mittat tibi auxilium de sancto:
et de Sion tueatur te.
Memor sit omnis sacrificii tui:
et holocaustum tuum pingue fiat.
Tribuat tibi secundum cor tuum:
et omne consilium tuum confirmet.
Laetabimur in salutari tuo:
et in nomine Dei nostri magnificabimur.
Impleat Dominus omnes petitiones tuas:
nunc cognovi quoniam salvum fecit
Dominus christum suum.*

*Exaudiat illum de caelo sancto suo:
in potentatibus salus dexteræ eius.
Hi in curribus, et hi in equis: nos autem
in nomine Domini Dei nostri invocabimus.*

May the Lord hear you on the day of judgement:
may the name of the God of Jacob protect you.
May he send to you help from his holy place:
and may he watch over you from Sion.
May he be mindful of all your sacrifices:
and may your burnt offerings be made fruitful.
May he grant to you after your own heart:
and may he confirm all your opinions.
We shall rejoice in your salvation:
and we shall rejoice in the name of our God.
May the Lord fulfil all your petitions:
now I have recognized that the Lord has saved
his anointed.

May he hear you from his holy heaven:
salvation by the power of his right hand.
Some on chariots, and others on horses:
but we on the name of our Lord God shall call.

*Ipsi obligati sunt, et ceciderunt:
nos autem surreximus, et erecti sumus.
Domine, salvum fac regem:
et exaudi nos in die
qua invocaverimus te. Amen.*

They are found guilty, and fall:
but we have arisen, and stand upright.
Lord, save the king:
and hear us on the day
when we call on you. Amen.

Credit: Greg Murray

Tenebrae

Described as “phenomenal” (*The Times*) and “devastatingly beautiful” (*Gramophone Magazine*), award-winning choir Tenebrae is one of the world’s leading vocal ensembles, renowned for its passion and precision.

Under the direction of Nigel Short, Tenebrae performs at major festivals and venues across the globe, including the BBC Proms, Wigmore Hall, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Rheingau Musik Festival and Sydney Festival. The choir has earned international acclaim for its interpretations of choral music from the Renaissance through to contemporary masterpieces, and has commissioned new music from composers including Judith Bingham, Joanna Marsh, Owain Park, Josephine Stephenson, Joby Talbot and Roderick Williams.

Tenebrae has enjoyed collaborations with some of the UK’s leading orchestras, including the London Symphony Orchestra, Aurora Orchestra, the Academy of Ancient Music and Britten Sinfonia. The choir also undertakes regular session work, having contributed the vocals for Max Richter’s *Voices* (2020), Jean-Jacques Annaud’s *Notre Dame brûle* (2022), and blockbuster sci-fi movie *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022) among others. Its extensive recording catalogue comprises a wide range of music on labels including Signum, LSO Live and Warner Classics, and has earned the choir two BBC Music Magazine Awards and a Grammy nomination.

Alongside its performance schedule, the choir runs a thriving Learning & Connection programme encompassing partnerships with Music Centre London and London Youth Choirs, Tenebrae Effect workshops with amateur choirs, and regular classroom singing for local primary schools through its Singing Schools initiative. Through its Associate Artist programme Tenebrae also provides talented young professional singers with vital experience and support in the early stages of their careers.

‘Passion and Precision’ are Tenebrae’s core values. Through its continued dedication to performance of the highest quality, Tenebrae’s vision is to inspire audiences around the world through dramatic programming, flawless performances and unforgettable experiences.

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