

Music from the Peterhouse Partbooks

Our Lady

The Byrd Ensemble

Artistic Director
Markdavin Obenza

Reconstructed by
Dr Nick Sandon

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The Byrd Ensemble

www.ByrdEnsemble.com



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THE BYRD ENSEMBLE described as “Seattle’s own masters of ancient polyphony” (Seattle Times), is a vocal ensemble specializing in the performance of chamber vocal music. The ensemble of eight to twelve singers have been performing programs of medieval, renaissance, baroque and modern music in the greater Seattle area since 2003, formerly under the name “The Renaissance Singers.” The Byrd Ensemble have been presented by the Early Music Guild’s *Musicians of the Guild* and *First Tuesdays* series, Tudor Choir, Music Northwest and Seattle University. The Byrd Ensemble are Artists-in-Residence at Seattle’s first Episcopal parish, Trinity Parish Church (established 1865), where the group performs regularly throughout the year. The group’s creative efforts are led by Markdavin Obenza.



THE HENRICIAN PARTBOOKS AT PETERHOUSE, CAMBRIDGE

One of the most important sources of English Latin church music from the period leading up to the Reformation is a set of partbooks belonging to Peterhouse, Cambridge. Known as the 'Henrician set' to distinguish them from two seventeenth-century sets also owned by the college, these partbooks are important because they contain a large and varied repertoire of first-class music copied at a crucial moment of religious history for use in a church of immense historical prestige and considerable national importance. The church in question is Canterbury Cathedral. During the Middle Ages this was, like several other English cathedrals, a monastery inhabited by Benedictine monks. Early in 1540 Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries caught up with it: its monastic community was dispossessed (some of the monks became clergy of the new establishment while others were pensioned off); its property was expropriated by the Crown; and it was refounded with a dean and chapter and the necessary ancillary staff. Plans for the change of regime were made well in advance in order to reduce to a minimum any hiatus in the cathedral's religious activity. The new foundation was on an ambitious scale and included a specialist choir of twelve vicars-choral and ten boys directed by a master of the choristers.

The newly formed choir must have surpassed that of the monastic cathedral both in size and in musical ability, and it would have urgently needed a suitably impressive and challenging repertoire. One of its vicars-choral, Thomas Bull, had previously been a singer in the choir of Magdalen College, Oxford, a university college probably unsurpassed in its cultivation of church music. Bull was also a professional scribe and music copyist, and it seems that when in 1539 he was offered a place in the choir to be formed at Canterbury he was charged with the task of copying and bringing with him a large amount of the

music currently being performed at Magdalen. This would explain why these partbooks contain several works by Magdalen composers whose music does not appear otherwise to have circulated outside that college. Further music may have been added to the collection at Canterbury itself. Much of the music in the partbooks is by composers with established reputations, such as Robert Fayrfax, John Taverner, Hugh Aston and Nicholas Ludford, whose music is likely to appear in any representative source of the period. The collection has something special to offer in the shape of otherwise unknown works, evidently of fairly recent composition, by some of these leading figures, for example Taverner's Mass Mater Christi, three votive antiphons by Aston and two Masses and two votive antiphons by Ludford. There are also unique copies of music by composers near the outset of their career, for example the Mass Sine nomine by Christopher Tye. Taken as a whole, the partbooks offer a unique snapshot, dated 1540, of the polyphonic repertoire which one of England's foremost cathedrals considered it appropriate to perform at its main services.

What may surprise some people is the conservatism of the repertoire. The musical forms represented—the Mass, Magnificat and votive antiphon (a devotional item usually performed after Compline)—are not in themselves surprising, for the Latin rite remained legal and indeed obligatory until 1549, and these were the three main forms that polyphonic church music had taken in England for well over a hundred years. The content and character of some of the works represented are, however, striking in their disharmony with conventional wisdom about the religious climate in England at this time. If votive antiphons seeking the Blessed Virgin's intercession for the release of sinners from purgatory or damnation were being sung in

Canterbury Cathedral, then where was Archbishop Cranmer's Reformation? The truth must be that religious opinion was divided, that the conservative dean and chapter of Canterbury were at odds with their reformist archbishop, that the King was a traditionalist in religion but prized the political and economic perquisites of reform, that no religious faction had a monopoly of influence, and that people alive at the time foresaw the future much less clearly than a certain kind of modern historian can visualize what-was-to-be. Given its mostly excellent quality, it may seem strange that this music is not better known. The chief reason for this is that this set of partbooks is not complete: it originally consisted of five books (a five-part texture of treble, alto, tenor, tenor/baritone and bass was standard for ambitious church music at the time), but the tenor book is missing and pages have been lost from the beginning and end of the treble book. As a result the fifty compositions which cannot be completed from other sources all lack their tenor part, and some also lack their treble. The missing voices can, however, be reconstructed—rarely with total fidelity but at least with stylistic congruity—by anybody with the necessary skill, keenness of ear and eye, determination, and time. Having devoted much of my life to completing these compositions, I am pleased to find that increasing interest is now being shown in them. I am also rather excited, but also a little ashamed, that choirs from the New World and not from the Old are in the vanguard of this exploration. The choice of music for this recital poses an interesting challenge by inviting us to compare the work of four sixteenth-century composers whose careers took diverse courses and whose modern reputations are vastly different: Thomas Tallis, Nicholas Ludford, John Merbecke and William Pashe. Tallis is the only one of them whose music has never fallen out of the Anglican choral repertory,

and he is widely accepted as a composer of major stature; Ludford was virtually unknown until about fifty years ago, but today his advocates would rank him alongside Tallis; Merbecke's memory is not yet quite extinguished, but it survives for reasons which are only peripherally connected with his chief musical achievement; and Pashe and his music have fallen completely into oblivion. I wonder how many listeners would independently decide, on the evidence of the works performed here, that Tallis and Ludford were markedly more significant composers than Merbecke and Pashe, and what reasons they would give for their decision. Such a judgement would, I suppose, imply that the music by the more famous composers was somehow better. Better in what sense? More skillfully composed? More striking? More like other Tudor church music that we have heard? More imaginative? More apt for its purpose? I do not mean to suggest that the idea of relative quality is irrelevant to music of this period, or that we have no right to make such judgements, but rather that we should not attach too much weight to biographical information about composers or be over-deferential to received opinion about their music. The professional success and posthumous reputation enjoyed by composers have always owed a great deal to accident and have never been infallible indicators of musical quality. In early sixteenth century England it would, I think, have been rare for a church musician to rise to the heights of his profession solely on account of his ability as a composer: his skill as a choirmaster, singer or organist would have counted much more. Then as now, an eminent musician might be a prosaic and clumsy composer, and a materially less successful musician might compose imaginatively and skilfully. Not all of the music by the lesser-known composers in Peterhouse is outstanding in quality; but none of it is contemptible, and the best of it is very good indeed.

My soul doth magnify the Lord.

And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my saviour.

For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden;
for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath magnified me; and holy is his name.

And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations.

He hath shewed strength with his arm:
he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seat,
and hath exalted the humble and meek.

He hath filled the hungry with good things;
and the rich he hath sent empty away.

He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel,
as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed, for ever.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost.

As it was in the beginning, and is now and ever shall be,
world without end.

Amen.



1. MAGNIFICAT

William Pasche (fl. late 15th, early 16th c.)

Magnificat anima mea dominum.

Et exultavit spiritus meus: in deo salutari meo.

Quia respexit humilitatem ancille sue:
ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes.

Quia fecit michi magna qui potens est:
et sanctum nomen ejus.

Et misericordia ejus a progenie in progenies:
timentibus eum.

Fecit potentiam in brachio suo:
dispersit superbos mente cordis sui.

Deposuit potentes de sede: et exaltavit humiles.
Esurientes implevit bonis: et divites dimisit inanes.
Suscepit Israel puerum suum: recordatus misericordie sue.

Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros:
abraham et semini ejus in secula.

Gloria patri et filio: et spiritui sancto.
Sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper: et in secula seculorum.

Amen.

Magnificat

Magnificat

WILLIAM PASHE was one of a breed of professional church musician which must have been numerous in pre-Reformation England and is by no means extinct there today: a competent and versatile practitioner who made a living from his skills without rising very high in his profession. He can probably be identified with the William Passhe or Pasche who in 1513 became a member of the Fraternity of St Nicholas, a guild of parish clergy, clerks and their associates serving in London, Westminster and their environs. If this signalled the beginning of his adult musical career he may have been born in the earlier 1490s. By about 1520 he had become one of the six lay-vicars who sang in the choir of St Paul's cathedral. Payments to 'Passhe the clerk' in the accounts of St Peter's church in the London parish of West Cheap in 1527/8 suggest that he also assisted other local choirs in need of vocal reinforcement. Singing was evidently only one of his skills: it seems probable that he was also the 'Mr Passhe of London' who carried out maintenance on the organs of Kingston-upon-Thames parish church in 1514/15 and 1536/7. He can thus be traced in the London area during a period of nearly a quarter of a century. What adds distinction to his apparently fairly modest career is his achievement as a composer: his three surviving works—the Magnificat included in this recital, the Mass *Christus resurgens* and the votive antiphon *Sancta Maria mater dei*—are skilfully written and show considerable inventiveness and character, and in two major musical sources of the period they occur in company with music by more prominent contemporaries such as Fayrfax and Ludford. It must have been Pashe's music that led Thomas Morley to list him (in first place!) among the English composers whose work he had consulted while writing *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* (London, 1597).

The Magnificat—the poetic version of the Blessed Virgin's response to the Annunciation given in St Luke's Gospel (1:46–55)—was the centrepiece of the evening service of Vespers, the pre-Reformation equivalent of Anglican Evensong. This service was often attended by laymen and laywomen after their day's work, and this may have been one of the reasons why on special occasions the Magnificat was sung with additional liturgical ceremony and, in churches having adequate choral resources, in polyphony rather than in plainchant. To be more precise, fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century English settings of the Magnificat and its doxology usually set only the even-numbered verses in polyphony, leaving the odd-numbered verses to be chanted to one

of the melodic formulae known as Magnificat tones (to which the whole canticle was sung on ordinary days). Pashe's setting conforms to this pattern, and also follows widely observed convention about the metre and scoring of the polyphonic verses: the second, fourth, tenth and twelfth verses are in triple metre, while the sixth and eighth are in duple; and the second, sixth and tenth verses and the ends of the two sections of the twelfth verse are scored for the full five-part choir, while the fourth and eighth verses and the beginnings of the two sections of the twelfth are scored for smaller combinations of voices.

Pashe also follows tradition in basing his setting on a pre-existing melody or *cantus firmus*, which he places, contrary to the usual practice, in the alto voice instead of one of the lower voices. As is customary in Magnificat settings, the *cantus firmus* is an unusual type of melody called a *faburden*, which had originated been the lowest voice of an improvised harmonisation of a plainchant melody: an interesting reminder of how much medieval and early renaissance polyphony we have lost with the disappearance of improvised polyphonic performances of plainchant items which never found their way into notation. Although there is no doubt about the identity of Pashe's *cantus firmus*—it is the *faburden* to the seventh of the eight Magnificat tones—its first five pitches are identical with those of the *cantus firmus* of his Mass *Christus resurgens* (which he also placed in the alto part); although I have found no conclusive evidence for it, I wonder whether the two works were designed to be performed on the same occasion.

The fact that the *cantus firmus* of the Magnificat is sung by the altos means that the missing tenor part has to be entirely recomposed. Pashe's frequent recourse to imitative writing, in which one voice begins a phrase in similar fashion to the other voices shortly before or after it, is very helpful to the restorer, although there remain many passages in which it is difficult to choose between several possible solutions. In its orderliness, economy and moderate floridity (less florid than Hugh Aston and Richard Pygott but considerably more so than Robert Fayrfax) the style of this piece is somewhat reminiscent of John Taverner's in such works as *Ave dei patris* and *Gaude plurimum*. Pashe may lack Taverner's lyricism and grasp of the overall shape of a composition, but he is a resourceful and thoroughly competent composer.

Hail, most noble daughter of God the father,
most worthy mother of God the Son,
most comely bride of God the Holy Spirit,
most humble handmaiden of God the Unity
and Trinity.

Hail, most merciful daughter
of the supreme Eternity,
most obedient mother of the supreme Truth,
most kind spouse of the supreme Good,
most meek handmaiden of the supreme Trinity.

Hail, most beloved daughter of the eternal Love,
most gracious mother of the eternal Wisdom,
most holy bride of the eternal Spirit,
most chaste handmaiden of
the co-eternal Majesty.

Hail, daughter of Jesus thy Son,
loving mother of Christ thy God,
unblemished bride of the Bridegroom,
closest handmaiden to the seat of Godhead.

Hail, uniquely noble daughter of the Lord,
uniquely glorious mother of the Lord,
uniquely comely bride of the Lord,
uniquely obedient handmaiden of the Lord.

Hail, queen of the heaven, full of grace,
mother of mercy, outstanding in merits,
lady of the world, singled out by the patriarchs,
empress of hell, foretold by the prophets.

Hail, fruitful maiden, shining like the sun,
chaste mother, comely as the moon.

Hail, illustrious parent, dutiful in childbirth,
bright star of the sea,
blessed gateway to heaven.

Be to us a straight road to eternal joys,
where peace is, and glory.
O most glorious ever-virgin Mary.

Amen.

2. AVE DEI PATRIS FILIA

John Merbecke (c.1510 - c.1585)

Ave dei patris filia nobilissima,
dei filii mater dignissima,
dei Spiritus sponsa venustissima,
dei unius et trini ancilla subjectissima.

Ave summae eternitatis filia clementissima,
summe veritatis mater piissima,
summe bonitatis sponsa benignissima,
summe trinitatis ancillia mitissima.

Ave eterne caritatis filia desideratissima,
eterne sapientie mater gratissima,
eterne spirationis sponsa sacratissima,
coeterne majestatis ancilla sincerissima.

Ave Jesu tui filii filia,
Christi dei tui mater alma,
sponsi sponsa sine ulla macula,
deitatis ancilla sessioni proxima.

Ave domini filia singulariter generosa,
domini mater singulariter gloriosa,
domini sponsa singulariter speciosa,
domini ancilla singulariter obsequiosa.

Ave plena gratia poli regina,
misericordie mater meritis preclara,
mundi domina a patriarchis presignata,
imperatrix inferni a prophetis
preconizata.

Ave virgo feta ut sol preelecta,
mater intacta sicut luna perpulchra.
Salve parens inclita, enixa puerpera,
stella maris prefulgida, felix celi porta.

Esto nobis via recta ad eterna gaudia
ubi pax est et gloria.
O gloriosissima semper virgo Maria.

Amen.



Ave dei patris filia

JOHN MERBECKE, as far as we know, was the only one of these four composers whose life was significantly changed by the religious convulsions which swept England in the mid-sixteenth century. Tallis proved adaptable to every religious regime, and by the time of the most cataclysmic changes in the later 1540s Nicholas Ludford was by contemporary standards well into old age and William Pashe may already have been dead. Merbecke's date of birth is unknown, but the birth of his son Roger in 1535/6 suggests that he was born no later than about 1515, and probably five or ten years earlier. Superficially his career was uneventful: by May 1531 he was a lay-clerk of St George's Chapel, Windsor, and he kept his place there until 1585, acting also as sole or joint organist for much of the time. The impact of the Reformation upon him was not so much professional as creative: after about 1550 he evidently ceased to compose, not out of regret for the passing of the Latin liturgy but out of zeal for Protestantism.

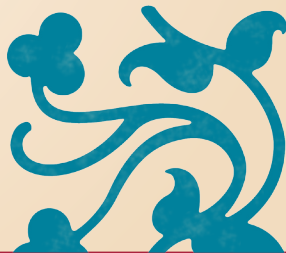
By March 1543 Merbecke's Protestant sympathies were sufficiently developed for him to be arrested with three companions on suspicion of heresy and taken to London for interrogation; he was accused of having written against the Mass, and a manuscript concordance of the English Bible which he had compiled was confiscated. All four suspects were found guilty and sentenced to death by burning; the sentence was quickly carried out on the other three culprits but the intercession of Stephen Gardiner, bishop of Winchester, procured a royal pardon for Merbecke and in October 1544 he returned to his post at Windsor. His experience does not seem to have lessened his enthusiasm: he rewrote his biblical concordance, and when he published it in 1550, a year after the introduction of the first Book of Common Prayer, he referred in the preface to having consumed vainly the greatest part of his life in 'the study of Music and playing on Organs'.

It was also in 1550 that Merbecke published the work by which he is today best known, his *Book of Common Prayer Noted*, a collection of monophonic music for the new English liturgy consisting of adapted plainchant and melodies of his own invention in a similar style. It is likely that he carried out this project with official encouragement: the committee deliberating on the imminent Anglican liturgy met at Windsor under the chairmanship of Archbishop Cranmer in 1548, and both the 1549 Prayer Book and Merbecke's music for it were issued by the government's printer Richard Grafton. Ironically Merbecke's contribution was soon made obsolete by the publication of a revised Book of Common Prayer in 1552; it fell into desuetude and obscurity until it was rediscovered and exploited by High Church Anglicans in the mid-nineteenth century.

Merbecke's most substantial musical legacy consists of his four surviving polyphonic compositions, the Mass *Per arma justitiae*, two votive antiphons *Ave dei patris* and *Domine Jesu Christe*, and an English-texted devotional piece *A virgin and mother*, all of which presumably predate his antiphony to the Mass and to musical settings of non-scriptural texts. The Marian antiphon *Ave dei patris* recorded here is not unlike Tallis's *Ave rosa* in its general idiom, but I have the impression that Merbecke is more ambitious than Tallis in the variety of musical effects which he creates, as if he enjoys displaying his versatility. The sections in three voices tend perhaps to be more successful than those in five, because they are more characterful melodically and have a greater sense of impetus, but the concluding five-part 'Amen' is a fine achievement by any standard.

Hail, O queen, mother of mercy, our life,
our sweetness and our hope, hail.
To you we cry, exiled sons of Eve.
To you we sigh, wailing and
weeping in this vale of tears.
Behold therefore, our advocate,
[and] turn those your merciful eyes
towards us, and after this exile show
us Jesus, the blessed fruit of your womb.
Virgin mother of the church,
eternal gateway to glory,
be to us a refuge

with the father and son.
O merciful one.
Merciful virgin, dutiful virgin,
sweet virgin, O Mary,
hear the prayers of all
crying faithfully to you.
O dutiful one.
Pour out prayers to your son,
crucified, wounded
and scourged for us,
pierced with thorns,
given gall to drink.
O sweet Mary, hail.



3. SALVE REGINA

Nicholas Ludford (c.1485 - c.1557)

Salve regina, mater misericordie,
vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve.
Ad te clamamus, exules filii Eve,
Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes,
in hac lacrimarum valle.
Eya ergo, advocata nostra,
[et] illos tuos misericordes
oculos ad nos converte,
et Jesum,
benedictum fructum ventris tui,
nobis post hoc exilium, ostende.
Virgo mater ecclesie,
Eterna porta glorie,
Esto nobis refugium

Apud patrem et filium.
O clemens.
Virgo clemens, virgo pia,
Virgo dulcis, O Maria,
Exaudi preces omnium
Ad te pie clamantium.
O pia.
Funde preces tuo nato,
Crucifixo, vulnerato,
Et pro nobis flagellato,
Spinis puncto, felle potato.
O dulcis Maria, salve.

Salve regina

Salve regina

NICHOLAS LUDFORD appears to have spent the greater part of his adult career working for a single employer, the Royal Free Chapel of the Blessed Virgin and St Stephen, Westminster. This was a collegiate church attached to the royal palace of Westminster; the site is now occupied by the Houses of Parliament, and the spacious hall along which visitors now pass on their way to the central lobby lies exactly on the foundations of the chapel which Ludford would have known. The main evidence for his association with the chapel is a list of its pensionable employees compiled at the time of its dissolution in 1547. It may appear surprising to find him named as verger in this list, but St Stephen's seems to have been one of several choral foundations which provided a director for its polyphonic choir by changing the job specification of a member of its existing establishment. An earlier composer, John Bedyngham, had been verger there in 1457, and in the 1460s and 70s yet another composer, John Plummer, had been verger of St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle.

Ludford was officially appointed verger and organist of St Stephen's on 30 September 1527, but the mention in his contract of the 'manifold services in... singing and organ playing' which he had already contributed implies that he was not a newcomer. He may have been a probationary member of the chapel as early as 29 July 1524, when he witnessed the will of one of the canons. He had been resident in Westminster at least since January 1517, when he rented lodgings belonging to Westminster Abbey. In 1521 he joined the Fraternity of St Nicholas, the guild of parish clerks and clergy to which William Pashe also belonged. Ludford stayed in Westminster after the dissolution of St Stephen's Chapel in 1547, involving himself in the affairs of the parish of St Margaret in which he lived, for example by serving as churchwarden from 1552 to 1554. He was buried in St Margaret's church on 9 August 1557. As one might expect, several of Ludford's compositions show signs of having been conceived for performance in St Stephen's Chapel: the Mass *Lapidaverunt Stephanum* is the most obvious example, but his Marian antiphons and the Masses *Christi virgo* and *Benedicta et venerabilis* on Marian cantus firmi would have been equally appropriate in a foundation jointly dedicated to St Stephen and Our Lady. The liturgical designation of the cantus firmus of the Mass *Regnum mundi*, on the other hand, suggests that it was composed for St Margaret's, Westminster, which although only a parish church had a lively

choral tradition; perhaps it was one of the works in the collection of music that this church bought from Ludford in 1533/4. The question of the implications of the cantus firmi used by Ludford is relevant to his setting of *Salve regina* included in this recital. It is one of three compositions by him—the others being the Marian antiphon *Ave Maria ancilla trinitatis* and the Mass *Inclina cor meum*—to incorporate the same cantus firmus, the plainchant responsory *Inclina cor meum in testimonia tua* ('Incline my heart unto thy testimonies': Psalm 118/19:36) sung at the daily service of Terce. Since this chant had no application to a particular saint or occasion it would seem to have been used for another reason perhaps connected with St Stephen's Chapel or one of its dignitaries. It was most unusual if not unprecedented for a composer to base three works upon the same cantus firmus, and we can reasonably infer that this melody, or more probably its text, had especial significance for Ludford or for his employer.

Only three original voices of Ludford's *Salve regina* survive, the treble and tenor parts being lost. I did not notice that it incorporated the *Inclina cor meum* cantus firmus until I revised my earlier completed version for publication in 2007; as far as I know, nobody had previously drawn attention to the fact. Awareness of it facilitates completion of the piece, because the melody fits neatly into the missing tenor part in the fully scored sections, and this limits the range of possibilities for the treble part. The sections in fewer than five parts are almost entirely freely composed, but fairly convincing approximations of the line or lines missing from them can sometimes be concocted out of motives discussed by the surviving voices. This *Salve regina* stands apart from Ludford's other two compositions upon the same cantus firmus because it makes no use of musical material which they share with each other. Its slightly rougher technique and its presence in a source at least a decade earlier than Peterhouse suggest that it may be earlier than its two companions. Despite this it illustrates several aspects of Ludford's distinctive mature style, such as his fondness for rising melodic sequences ('et spes nostra') and his enterprising exploitation of harmony and dissonance as affective devices ('virgo dulcis', 'virgo mater ecclesiae').

Hail, rose without thorns, whom the father
set on high in divine majesty and made
free from all sorrow.

Mary, called the star of the sea, by your
son you are made resplendent with the
bright light of divinity, through which
you shine with every virtue.

Full of grace the holy spirit filled you while
it made you the vessel of divine goodness
and total obedience.

The Lord is with you in a wondrous way,
the word of life made flesh by the deed
of the triune creator: Oh, how sweet
a vessel of love.

Blessed are you among women: this
is declared to all nations. The heavens
acknowledge you to be blessed and
raised high above all.

And blessed is the fruit of your womb,
a gift for us always to enjoy here as an inner
foretaste, and after death in perpetuity.

O merciful virgin Mary, receive into
the holy refuge of your heart this
perception of salvation, the grateful
object of your prayers. Amen.

4. AVE ROSA SINE SPINIS

Thomas Tallis (c.1505 - 1585)

Ave rosa sine spinis,
Tu quam pater in divinis
Majestate sublimavit,
Et ab omni ve purgavit.

Maria, stella dicta maris,
Tuo nato illustraris
Luce clara deitatis
Qua prefulges cunctis datis.

Gratia plena te perfecit
Spiritus sanctus dum te fecit
Vas divine bonitatis
Et totius pietatis.

Dominus tecum miro pacto
Verbo vite carne facto
Opere trini conditoris:
O quam dulce vas amoris.

Benedicta tu in mulieribus:
Hoc testatur omnis tribus.
Celi fantur te beatam
Super omnes exaltatam.

Et benedictus fructus ventris tui
Quo nos dona semper frui
Per pregustum hic internum
Et post mortem in eternum.

Hunc virgo salutis sensum
Tue laudis gratum pensum
Corde tuo sinu pia
Clemens sume, O Maria. Amen.



THOMAS TALLIS, during his long career accommodated himself to every official change of religion, provided whatever music the prevailing religious circumstances required, and steadily climbed the professional ladder, ending his life as the senior musician in the royal household chapel and the recognized doyen of English music. We first hear of him in 1532 as organist of Dover Priory, a small Benedictine monastery whose musical activity can have been no more than modest. If, however, the generally accepted date of one of the sources of his Marian antiphon *Salve intemerata* is correct, he was already a capable composer at least two or three years before this. In 1537 and 1538 he was employed, probably either as organist or as a singer, by the church of St Mary-at-Hill, London, a parish church which was especially ambitious in its cultivation of music. From there he moved to the Augustinian abbey of Holy Cross at Waltham, Essex, where he may have directed a small choir of professional singers who performed in the Lady Chapel. Upon the dissolution of the abbey in March 1540 he moved to Canterbury, where in a staff list of the newly refounded cathedral drawn up in the late summer of the same year he is named first among the twelve vicars-choral. He does not appear on the cathedral payroll for 1543 but figures among the gentlemen of the royal household chapel in the lay subsidy list for 1543/4; he still occupied this post, at least nominally, until his death in 1585.

Tallis's Marian antiphon *Ave rosa sine spinis* was one of the last pieces to be copied into the Peterhouse partbooks, and it seems likely that the scribe received it from the composer himself, perhaps as a recent work. The missing treble and tenor parts can be supplied almost in their

entirety from later sources, so that all that needs to be recomposed is the top line of the treble-bass duet beginning 'Benedicta tu in mulieribus'. If *Ave rosa* is more shapely and less diffuse than *Salve intemerata* this is at least partly because its text is fairly concise and clearly defined in form (eight four-line stanzas), not a prolix and amorphous effusion in prose. Tallis's musical style in this work is still largely traditional: the very obvious sectional structure is created by contrasts of metre and scoring; the sections for reduced voices are more ornate than those for full choir; almost every line of text begins with syllabic declamation and ends with a melisma, and the longest melismata occur at the ends of sections. There is more sign of modernity in the heavy reliance on imitative writing and motivic discussion, the latter sometimes (as in the final 'Amen') being accompanied by sequential treatment. Perhaps most significant for Tallis's future development as a composer are the occasional experiments in musical punctuation through changes of pace, contrapuntal texture or harmonic colour, for example *ar'et totius*, '*O quam dulce*' and '*per pregustum*'.

Listeners will make their own judgement about the relative merits of the four compositions presented on this disc. For my part, I am impressed by how attractive, interesting and substantial the works by Pashe and Merbecke sound in the company of those by Ludford and Tallis. That composers of their modest professional status could produce music of such strong character and polished craftsmanship is testimony to the high standards prevalent in this closing period of English medieval church music: not so much a twilight as a sunset.

Amen

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1. **MAGNIFICAT** (15:27) William Pasche (fl. late 15th, early 16th c.) 15:27
2. **AVE DEI PATRIS FILIA** (13:58) John Merbecke (c.1510 - c.1585)
3. **SALVE REGINA** (16:11) Nicholas Ludford (c.1485 - c.1557)
4. **AVE ROSA SINE SPINIS** (10:49) Thomas Tallis (c.1505 - 1585)



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contain a large and varied
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Dr Nick Sandon

FPO UPC

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Erika Chang
Margaret Obenza

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Joshua Haberman (2-3)
Sarrah Sharif
Christina Siemens (1,4)

TENOR

Orrin Doyle
Joshua Haberman (1,4)
Markdavin Obenza (2,3)

BARITONE

Markdavin Obenza (1,4)
Willimark Obenza (2,3)
Thomas Thompson

BASS

Jonathan Silvia
David Stutz