

IN THE COMPANY OF

# William Byrd

THE BYRD ENSEMBLE  
MARKDAVIN OBENZA

PHILIP  
VAN WILDER

ALFONSO  
FERRABOSCO

CLEMENS  
NON PAPA

THOMAS  
MORLEY

PHILIPPE  
DE MONTE



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SCRIBE RECORDS

**PRODUCER**

Markdavin Obenza

**SOUND ENGINEER**

Joshua Haberman

**GRAPHICS**

Roslyn Hyde

**PHOTOGRAPHY**

Willimark Obenza

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**EDITORS**

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# The Byrd Ensemble



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*The Byrd Ensemble* is a Seattle-based vocal ensemble specializing in the performance of chamber vocal music. Since 2003, the ensemble has performed medieval, renaissance, baroque and modern music across the United States. Described as “pure and radiant” (Gramophone), “immensely impressive” (Early Music Review), and “rich, full-voiced, and perfectly blended” (Early Music America), the ensemble is garnering international acclaim for its recordings of renaissance vocal music. The Byrd Ensemble is an Artist-in-Residence at Seattle’s first Episcopal parish, Trinity Parish Church (established 1865), where the group presents their subscription series. The Byrd Ensemble is a nonprofit organization.

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*Artistic Director Markdavin Obenza* is a Seattle native and has been active in the local music scene since he was a boy Soprano in the Northwest Boychoir in the early 1990s. His love and dedication to early music and chamber vocal music emerged while singing as a countertenor for the Compline Choir at St. Mark’s Cathedral and the Tudor Choir in 2000. He performs regularly as a countertenor and baritone with the Tudor Choir (US), and has performed with members of the Tallis Scholars (UK) under the direction of Peter Phillips, the Seattle Academy of Baroque Opera (US) under the direction of Steven Stubbs, and the Kronos Quartet. He is one of the founders of the Byrd Ensemble and is the choirmaster at St. Clement of Rome Episcopal Church in Seattle. He is also the producer for Scribe Music.



# In the Company of William Byrd



This CD places the English Renaissance composer William Byrd (1540–1623) alongside five other musicians whose work he knew well. It is a diverse group, spanning several generations and reaching far beyond the borders of England. Byrd himself seems never to have visited continental Europe—although he did own a copy of a printed travel book, a sort of sixteenth-century Michelin guide, with advice for first-time travelers abroad. (He was duly warned against the dangers of warmer climes, from “popish superstition” to “the daily use of Garlic.”) Although Byrd was no more than an armchair traveler, he certainly stayed in touch with international musical life. He kept up a lively correspondence with fellow-musicians both at home and abroad. He had access to the best collection of imported music in England, everything from old chant manuscripts to Monteverdi’s new books of madrigals. Like the great composers of later centuries, he had a keen ear for what his contemporaries were doing, and he spent his whole life learning from them. The closest comparison may be with Shakespeare, who never hesitated to beg, borrow, or steal from the rich Renaissance tradition of drama and poetry.

# Philip van Wilder



With the exception of one elegant little French song by Philip van Wilder, all the pieces on this CD are Latin motets. The motet enjoyed an unexpected revival of sorts in Elizabethan England, with Byrd himself taking a leading role. Latin motets had been banned from the reformed services of the Anglican church, but they took on a new life as sophisticated chamber music, sung by small groups of skilled musicians. This sort of music was no longer welcome in cathedral choirs, so it resurfaced in academic circles, the private rooms of the well-to-do, and the sometimes heroic efforts of scribes and collectors. Now that settings of the Catholic mass (the traditional grand genre of Renaissance music) were out of the question in England, the motet offered English musicians their only real opportunity to write large and complex works for many voices. It was also a very good choice for a cosmopolitan figure like Byrd, because there was no language barrier: educated people in any country could understand and enjoy musical prayers in Latin. The point was not lost on the printer of Byrd's first book of motets, who advertised it as "worthy to be published throughout the world." This recording is a small attempt to restore his music to its rich international context.

*Philip van Wilder (c. 1500–1553)* was a Flemish lutenist who was brought to England in his early twenties as part of the ambitious cultural program undertaken by King Henry VIII, who spared no expense in emulating the glittering courts of European royalty. Wilder ended up as a popular composer and a music tutor to English princes and princesses. He wrote ceremonial music for Henry's court (he seems to have been a collaborator with Thomas Tallis) and a large number of French songs, which, like everything else French, were very fashionable in England at the time. Byrd must have known his song *O doux regard*, because he borrowed its first page as the beginning of *Ne irascaris Domine*. A gently melancholy love song, as it turns out, also does well as a gently melancholy prayer. Wilder's piece was (rather unjustly) forgotten after tastes turned to Italian music, but it gained some measure of immortality in *Ne irascaris Domine*, which became the most popular and most widely distributed of all Byrd's motets. One laconic Elizabethan scribe simply copied it out with the note "good song."

# Alfonso Ferrabosco



*Alfonso Ferrabosco (1543–1588)* was an Italian composer who spent almost two decades in England working for Queen Elizabeth. His English contemporaries called him “the Phoenix of our time,” an epithet they also used for Byrd in later years. Like many other Renaissance composers, Ferrabosco did a lot of traveling, and he seems to have used his frequent journeys as an opportunity for intrigue and espionage of various sorts. He was mixed up in a scandal surrounding the murder of an Italian colleague, and he was under surveillance, at different times, by both the Inquisition and the English Protestant authorities. His services must have been highly valued by Elizabeth, because by his mid-twenties he was already being paid £100 per year—a small fortune in his day, and more than three times Byrd’s salary as chief musician of the Chapel Royal. At a time when rather little up-to-date European music was readily available in England, he was a perfect match for his Elizabethan contemporaries, given their insatiable thirst (mixed with a dash of suspicion) for foreign luxury goods. Byrd knew him personally and engaged in friendly musical rivalries with him. Some of their best-known compositions are more or less reworkings of each other. *Da pacem Domine* (a long-lost piece recorded here for the first time ever) and *Plorans plorabit* are less directly related, although they both use a rare and clever technique called “inversion”: some of the voices sing the opening theme right side up, while others sing it upside down.

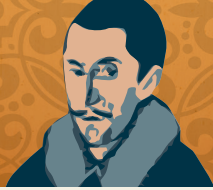
# Clemens non Papa



*Clemens non Papa (c. 1510–1555)* was perhaps the most prolific and beloved composer of the generation between Josquin and Palestrina—a generation which tends to be unjustly ignored in our own day, if only for lack of famous names. As far as we know, Clemens never made it to England, but his music certainly did. One of Byrd’s colleagues had a carefully preserved library full of his motets. He seems to have been a colorful character: he was described by a contemporary as a “great drunkard and of loose morals,” and one of the musical laments on his death is a tongue-in-cheek reworking of a drinking song. Byrd borrowed the unusual text of *Tristitia et anxietas* from a very similar piece by Clemens, although he edited the long ending into something much more concise and perhaps, in the end, more moving. Clemens was at his best when writing this sort of introverted, melancholy piece—a trait shared by Byrd, whose motets were renowned in his own day for their “gravity and piety.”



# Thomas Morley



*Thomas Morley (1557–1602)* was the only other composer on this CD who was actually born in England. Morley was a student and a great admirer of Byrd, but his own career took a very different direction from his teacher's. He was an enthusiast for Italian music who more or less single-handedly made the Elizabethan madrigal popular and profitable. Much of this was a clever exercise in plagiarism: he got his hands on the latest madrigals from Rome or Venice, re-set them to English words, changed some notes here and there, and used the official Elizabethan monopoly on printing music (which Byrd had generously passed along to him and his family) to sell cheap mass-market editions of them to the English middle class. At its best, this produced delightful pieces such as *Now is the month of Maying* and *April is in my mistress' face*, madrigals which are still known and loved four centuries later. *Domine Dominus noster* is one of Morley's (quite rare) serious works. He wrote it in 1576, when he was aged only nineteen. He must already have had a taste for borrowing, because the last half-dozen measures are lifted directly from Byrd's own motet *Libera me Domine*, published just the year before. Despite his love for light-hearted Italian music, Morley still reserved high praise for the Latin motet:

*... of all others [it] requireth most art, and moveth and causeth most strange effects in the hearer:  
for it will draw the auditor, and especially the skillful auditor, into a devout and reverent  
kind of consideration of him for whose praise it was made.*

# Philippe de Monte



*Philippe de Monte (1521–1603)* enjoyed a very long life, just a year shorter than Byrd's. He lived and worked all over Europe: his career took him through Belgium, Spain, Italy, Vienna, Prague, and a brief stint in London in the 1550s. He kept up a musical correspondence with Byrd, who seems to have met him during his apprentice years in London. In 1583–84, the two composers exchanged a splendid pair of eight-voice pieces, *Super flumina Babylonis* (Monte) and *Quomodo cantabimus* (Byrd), which have been recorded together numerous times. (Monte also wrote musical letters to Orlando di Lasso and a number of other famous composers: he appears to have been one of those rare sixteenth-century musicians who knew absolutely everyone else in the business.) *Ad Dominum cum tribularer* is another of Byrd's (very few) eight-voice motets, paired here with *Filiae Jerusalem*, a less familiar piece by Monte. The intensity of Byrd's music is a good fit for the poignant text:

*With those who hate peace I was a peacemaker:  
when I spoke to them, they battled me without cause.*

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## 1. Ne irascaris Domine

*William Byrd (1540–1623)*

*Be not angry, O Lord,  
and remember our iniquity no more.  
Behold, we are all your people.  
Your holy city has become a wilderness.  
Zion has become a wilderness,  
Jerusalem has been made desolate.*

Ne irascaris Domine satis,  
et ne ultra memineris iniquitatis nostrae.  
Ecce, respice, populus tuus omnes nos.  
Civitas sancti tui facta est deserta.  
Sion deserta facta est,  
Jerusalem desolata est.

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## 2. O doux regard

*Philip van Wilder (c.1500–1553)*

*O sweet glance, O gracious speech,  
O kind smile, O gently tanned face,  
O sweet love which proceeds from her eyes  
set in such a clear countenance:  
O great sweetness, O celestial planet  
under which heaven wished me to be born:  
I put my freedom at your disposal  
because heaven has destined me to be your servant,  
with hope that after long suffering  
I will be granted a place in your heart.*

O doux regard, o parler gracieux,  
O ris humain, o face un peu brunette,  
O doux aimer qui provient de ses yeux  
Qui sont assis en face si très nette:  
O grand douceur, o céleste planète  
Sous qui le ciel a voulu ma naissance:  
Ma liberté je mets en ta puissance  
Puisque le ciel ton serf m'a destiné,  
Ayant espoir qu'après longue souffrance  
Dedans ton cœur j'aurai lieu assigné.

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## 3. Plorans plorabit

*William Byrd*

*Weeping, it shall weep, and my eye shall drop tears,  
because the flock of our Lord is taken captive.  
Say to the king and the queen: Be humbled, sit down:  
because the crown of your glory  
has fallen from your head.*

Plorans plorabit, et deducet oculus meus lachrimas,  
quia captus est grex Domini.  
Dic regi et dominatrici: humiliamini, sedete:  
quoniam descendit de capite vestro  
corona gloriae vestrae.

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## 4. Da pacem Domine

*Alfonso Ferrabosco (1543–1588)*

*Give peace, O Lord, in our time:  
because there is no one else who will fight for us,  
if not you, our God.*

Da pacem, Domine, in diebus nostris:  
quia non est alius qui pugnet pro nobis,  
nisi tu Deus noster.



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## 5. Tristitia et anxietas

*William Byrd*

*Sadness and anxiety have filled my inmost being.  
My heart has become heavy with pain,  
and my eyes have grown dim.  
Woe is me, for I have sinned.  
But you, O Lord, who do not abandon  
those who hope in you, console and help me,  
for your holy name's sake,  
and have mercy on me.*

Tristitia et anxietas occupaverunt interiora mea.  
Moestum factum est cor meum in dolore,  
et contenebrati sunt oculi mei.  
Væ mihi, quia peccavi.  
Sed tu, Domine, qui non derelinquis  
sperantes in te, consolare et adjuva me  
propter nomen sanctum tuum,  
et miserere mei.

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## 6. Tristitia et anxietas

*Clemens non Papa (c.1510–1555)*

*Sadness and anxiety have filled my inmost being.  
My heart has become heavy with pain,  
and my eyes have grown dim.  
Woe is me, for I have sinned.  
But you, O Lord, who do not abandon  
those who hope in you,  
console and help me, for your holy name's sake:  
may your name therefore be blessed,  
now, and always, and for ever and ever. Amen.*

Tristitia et anxietas occupaverunt interiora mea.  
Moestum factum est cor meum in dolore,  
et contenebrati sunt oculi mei.  
Væ mihi, quia peccavi.  
Sed tu, Domine, qui non derelinquis  
sperantes in te,  
consolare et adjuva me propter nomen sanctum tuum:  
sit igitur nomen tuum benedictum,  
nunc et semper et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

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## 7. Libera me Domine

*William Byrd*

*Deliver me, O Lord, and place me at your side,  
and let anyone's hand contend against me.  
My days have passed away,  
my thoughts are dissipated,  
tormenting my heart.  
They have turned night into day,  
and after darkness I hope again for light.*

Libera me Domine, et pone me iuxta te:  
et cuiusvis manus pugnet contra me.  
Dies mei transierunt,  
cogitationes meae dissipatae sunt,  
torquentes cor meum.  
Noctem verterunt in diem,  
et rursum post tenebras spero lucem.

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## 8. Domine Dominus noster

*Thomas Morley (c.1557–1602)*

*O Lord, our Lord,  
how admirable is your name  
in the whole earth!*

Domine, Dominus noster,  
quam admirabile est nomen tuum  
in universa terra!

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## 9. Filiae Jerusalem

### *Philippe de Monte (1521–1603)*

*Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me,  
but weep for yourselves and for your children.  
For behold, the days are coming when they will say,  
“Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore,  
and the breasts that never nursed!”  
Then they will begin to say to the mountains, “Fall on us,”  
and to the hills, “Cover us.”  
For if they do these things when the wood is green,  
what will happen when it is dry?*

Filiae Jerusalem, nolite flere super me,  
sed super vos ipsas flete et super filios vestros.  
Quoniam ecce venient dies in quibus dicent:  
Beatae steriles, et ventres qui non genuerunt,  
et ubera quæ non lactaverunt.  
Tunc incipient dicere montibus: Cadite super nos;  
et collibus: Operite nos.  
Quia si in viridi ligno hæc faciunt,  
in arido quid fiet?



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## 10. Ad Dominum cum tribularer

### *William Byrd*

*In my distress I cried unto the Lord, and he heard me.  
O Lord, deliver my soul from the mouth of falsehood,  
and from a deceitful tongue.  
What should be given unto you, or done to you,  
to a deceitful tongue?  
Sharp arrows of the mighty, with searing coals.  
Woe is me! that my sojourn is prolonged;  
I have lived with the inhabitants of Cedar.  
My soul has dwelt long there.  
With those who hate peace I was a peacemaker:  
when I spoke to them, they battled me without cause.*

Ad Dominum cum tribularer clamavi, et exaudivit me.  
Domine, libera animam meam a labiis iniquis,  
et a lingua dolosa.  
Quid detur tibi, aut quid apponatur tibi,  
ad linguam dolosam?  
Sagittae potentis acutae, cum carbonibus desolatoriis.  
Heu mihi! quia incolatus meus prolongatus est;  
habitavi cum habitantibus Cedar.  
Multum incola fuit anima mea.  
Cum his qui oderunt pacem eram pacificus:  
sed cum loquebar illis impugnabant me gratis.

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The music on this CD was researched and prepared by Kerry McCarthy. She has taught at Duke University and Stanford University, and has published widely on the music of the English Renaissance, alongside an active career as a singer, editor, and lecturer. Her new biography of William Byrd appeared with Oxford University Press in 2013. She is grateful to Jamie Apgar (University of California, Berkeley) for his expert reconstruction and edition of Ferrabosco's *Da pacem Domine*.

*Byrd Ensemble recording session at Christ Episcopal Church, Tacoma, WA*

*Pictured left to right: Linda Strandberg, Sarra Sharif, Orrin Doyle, Caroline Trevor,  
Gary Cannon, Joshua Haberman, Thomas Thompson, Jonathan Silva, Willimark Obenza,  
David Stutz, Seated: Margaret Obenza, Markdavin Obenza*