

PROGRAM NOTES

This afternoon we hear English liturgical music in Latin from the period between the 1470s and the early 17th century, complemented by one new piece, *Ave Verum Corpus*, by James Bassi, the conductor of the concert. The 15th and the 17th centuries were marked by civil wars in England: the Wars of the Roses in the 15th century, and the English Civil War in the 17th century. The century and a half between the wars brought a religious and political cataclysm of a different type, which swept medieval Christianity away, replacing it with the division between Catholic and Protestant. On the continent this division started as a struggle over ideas, which had political consequences; in England, the division was driven by politics, with consequences for the church. In England, the kind of church depended upon who happened to be on the throne: Henry VIII had no desire to change the theology of the old church, and not much desire to change its services, but he believed he had to have a male heir, and broke with Rome in the mid-1530s. Eventually his three legitimate children who survived birth and infancy succeeded him on the throne: Edward, son of Jane Seymour, Henry's third wife, reigned 1547-1553. Edward was very much influenced by Protestant ideas. The Book of Common Prayer was published during his reign, in 1549, and England became a Protestant country. Mary, daughter of Catherine of Aragon, Henry's first wife, reigned 1553-1558, and brought the country back into communion with Rome. Elizabeth, daughter of Anne Boleyn, Henry's second wife, reigned 1558-1603, and England became a Protestant country again.

Latin liturgical music of the period before Henry's break with Rome articulated the religion lovingly, but, in retrospect, perhaps somewhat naively. The composers provided the Christian liturgy with "sound spectaculars" which seem intended to help one imagine celestial choirs (as well as the kingliness of the king). The texts themselves seem to hang on the music as do the architectural ornaments on the pillars and ceiling of the stately and glorious chapel of King's College, Cambridge, whose design and construction are a product of this same period. When we hear imitation, it seems to float as on the surface of a river whose energies are above and beyond and outside the piece itself. The sounds themselves are particularly rich, as the full sections are usually of at least five parts. The music of the later period, after the Reformation, including music whose texts are in Latin, couldn't be more different. It arises unmistakably from the text. Imitation is clearly a principle of construction, and not just a decoration. The harmonies seem to sound more modern. Brevity, conciseness, clear diction, and at times even madrigalistic word painting, are everywhere. Every line of the text is given equally careful treatment. Whether Catholic or Protestant, the specific ideas of the text matter now, all of them. The music must arise from them, must symbolize them, must project them; you must be able to understand them, contemplate them, feel them. "Celestial choirs" and dramatic liturgies have given way to words, to teaching and preaching; playfulness has given way to a more serious, or at least more solemn, approach.

We start at the end of our "long century." Byrd himself was a Catholic, and recent research suggests that this may have been by choice. As a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal, he wrote music for services in English, but he also wrote to Latin texts. His Latin motets of the 1570s and 1580s often seem to choose texts that talk of alienation, desolation, and restoration, but the later works, especially the settings of the Proper, gathered in the first decade of the 17th century into publications called "Gradualia," prepare the standard Marian and seasonal liturgical feast Propers for celebrations that had to be held in private. *Rorate coeli* is the Introit for the Lady Mass in Advent. In its five-part texture the *Kyrie of the Mass for Five Voices* seems to evoke the spirit of Thomas Tallis. It is unusual for an English mass setting to have a Kyrie at all. Earlier masses omit them because they were usually supplied with extra texts called tropes. But the masses of Byrd, published in the 1590s, come after the Council of Trent, which stripped away many medieval accretions to the liturgy. The Byrd masses seem like a missive, as it were, from an embattled corner of the Counter Reformation.

Born around 1505 before the accession of Henry VIII to the throne and dying in 1585, a musician in the employ of at least two monastic establishments before the king dissolved the monasteries, Gentleman of the Chapel Royal for Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, and Elizabeth, and like Byrd a Catholic, Thomas Tallis bridged the gap between the old and the new styles. We may well say that, in fact, he did as much as anyone to "build the bridge." *In manus tuas* comes from the joint Tallis/Byrd publication called *Cantiones quae ab argumento Sacrae vocantur* (Songs which because of their texts are called Sacred), of 1575. As *In manus tuas* is a Compline respond, part of the last service of the day in the Roman scheme, and is basically in the modern, integrated, imitative motet style, one wonders if it perhaps may date originally from Mary's reign. The *Missa Salve Intemerata*, on the other hand, is very much in Tallis's version of the earlier style, and probably dates from the 1530s, before Henry's break with Rome. Its musical material is taken from Tallis's Votive Antiphon "Salve Intemerata Virgo," celebrating the Courageous Virgin. Votive Antiphons were large and elaborate salutations to the Virgin presented at the very end of the day, after the liturgy has finished; the best-known of them is surely the pleading and evocative Salve Regina, of which there is no example by Thomas Tallis.

John Taverner was probably about fifteen years older than Tallis, and died shortly before Henry VIII. He "surfaces" in 1524, and may have stopped composing not long after he left Cardinal College (Christ Church), Oxford, in 1530, following the dramatic fall of Cardinal Wolsey, who had failed to obtain an annulment of Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Thus Taverner's works belong mostly to the 1520s, to the earlier church, towards the end of its run. His music seems less severe than Robert Fayrfax's, and more dramatic and penetrating than Tallis's. *Audivi* is the 8th Respond of Matins for All Saints, Nov. 1. Polyphony is used where the form of the responsory calls for the soloists of the choir. In those polyphonic sections we continue to hear the chant, in the top voice, as a cantus firmus. The *Western Wind mass* uses a cantus firmus as well, but it is not chant, it is a secular song. The Credo, and, indeed, every movement of the Mass, consists of nine variations on the

tune, which appears now in the tenor, now in the top part, now in the bass. Taverner doesn't vary the tune itself very much; it's the musical surroundings that change.

Ave Verum Corpus is James Bassi's response to this concert of 16th century English Latin music. He writes, "As a composer, pianist, music director, and ensemble singer, I traverse a highly diverse musical world. Through all my activities, I habitually return to Renaissance polyphony as a powerful tool with which I can refresh my musical soul. The inevitable spinning out of clear, solid ideas in this repertoire, and the transcendence achieved by relatively clear-cut technical means, reconnect me to music itself, in its most abstract and purest form. When I engage these works, transient fashions and fleeting trends disappear, and only music remains. Today we hear a wide-ranging diversity of voices in the sounds of our composers. To these voices I add my own in the first performance of my *Ave Verum Corpus*. Though contrapuntal in nature, it is intended not so much to "fit in" with the company of our hallowed friends, as it is to provide a kind of double mirror, a look back at ancient forms reconfigured in a more contemporary language. Special thanks to Louise Basbas for honoring me with the invitation to conduct and compose for this concert, and to Tom Baker for his invaluable assistance and guidance."

Born in 1464 into the world of the Wars of the Roses, Robert Fayrfax became a Gentleman of Henry VII's Chapel Royal in 1497, and earned his doctorate at Cambridge in 1504 with the unbelievably intricate *Missa O Quam Glorifica*. He remained with the Chapel Royal for the rest of the reign of Henry VII and for the first twelve years of the reign of Henry VIII. Fayrfax was part of Henry's entourage at the great meeting in 1520 with François I called the Field of the Cloth of Gold. The Hymn *O Lux Beata Trinitas* belongs to Saturday Vespers from the Octave of Corpus Christi, usually in early June, to the beginning of Advent four weeks before Christmas. Fayrfax's setting is preserved only in a treatise on music written in the 16th century by an anonymous Scotsman. The piece comes in two sections. The first section presents the chant in parallel thirds and sixths, a texture called fauxbourdon or faburden; the second section offers a much freer treatment of the hymn. The treatise calls both of these treatments "faburdon," although of different types, and gives the reader a charming guarantee that the more complex section, clearly requiring a composer, really is by "Doctor Fayrfax." Fayrfax was organist at St. Alban's Abbey from 1498 to 1502. It is likely that the *Missa Albanus* belongs to that period, because it is based on, and named for, a short section of rather cheerful chant that sets the name of the patron saint of the Abbey. The setting of the word "Albanus," identical to the beginning of the Sanctus of the well-known *Missa de angelis*, becomes the cantus firmus of the mass. Because it is short, it appears many, many times. Fayrfax turns "Albanus" around in several different ways, right-side-up, upside-down, and backwards. In this way, "Albanus" lends its bright color to the whole movement.

Christopher Tye received the degree of Bachelor of Music from Cambridge in 1536 and the degree of Doctor of Music in 1545. He went on to be an enthusiastic contributor to the Protestant reforms of Edward VI. *Omnes Gentes* is a setting of a complete psalm. Such settings replaced the Votive Antiphon in Henry VIII's later years. It has the imitative texture and simpler rhythms of the modern, text-based style, but retains from the earlier style the division of the piece into sections that use subsets of the choir. The name of the six-voice *Missa Euge Bone* is a bit of a mystery, because there is no musical reference to the antiphon "Euge, serve bone," nor is there any known polyphonic model. The structure of the Agnus Dei is a puzzle as well, because there are four invocations instead of the usual three: Agnus I: all voices; Agnus II: lower voices, with the trebles silent; Agnus III: high voices divided into four parts, with tenors as the lowest line; and Agnus IV, with the Dona Nobis Pacem, for all voices again. The succinctness of the last Agnus makes a stunning effect.

To conclude and frame our tour of English Latin liturgical music, we present a *Magnificat* by John Nesbett, from early in the period, followed by a *Nunc Dimittis* of Thomas Tallis. John Nesbett worked in Canterbury in the 1470s and 1480s, training the choristers and preparing music for the Lady Chapel of the Cathedral. That is all that is known about him. His *Magnificat* survives in the Eton Choir Book, but only the final sections of the Medius and Bass parts. The Carver Manuscript, a Scottish manuscript in the Edinburgh library, preserves all the music, but without attribution. Without Carver, we could not perform the piece; without Eton, we would not know who composed it. The Eton Choir Book is a large and splendid collection of Magnificats and Votive Antiphons to the Virgin prepared for Eton College, covering the half century from 1460 to about 1510. It is one of only three large choir books that survived destruction in the 16th century. Its music, usually of at least five voices, and sometimes more, is of a vigor, complexity and splendor rarely equaled and never surpassed by later choral music. Tallis's *Nunc Dimittis*, in the fashion of the old church rite, and like the Nesbett *Magnificat*, sets only the even-numbered verses. With its imitative and chordal sections, however, it is clearly in the later, word-based style. There is a *Magnificat* by Tallis that uses the same musical materials. It was the Anglican reformers who, by bringing Vespers and Compline together in the service of Evening Prayer, suggested this pairing of Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis. It seems likely therefore that these Tallis pieces were intended for private Anglican services, perhaps in a university context, where Latin would have been legal because it would have been understood.

—Tom Baker