

## PROGRAM NOTES

Tomás Luis de Victoria, born in 1548, received his early musical training as a chorister at Avila Cathedral under the tutelage of Gerónimo de Espinar and Bernardino de Ribera—the latter of whom can be counted among the greatest Spanish composers of his generation. Victoria was probably around seventeen when he traveled to Rome to continue his education at the Collegio Germanico. It was a city rich in opportunity for him, because he stayed there for the first half of his adult life, working as a singer, teacher, organist and *maestro di cappella* for several institutions including the Collegio Germanico, and taking holy orders. It was not until 1587 that Victoria returned to his native Spain, settling in Madrid. He served as chaplain to the Dowager Empress Maria and as *maestro de capilla* in the chapel of the Convent of Las Descalzas Reales where she resided until her death in 1603. After this he remained as chapel organist and one of the convent chaplains until his own death eight years later.

The *Tenebrae responsories* come from a larger collection of polyphonic music for Holy Week, the *Officium Hebdomadae Sanctae*, which Victoria published in 1585, collecting together a number of pieces he had written during his years in Rome. The responsories set here are part of the much longer office of Tenebrae, which combined the monastic hours of Matins and Lauds for each of the last three days of Holy week. Although Matins and Lauds were historically the first hours of the monastic day, by the late middle ages it was customary to celebrate them the previous evening, and it seems that, in Victoria's Rome, Tenebrae began in the late afternoon, with daylight fading by its conclusion. Indeed, one of the distinctive features of the service is the gradual extinguishing of fifteen candles until the building is finally left in darkness—from which its name derives.

The Matins-section of Tenebrae was divided into three “nocturns,” each comprising three psalms (each with its own antiphon, and after each of which a candle was extinguished)—then a short versicle, a silent recitation of the Lord's Prayer, and, finally, a reading divided into three sections, each section followed by a responsory. Each day, the reading in the first nocturn was from Lamentations (an Old Testament lament on the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in the early 6th century BC), the reading of the second nocturn was taken from Augustine's commentaries on the Psalms, and that of the third was from New Testament epistles (Paul's discourse on the Lord's supper from 1 Corinthians 11 on Maundy Thursday, and the Epistle to the Hebrews on Good Friday and Holy Saturday). After all this would follow Lauds, containing further psalms and canticles with their respective antiphons and prayers.

In his *Tenebrae responsories*, Victoria set the responsory texts which follow each of the three sections of the reading at the second and third nocturns of Matins. (For the first nocturn, conversely, he *didn't* provide polyphonic responsory settings but rather set the text of the Lamentations reading itself to music which also appears in the 1585 publication.) Thus, of the eighteen responsories included here, the first six would have been performed at Maundy Thursday Tenebrae (early on Wednesday evening), of which nos. 1 - 3 followed the reading from Augustine in the second nocturn, and nos. 4 - 6 followed Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians in the third nocturn. The middle six would have followed a similar pattern at Good Friday Tenebrae (nos. 7 - 9 following Augustine, and nos. 10 - 12 following Hebrews), and likewise nos. 13 - 18 at Holy Saturday Tenebrae.

While all this may seem befuddling to the liturgically uninitiated, perhaps the most important point to appreciate (apart from the dramatic darkening of the church building over the course of the service) is the fact that Victoria's responsories take place as part of a much longer devotional liturgy, most which would have been sung to plainchant, and against which Victoria's polyphonic settings would provide a rich contrast. Such an effect is harder to achieve in a non-liturgical performance of the responsories where all the polyphony is heard back-to-back. Though the music is in many ways varied, the unbroken use of the same mode and similar three- and four-part textures throughout all eighteen responsories could feel like too much of a good thing (it would have a very different, unifying effect when spread over three days'-worth of liturgy). In order to counteract this, we have interspersed some plainchant verses and two additional motets at the natural breaks in the sets' responsories. Furthermore, although all the responsories follow a pattern of repetition, we have opted to omit the *additional* repetitions of the final versicle and response which the liturgy demanded at the end of every third responsory. Finally, it is a longstanding performance tradition that some or all of the upper-voice responsories are sung

instead by lower voices. In the interests of both variety and characterization of the text, we have opted to do this in *Tenebrae factae sunt* and *Aestimatus sum*.

The texts themselves draw extensively on the Gospel accounts of the events of Jesus' betrayal, arrest, crucifixion and burial, while referring to many other scriptures (including edifying references to some of the psalms sung during the course of the *Tenebrae* service). Both the choice and liturgical ordering of the texts affords the worshipper an opportunity to not only recall the historical narrative but also to meditate upon its significance; likewise they shed interpretative light on—but also provide a parallel narrative to—the scripture readings and psalms which surround them.

Victoria is strikingly responsive both to the expressive intention of his texts and to the liturgical structure in which he is working. The latter is primarily articulated through his choice of scoring: each reading has three responsories (one after each part of the reading); for each group of three responsories, the second one is scored for four upper voices as mentioned above, while in the first and third the four parts span the full range of voices. Furthermore, the “versicle” in each responsory is reduced to three voice parts. The former is achieved in a number of ways. There are plenty of instances of traditional and sometimes predictable word-painting, such as in the use of ascending or descending figures (a phrase such as “cum descenditibus in lacum” in *Aestimatus* is a good example, as is the impassioned rising fourth for “exclamans Iesus” in *Tenebrae factae sunt*). Perhaps more notable, however, is Victoria's textural and rhythmic variety and the way he uses it for declamatory effect, whether it be the military homophonic unity with which the kings of the earth arise and “come together as one” against the Lord in *Astiterunt reges* or the loneliness of the single voice which begins *Una hora*. Furthermore, motivic references make connections along the way: in several instances, phrases of text make multiple appearances and receive very similar musical treatment; most memorable among them is the opening of Good Friday's first responsory, which begins where Maundy Thursday's left off—with the phrase “tamquam ad latronem.” and is set to near enough the same music. Perhaps more subtly, the reference to Jesus' betrayal at the start of *Iesum tradidit impius* recalls the music of *Iudas mercator* where the betrayer is first mentioned by name.

The plainchant verses interspersed between each set of three responsories are taken from what is now popularly known as the “Lent prose,” a penitential responsory. Although its current form in which verses alternate with the refrain “Attende Domine” may date from as late as the 1820s, the text and melody of the verses themselves are of 10th-century Mozarabic origin, and would probably have been familiar to Victoria and his contemporaries. We have here included four. Interspersed between the two groups of Good Friday responsories is Victoria's luminous six-voice Holy week motet *O Domine Jesu Christi*, published by the composer in his sacred music collection of 1576. Victoria sets this simple prayer to spaciouly devotional music which, although it unfolds from a single voice, reveals a much broader and richer tonal palate than heard in the responsories—something of a contrast, indeed, to their directness and textual clarity, although it is not without some of the composer's signature affective gestures.

To conclude the program, we move from Jesus' burial to Easter morning and visit of the two women at the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. The text, from the end of Mark's gospel, is set by another of the Spanish masters, and Victoria's senior: Francisco Guerrero (1528-1599). A pupil of Cristóbal de Morales, Guerrero spent most of his life at Seville Cathedral, although he devoted some time traveling in the service of the Cardinal of Seville, Rodrigo de Castro. *Maria Magdalene* is a work of a generally sunny complexion befitting its subject matter; nonetheless, Guerrero uses a slowing of the rhythmic and harmonic pace combined with a turn to the minor as the crucifixion of Jesus is recalled. It is followed by an arrestingly energetic new point introduced at the word “surrexit” (he is risen) in order to conclude on an exuberantly uplifting note.