

I SING OF A MAIDEN

Friday 11th December 2015, St Sepulchre-without-Newgate
Londinium, Andrew Griffiths (conductor)

On behalf of Londinium, I am delighted to welcome you to our 2015 Christmas concert.

This evening's programme draws on the rich tradition of English festive music in praise of the Virgin Mary, stemming chiefly from the Catholic Renaissance and the Anglo-Catholicism of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We begin with one of Thomas Tallis' most beautiful works, *Videte miraculum*, which captures perfectly the rapt adoration appropriate to this Candlemas text. It probably dates from the reign of Queen Mary (who oversaw the short-lived restoration of the Catholic liturgy), and is written in a resolutely old-fashioned style, with a cantabile timus of plainchant in equal notes in the baritone register throughout.

The well-loved *Ave Maria* by Robert Parsons may well come from the same period, though there is an intriguing theory that it dates from the early part of Elizabeth's reign and was intended for Mary, Queen of Scots; if so, Parsons must have remained a Catholic even under Elizabeth's Protestant regime. There is far less doubt about the Catholic music of William Byrd, who took Parsons' position at the Chapel Royal after the latter's untimely death in 1570. Enjoying Elizabeth's protection, Byrd continued brazenly to publish music for the Catholic liturgy into old age, and his perfect miniature *Ecce Virgo concipiet* (published 1605) would doubtless have been first sung at the festive services held at Ingtestone Hall, the home of his patron Sir John Petre.

It may be hard to discern the connection, but Arnold Bax claimed that his 1921 masterpiece *Mater ora filium* was inspired after hearing a performance of Byrd's Five-Part Mass. Though he enjoyed a long career spanning the first half of the twentieth century, Bax wrote relatively little choral music, which makes the extravagant ambition of *Mater ora filium* all the more remarkable. Bax endows this slight carol text with near-symphonic scale, splits the choir into as many as sixteen parts, calls for prodigious extremes of range, and cloaks his luscious, late-Romantic harmony in a myriad different textures to create one of the most challenging and rewarding works in the English repertoire – a worthy end to our programme.

The other Bax work heard tonight, the warm-hearted *I Sing of a Maiden*, shows a more intimate side to this composer, as well as plenty of seductively sinuous harmony. We pair it with a very different setting of the same text written in 2000 by Francis Pott, whose gently lilting lines trace irregular rhythms against a constantly shifting harmonic background, building to a rapturous climax before subsiding into delicate weightlessness. Classic works by John Joubert and Herbert Howells form a second pair, based around the metaphor of Mary as the Mystical Rose.

Four contrasting pieces complete our programme. John Tavener's opulent *Hymn to the Mother of God* is set as a strict canon between the two choirs, which collide and overlap to thrilling effect. Meanwhile, the studied detachment and repetitive rhythms of Howard

Skempton's *Adam Lay y-bounden* (2001) shine new light on familiar words. Richard Roome Bennett's *Five Carols* (1967) restrict themselves to austere four-part textures, but connect directly and movingly with the listener. Finally, John Byrt's exuberant *All and Some* build steadily to a powerful climax before the worshippers seem apparently to slip away – a doubt in search of mince pies.

Andrew Griffiths

PROGRAMME

THOMAS TALLIS	<i>Videte miraculum</i>
JOHN JOUBERT	<i>There is no Rose</i>
HERBERT HOWELLS	<i>A Spotless Rose</i>
ARNOLD BAX	<i>I Sing of a Maiden</i>
FRANCIS POTT	<i>I Sing of a Maiden</i>
WILLIAM BYRD	<i>Ecce Virgo concipiet</i>
JOHN BYRT	<i>All and Some</i>

INTERVAL OF 20 MINUTES

JOHN TAVENER	<i>Hymn to the Mother of God</i>
HOWARD SKEMPTON	<i>Adam Lay y-bounden</i>
ROBERT PARSONS	<i>Ave Maria</i>
RICHARD RODNEY BENNETT	<i>Five Carols</i>
ARNOLD BAX	<i>Mater ora filium</i>

Out of your sleep; There is no rose; That younge Child; Sweet was the Song; Susani

The use of cameras and recording devices is strictly forbidden.

Please ensure that all mobile phones, pagers, watch alarms and other electrical devices are switched

VIDETE MIRACULUM

Thomas Tallis (c. 1505–1585) Text: Responsory at First Vespers of the Purification

Videte miraculum matris Domini:
concepti virgo
virillis ignara consortii,
stans onerata nobili onere Maria:
et matrem se laetam cognosci,
quae se nescit uxorem.
Haec speciosum forma prae filiis hominum
castis concepti visceribus,
et benedicta in aeternum
Deum nobis protulit et hominem.
Gloria Patri et Filio
et Spiritui Sancto.

Behold the miracle of the mother of the Lord:
a virgin has conceived
though she knows not a man,
Mary, who stands laden with her noble burden;
knowing not that she is a wife,
she rejoices to be a mother.
She has conceived in her chaste womb
one who is beautiful beyond the sons of men,
and blessed for ever,
she has brought forth God and man for us.
Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Ghost.

THERE IS NO ROSE

John Joubert (1927–) Text: Anonymous, c. 1420

There is no rose of such virtue
As is the rose that bare Jesu;
Alleluia.

For in this rose contained was
Heaven and earth in little space;
Res miranda.

By that rose we may well see
There be one God in persons three,
Pares forma.

Then leave we all this worldly mirth
And follow we this joyful birth;
Transeamus.

A SPOTLESS ROSE

Herbert Howells (1892–1983) Text: German, 15th century, tr: Catherine Winkworth (1869)

A spotless Rose is blowing
Sprung from a tender root,
Of ancient seers' foreshowing,
Of Jesse promised fruit;
Its fairest bud unfolds to light
Amid the cold, cold winter
And in the dark midnight.

The Rose which I am singing,
Whereof Isaiah said,
Is from its sweet root springing
In Mary, purest Maid;

For through our God's great love and might
The blessed babe she bare us
In a cold, cold winter's night.

I SING OF A MAIDEN

Arnold Bax (1883–1953) | Francis Pot (1957–) Text: Anonymous, 15th century

I sing of a maiden
That is makeless,
King of all kinges
To her son she ches.

He came all so stille
There his mother was
As dew in Aprille
That falleth on the grass.

He came all so stille
To his mother's bower
As dew in Aprille
That falleth on the flower.

He came all so stille
There his mother lay,
As dew in Aprille
That falleth on the spray.

Mother and maiden
Was never none but she;
Well may such a lady
God's mother be!

ECCE VIRGO CONCIPIET

William Byrd (c. 1539–1623) Text: Isaiah 7:14

Ecce virgo concipiet et pariet filium
et vocabitur nomen eius Emmanuel.
Alleluia.

Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son
and shall call his name Immanuel, God with
us.
Alleluia.

ALL AND SOME

John Byrt (1939–) Text: Anonymous, 15th century

Nowell sing we, both: all and some
Now Rex pacificus is come.

Exortum est in love and lysse,
Now Christ His grace He gan us gysse,
And with His body us bought to bliss,
Both all and some.

De fructu ventris of Mary bright,
Both God and man in her alight,
Out of disease He did us dight,
Both all and some.