

## PROGRAM NOTES

In 1973, Peter Phillips, then an undergraduate organ scholar in Oxford, founded a group dedicated to the performance of Renaissance polyphony. 50 years, and well over 2300 performances later, they are the premier modern interpreters of this music, while also developing fruitful relationships with the cream of today's composers. This programme celebrates those 50 years, honouring the composer and the style that have (literally) made the group's name, while also reaching right up to the present by including several modern figures who have been inspired by that distinctive sound.

The group's founder first encountered *O clap your hands* when he was 14 years old. This is Orlando Gibbons, the masterful 17<sup>th</sup>-century English composer, at his most direct, forceful, and exuberant. This celebratory piece was likely written to fulfill the requirements of the Oxford degree of Doctor of Music, for which composers would produce exercises in counterpoint in as many as eight vocal parts. Gibbons' effort could not be further from dusty academia, exhibiting juggernaut-like momentum and a consummate command of choral texture.

It is no surprise that the music of Thomas Tallis has dominated the performances schedules of the group which bears his name. A shrewd navigator of the unpredictable political currents of 16<sup>th</sup>-century England, Tallis was canny enough to end up with a royal monopoly on music printing – a very handy source of income. *Suscipe quaeso* is drawn from a collection published jointly with William Byrd, thanking Elizabeth I for her patronage and celebrating this new freedom. It is a prayer for absolution, cast in seven voices, which enter slowly, building up a polyphony which is then abruptly stripped down for the word *peccavi* – 'I have sinned'.

*Rough Notes* was written for the Tallis Scholars by the New York-based composer Nico Muhly. It sets two fragments from Robert Falcon Scott's diaries, made towards the end of his doomed journey to Antarctica. Muhly

writes: “The first part depicts the extraordinary aurora australis in quite musical terms, with “arches, bands, and curtains, always in rapid movement.” The second is a severe foreshadowing of the crew’s deaths, promising that they will “meet death with as great a fortitude as ever in the past.” The poetry leads to a sort of resolute but resigned conclusion, facing the inevitable but never quite reaching it in text or music. This is the first piece of secular music I’ve written for the Tallis Scholars, and tried, here, to maximise their skills as colourists and dramatic communicators.’

The aforementioned 1575 *Cantiones sacrae* publication suggests that, whatever their private sympathies – and modern scholarship suggests they may have been closet Catholics – both Tallis and Byrd were adept at playing the game of Tudor politics. They each contributed seventeen pieces to the monumental collection, one for each year that Queen Elizabeth had been on the throne.

*Tribue Domine* is one of the most extensive of the motets featured. Taking a text attributed to the early Church Father, Augustine, Byrd rapidly alternates textures as the words enumerate the virtues of the Trinity. In its use of smaller forces contrasting with rich homophony it evokes the English tradition of the composer's forebears. A fantastically extended Gloria makes a fitting coda, a monument to the splendours of Tudor polyphony.

The text of the motet *Tu es Petrus* is of especial importance to Rome, the seat of the Catholic Church, which derives its authority from the lineage of St Peter, the first Pope (in the scripture, Christ anoints Peter as the rock upon which he will build his church). As a Roman composer, Palestrina was called on to write multiple settings of this key passage. Tonight, we hear the version in six parts – a taut and masterly setting, sufficiently popular in the composer’s own age that he wrote an entire mass setting based upon it. Everything works to underscore the confidence and charisma of the Counter-Reformation Catholic church; high and low voices alternate and then cohere in rock-solid homophony, only to break into joyous melisma.

John Rutter's genius for melody and its sympathetic arrangement has won him devotees from across the English-speaking world and beyond. The *Hymn to the Creator of Light* proves him equally capable in more ambitious forms. It was written for performance in Gloucester Cathedral, on the occasion of the dedication of a window commemorating the great English composer Herbert Howells. At the beginning, ominous unison from one choir is answered by celestial harmony from the other. A more propulsive central section leads to a meditative finale which cleverly weaves the initial motif together with the melody of the chorale 'Schmücke dich'.

In the Old Testament book of 2 Samuel, King David is brought the news that, following a battle, one of his sons has been killed, in a moving passage of scripture. Despite the fact that Absalom had been in open rebellion against his father, David still weeps for his loss. The story has inspired countless composers across the centuries.

*Lugebat David Absalom* has been attributed to Nicholas Gombert; a motet with a curious history, which may originally have had secular words and subsequently been given a *contrafactum*, or new sacred text. It is a profound meditation on grief, painted on a broad, ten-voice canvas. In *Absalon fili mi*, probably authored by Gombert's teacher Josquin, the descent into grief is described in a piece which seems to constantly spiral downwards in pitch, lower and lower as it traces the depths of sorrow.

It is often said of a good composer that they could set the phone book to music and it would still be compelling. Estonian composer Arvo Pärt's *Which was the son of...* comes very close to proving this axiom – the phone book, in this case, being a chapter from Luke's gospel listing the genealogy of Jesus. An impenetrable and entirely undramatic list of bizarre names, one might think, and yet in Pärt's hands it is riveting. Crisp rhythms, syncopations, and shifts between meters barrel the piece towards its end – which is also its beginning: God.

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## TEXTS & TRANSLATIONS

### Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625): O clap your hands

O clap your hands together, all ye people: O sing unto God with the voice of melody. For the Lord is high, and to be feared: he is the great King of all the earth. He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet. He shall choose out an heritage for us, even the worship of Jacob, whom he loved. God is gone up with a merry noise: and the Lord with the sound of the trumpet.

O sing praises, sing praises unto our God: O sing praises, sing praises unto the Lord our King. For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding. God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon his holy seat. For God, which is highly exalted, doth defend the earth, as it were with a shield. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

[Kemper – for the translations with the texts, please put them side by side]

### Thomas Tallis (c1505-1585): Suscipe quaeso Domine

Suscipe quaeso Domine, vocem confitentis.  
Scelera mea non defendo; peccavi.  
Deus miserere mei; peccavi, dele culpas meas gratia tua.  
Si enim iniquitates recordaberis quis sustineat?  
Quis enim justus qui se dicere audeat sine peccato esse?  
Nullus est enim mundus in conspectu tuo.

*Accept, I beseech thee O Lord, the voice of him who confesses.  
My crimes I do not defend; I have sinned.*

*O God have mercy on me; I have sinned, do away my sins by thy grace.  
For if thou shalt remember iniquities, who could bear it?  
For who is so righteous that he dare say that he is without sin?  
For there is no-one pure in thy sight.*

### **Nico Muhly (b.1981): Rough Notes**

#### *PART ONE*

To-night we had a glorious auroral display--quite the most brilliant I have seen. At one time the sky from N.N.W. to S.S.E. as high as the zenith was massed with arches, bands, and curtains, always in rapid movement. The waving curtains were especially fascinating--a wave of bright light would start at one end and run along to the other, or a patch of brighter light would spread as if to reinforce the failing light of the curtain.

#### *PART TWO*

For four days we have been unable to leave the tent--the gale howling about us. We are weak, writing is difficult, but for my own sake I do not regret this journey, which has shown that Englishmen can endure hardships, help one another, and meet death with as great a fortitude as ever in the past. We took risks, we knew we took them; things have come out against us, and therefore we have no cause for complaint, but bow to the will of Providence, determined still to do our best to the last. These rough notes and our dead bodies must tell the tale...

### **William Byrd (1539/40-1623): Tribue Domine**

Tribue, Domine, ut donec in hoc fragili  
corpore positus sum laudet te cor meum,  
laudet te lingua mea, et omnia ossa mea  
dicant: Domine, quis similis tui?  
Tu es Deus omnipotens, quem trinum  
in personis, et unum in substantia deitatis  
colimus et adoramus:

Patrem ingenitum, Filium de Patre unigenitum,  
Spiritus Sanctum de utroque procedentem  
et in utroque permanentem,  
sanctam et individuam Trinitatem,  
unum Deum omnipotentem.

Te deprecor, supplico et rogo, auge fidem,  
auge spem, auge charitatem:

Fac nos per ipsam gratiam tuam semper in fide  
stabiles, et in opere efficaces,  
ut per fidem rectam, et condigna  
fidei opera, ad vitam, te miserante,  
perveniamus aeternam.

Gloria Patri, qui creavit nos,  
gloria Filio, qui redemit nos:  
gloria Spiritui Sancto, qui sanctificavit nos:  
gloria summae et individuae Trinitati,  
cuius opera inseparabilia sunt,  
cuius imperium sine fine manet.

Te decet laus, te decet hymnus, tibi debetur  
omnis honor, tibi benedictio et claritas, tibi  
gratiarum actio, tibi honor, virtus et fortitudo,  
Deo nostro, in saecula saeculorum,  
Amen.

*Grant, O Lord, that while I am in this fragile  
body my heart may praise you, my tongue may  
praise you, and all my being may say:*

*Lord, who is there like you?*

*You are Almighty God whom  
we worship and adore, three persons,  
and one divine essence:*

*the Father unbegotten, the only begotten Son  
of the Father, the Holy Spirit who proceeds*

*from both, yet abides in both,  
the holy and undivided Trinity,  
one God omnipotent.*

*I pray, beseech and entreat you: increase my  
faith, increase my hope, increase my charity.*

*By your grace make us always steadfast in our  
faith, and successful in our deeds,  
that through true faith and deeds  
worthy of that faith we may come,  
by your mercy, to eternal life.*

*Glory be to the Father, who created us.*

*Glory be to the Son who redeemed us.*

*Glory be to the Holy Spirit who sanctified us.*

*Glory be to the highest and undivided Trinity,  
whose works are inseparable,  
whose kingdom abides for ever.*

*You are worthy of praise, worthy of songs  
of praise: all honour and blessing and glory,  
thanksgiving, honour, perfection and might  
be yours, our God, for ever and ever.*

*Amen.*

### **Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (c1525-1594): Tu es Petrus**

Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam, et portae inferi non praevalent adversus eam: et tibi dabo claves regni caelorum. Quodcumque ligaveris super terram, erit ligatum et in caelis: et quodcumque solveris super terram erit solutum et in caelis, et tibi dabo claves regni caelorum.

*Thou art Peter, and on this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them: and unto thee do I give the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatsoever thou bindest in earth shall be bound in heaven: and*

*whatsoever thou loosest in earth shall be loosed in heaven; and I give thee the keys to the kingdom of heaven.*

**John Rutter (b1945): Hymn to the Creator of Light**

Glory be to thee, O lord,  
Creator of the visible light,  
the sun's ray, the flame of fire.  
Creator also of the light invisible and intellectual,  
That which is known of God.  
the light invisible.  
Glory be to thee, O Lord,  
Creator of the light,  
for writings of the law,  
for oracles of prophets,  
for melody of psalms,  
for wisdom of proverbs,  
experience of histories,  
a light which never sets.  
God is the Lord, who hath shewed us light.

Light, who dost my soul enlighten;  
Sun, who all my life dost brighten;  
Joy, the sweetest man e'er knoweth;  
Fount, whence all my being floweth.  
From thy banquet let me measure,  
Lord, how vast and deep its treasure;  
Through the gifts thou here dost give us,  
As thy guest in heav'n receive us. Alleluia.  
Creator of the visible light.

**Nicolas Gombert (c1495-c1560): Lugebat David Absalon**



Lugebat David Absalon, pius pater filium, tristis senex puerum:  
heu me fili mi Absalon, quis mihi det ut moriar, ut ego pro te, O fili mi  
Absalon?

Rex autem David filium cooperto flebat capite:  
quis mihi det ut ego moriar pro te, O fili mi?  
Porro rex operuit caput suum, et clamabat voce magna:  
O fili mi Absalon.

*David mourned for Absalom, a pious father for his son, a sad old man for his  
boy: alas, my son Absalom, would God I had died for you.  
King David covered his head and wept for his son:  
would God I had died for you, Absalom, my son.  
Then the king covered his head, and cried with a great voice:  
O my son, Absalom.*

**Josquin des Prez (c1450-1521): Absalon fili mi**

Absalon fili mi, quis det ut moriar pro te,  
fili mi Absalon?  
Non vivam ultra, sed descendam  
in infernum plorans.  
Porro rex operuit caput sum,  
Et clamabat voce magna:  
Fili mi Absalon.

*Absalom my son, would that I might die for thee,  
my son Absalom.  
Let me not live longer but descend  
into hell weeping.  
The the king covered his head,  
and in a loud voice cried out:  
My son Absalom.*

*Arvo Pärt (b1935): ... Which was the Son of...*

And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli,  
Which was the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi, which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Janna, which was the son of Joseph,  
Which was the son of Mattathias, which was the son of Amos, which was the son of Naum, which was the son of Esli, which was the son of Nagge,  
Which was the son of Maath, which was the son of Mattathias, which was the son of Semei, which was the son of Joseph, which was the son of Juda,

Which was the son of Joanna, which was the son of Rhesa, which was the son of Zorobabel, which was the son of Salathiel, which was the son of Neri,  
Which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Addi, which was the son of Cosam, which was the son of Elmodam, which was the son of Er,  
Which was the son of Jose, which was the son of Eliezer, which was the son of Jorim, which was the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi,  
Which was the son of Simeon, which was the son of Juda, which was the son of Joseph, which was the son of Jonan, which was the son of Eliakim,  
Which was the son of Melea, which was the son of Menan, which was the son of Mattatha, which was the son of Nathan, which was the son of David,  
Which was the son of Jesse, which was the son of Obed, which was the son of Booz, which was the son of Salmon, which was the son of Naasson,  
Which was the son of Aminadab, which was the son of Aram, which was the son of Esrom, which was the son of Phares, which was the son of Juda,  
Which was the son of Jacob, which was the son of Isaac, which was the son of Abraham, which was the son of Thara, which was the son of Nachor,  
Which was the son of Saruch, which was the son of Ragau, which was the son of Phalec, which was the son of Heber, which was the son of Sala,  
Which was the son of Cainan, which was the son of Arphaxad, which was the son of Sem, which was the son of Noe, which was the son of Lamech,

Which was the son of Mathusala, which was the son of Enoch, which was the son of Jared, which was the son of Maleleel, which was the son of Cainan, Which was the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God.