

# **YORK** EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL

## **The Gesualdo Six**

### **English Motets**

**National Centre for Early Music**  
**15 July 2021 6.30 pm & 8.45 pm**

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**Online Premiere**  
**15 July 2021 8.45 pm**



## The Gesualdo Six

**Guy James** *countertenor*  
**Joseph Wicks** *tenor*  
**Josh Cooter** *tenor*  
**Michael Craddock** *baritone*  
**Sam Mitchell** *bass*  
**Owain Park** *bass, director*

### English Motets

Te lucis ante terminum **Thomas Tallis** (c. 1505–1585)  
Ave verum corpus **William Byrd** (c. 1540–1623)

Afflicti pro peccatis nostris **Byrd**

Qualis est dilectus meus **John Forest** (fl. 1400–1450)  
In manus tuas (III) **John Sheppard** (c. 1515–1558)  
In pace **Christopher Tye** (c. 1505–1573)  
All people, clap your hands **Thomas Weelkes** (1576–1623)

Vigilate **Byrd**

Christe qui lux es et dies (I) **Robert White** (c. 1538–1574)  
If ye love me **Tallis**  
In manus tuas **Tallis**  
When David heard **Thomas Tomkins** (1572–1656)

Laudate, pueri, Dominum **Byrd**

During the Renaissance, musical composition flourished, but it was a time of great change, fuelled by religious division. This programme traces music written by some of the English Renaissance masters over a period of 200 years, encompassing florid medieval-sounding works by Forest and Sheppard, intricately woven polyphonic works by Tallis and Byrd, and the beautiful simplicity of Tomkins and White.

All of these composers were obliged to write in the musical style of the moment, which was constantly fluctuating in one of the most turbulent periods in English history. Lavish Catholic services required suitably elaborate music, with Latin texts and rich sonorities. The Protestants did away with such excess, and as the walls were whitewashed so too was the music, with demands placed on composers to set English words as simply as possible, so that every syllable could be clearly heard by the congregation. Then, in Queen Elizabeth I's reign, came a kind of relaxed simplicity, a halfway house, in which the ideal was both that the words could be heard clearly and also that the music should be interesting.

While all composers in Tudor England were flexible to the period's shifting religious requirements, none was quite as skilful at reinvention as Tallis, whose music remains absolutely consistent in its quality, even while his style changes dramatically. The recusant Byrd gave voice to the plight of Catholics in England through many of his compositions, using his royal favour to escape punishment for his beliefs, and in doing so wrote some of the most enduring and powerful music of the era.

The incredible productivity of composers writing during this period, coupled with the advent of printed sheet music and licences granted for its production, has resulted in a wealth of material available to us – and, as such, selecting only a handful to represent 'English Motets' as a whole is by no means easy. But I hope that we manage to showcase something of the extraordinary journey which composition took around the English Reformation and, in turn, reflect our immense enjoyment in performing the music we all grew up singing.

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## **Te lucis ante terminum**

Thomas Tallis

Te lucis ante terminum,  
Rerum Creator, poscimus,  
Ut pro tua clementia,  
Sis praesul et custodia.

Procul recedant somnia,  
Et noctium phantasmata:  
Hostemque nostrum comprime,  
Ne polluantur corpora.

Praesta, Pater piissime,  
Patrique compar Unice,  
Cum Spiritu Paraclito,  
Regnans per omne saeculum. Amen.

Thee, Lord, before the close of day,  
Maker of all things, Thee we pray  
For Thy dear loving kindness' sake  
To guard and guide us in Thy way.

Banish the dreams that terrify,  
And night's fantastic company:  
Keep us from Satan's tyranny:  
Defend us from unchastity.

Protect us, Father, God adored,  
Thou too, co-equal Son and Lord,  
Thou, Holy Ghost, our Advocate,  
Whose reign can know nor bound nor  
date. Amen.

The earliest known settings of the ancient compline hymn *Te lucis ante terminum* appear as plainsong versions in Catholic liturgical books from the mid sixteenth century. In this intimate setting by Thomas Tallis, included in the 1575 *Cantiones sacrae*, two verses of the chant frame a simple five-voiced middle section in which the highest voice sings the melody. Tallis's craft is reserved for the lower parts which subtly bring out the nuances of the text, a prime example of this being the wide-eyed chord that heralds the night's ghostly company ('phantasmata').

## **Ave verum corpus**

William Byrd

Ave verum corpus natum  
de Maria Virgine:  
vere passum, immolatum  
in cruce pro homine:  
cuius latus perforatum  
unda fluxit sanguine:  
esto nobis praegustatum,  
in mortis examine.  
O dulcis, O pie, O Jesu Fili Mariae.  
Miserere mei. Amen.

Hail the true body, born  
of the Virgin Mary:  
You who truly suffered and were  
sacrificed  
on the cross for the sake of man.  
From whose pierced flank  
flowed water and blood:  
Be a foretaste for us  
in the trial of death.  
O sweet, O merciful, O Jesus, Son of  
Mary.  
Have mercy on me. Amen.

*Ave verum corpus* is from the first volume of Byrd's *Gradualia ac cantiones sacrae*. Published in 1605, the collection was temporarily banned in the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot against James I, when anti-Catholic sentiment was especially volatile.

### **Afflicti pro peccatis nostris**

William Byrd

Afflicti pro peccatis nostris, quotidie  
cum lacrimis expectemus finem  
nostrum:  
Dolor cordis nostri ascendat ad te  
Domine.  
Ut eruas nos a malis qui innovantur in  
nobis.

Afflicted by our sins, each day with  
tears we look forward to our end:  
The sorrow in our hearts rises to  
thee, O Lord.  
That you may deliver us from those  
evils that originate within us.

William Byrd's *Afflicti pro peccatis nostris* is an achingly beautiful Lenten anthem, setting a text from Isaiah and rooted in the traditions of the medieval Sarum rite, bridging centuries and bringing his own time of precarity and vulnerability to our own. The work is built around a plainsong cantus firmus, first heard in the baritone part then moving to the tenor part in the second section.

### **Qualis est dilectus meus**

John Forest

Qualis est dilectus meus ex dilectis  
o pulcherrima mulierum?  
Amicus meus candidus et rubicundus  
electus ex millibus.  
Leva ejus sub capite meo  
et dextera illius amplexabitur me.

What is my beloved more than other  
beloveds  
O fairest of women?  
My beloved is white and ruddy  
The chief among ten thousand.  
His left hand should be under my  
head,  
And his right hand should embrace me.

The Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon) has been a source of inspiration for composers for centuries, with its beautiful imagery captured by composers in long, twisting melismatic lines. Rather amazingly, this work by John Forest, a sometime resident of York, appears in a manuscript copied in Ferrara in the mid fifteenth century for use at the court chapel of Leonello d'Este. The collection, called 'ModB', has five repertorial sections: the last is motets by English composers.

### **In manus tuas (III)**

John Sheppard

In manus tuas, Domine, commendo  
spiritum meum.  
Redemisti me Domine, Deus veritatis.

Into your hands, O Lord, I commend  
my spirit.  
You have redeemed me, O Lord, O  
God of truth.

John Sheppard composed three short settings of *In manus tuas*, all for use in the evening service of compline in the days leading up to Holy Week. As usual in settings of this text, only some of the words are given polyphony; the rest are sung to plainchant. All three times can be found in the Gyffard partbooks, a set of four partbooks that were probably mostly copied during the reign of Mary I for use at St Paul's Cathedral.

### **In pace**

Christopher Tye

In pace, in idipsum dormiam et  
requiescam.  
Si dedero somnum oculis meis,  
et palpebris meis dormitationem,  
dormiam et requiescam.  
Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto.

In peace and into the same I shall sleep  
and rest.  
If I give slumber to my eyes, and to my  
eyelids drowsiness,  
I shall sleep and rest.  
Glory to the Father, and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit.

Christopher Tye's *In pace* sets a Lenten compline responsory, with its text from the Sarum breviary. The music alternates between polyphony and chant verses, with the four-voice sections featuring long melismatic lines that overlap in their descending contour.

### **All people, clap your hands**

Thomas Weelkes

All people, clap your hands, sing loud unto the Lord with a joyful voice.  
God is gone up with triumph, e'en the Lord with the sound of the trumpet.  
Praise the Lord with harp, sing unto him with viol and instruments of music.  
Let us rejoice in the living God from this time forth for evermore. Amen.

Very little is known of Weelkes's early life, but his later career suggests that he came from southern England. He was appointed organist of Chichester Cathedral probably late in 1601, and in later years was frequently reprimanded for a variety of reasons, including bad language and drunkenness. This exuberant setting of words from the Book of Psalms depicts dancing trumpets and viols praising God, and features a sumptuous 'Amen' which finishes with the voices cascading down together.

## **Vigilate**

William Byrd

Vigilate, nescitis enim quando dominus  
domus veniat,  
sero, an media nocte, an gallicantu, an  
mane.

Vigilate ergo, ne cum venerit repente,  
inveniat vos dormientes.

Quod autem dico vobis, omnibus dico:  
vigilate.

Watch ye therefore (for you know not  
when the lord of the house cometh,  
at even, or at midnight, or at the cock  
crowing, or in the morning):

Watch therefore, lest coming on a  
sudden, he find you sleeping.

And what I say to you, I say to all:  
Watch.

Mark 13: 35-37

The many clear borrowings from the Italian madrigal tradition that colour William Byrd's lively *Vigilate* (probably dating from early in his career) suggest it was perhaps aimed at less directly religious circles, and could even be interpreted as a warning to his fellow recusant Catholics to 'keep watch' against spies. The word painting throughout is vivid and detailed; listen for the ascending motif at 'an galli cantu' representing a cock crowing, the slowing harmonic pulse and lulling suspensions that accompany the sleeping faithful at 'dormientes', and the sudden coming together of the voice parts at 'omnibus dico' (I say to all).

## **Christe qui lux es et dies (I)**

Robert White

Office hymn for compline

I. Christe qui lux es et dies,  
Noctis tenebras detegis,  
Lucisque lumen crederis,  
Lumen beatum praedicans.

I. Christ, who art the light and day,  
You drive away the darkness of night,  
You are called the light of light,  
For you proclaim the blessed light.

2. Precamur Sancte Domine,  
Defende nos in hac nocte,  
Sit nobis in te requies,  
Quietam noctem tribue.

3. Ne gravis somnus irruat,  
Nec hostis nos surripiat,  
Nec caro illi consentiens,  
Nos tibi reos statuatur.

4. Oculi somnum capiant,  
Cor ad te semper vigilet,  
Dextera tua protegat  
Famulos qui te diligunt.

5. Defensor noster aspice,  
Insidiantes reprime,  
Guberna tuos famulos,  
Quos sanguine mercatus es.

6. Memento nostri Domine  
In gravi isto corpore,  
Qui es defensor animae,  
Adesto nobis Domine.

7. Deo Patri sit gloria,  
Eiusque soli Filio,  
Cum Spiritu Paraclito,  
Et nunc et in perpetuum. Amen.

2. We beseech you, Holy Lord,  
Protect us this night.  
Let us take our rest in you;  
Grant us a tranquil night.

3. Let our sleep be free from care;  
Let not the enemy snatch us away,  
Nor flesh conspire within him,  
And make us guilty in your sight.

4. Though our eyes be filled with  
sleep,  
Keep our hearts forever awake to you.  
May your right hand protect  
Your willing servants.

5. You who are our shield, behold;  
Restrain those that lie in wait.  
And guide your servants whom  
You have ransomed with your blood.

6. Remember us, O Lord,  
Who bear the burden of this mortal  
form;  
You who are the defender of the soul,  
Be near us, O Lord.

7. Glory be to God the Father,  
And to his only Son,  
With the Spirit, Comforter,  
Both now and evermore. Amen.

Robert White (whose short but successful career took him to Trinity College, Cambridge, Ely Cathedral and Westminster Abbey) composed four settings of the Lenten compline hymn *Christe qui lux es et dies*, all based on the traditional chant melody. His first version is an understated exercise in textural contrast, alternating single-voice chant with a five-voice chordal texture. Subtle changes in harmony gently colour each verse of the text, but the voices remain homophonic throughout, with only one instance of a voice moving separately from the rest – in the middle verse, at the end of the important phrase ‘cor ad te semper vigilet’ (keep our hearts forever awake to you).



## **If ye love me**

Thomas Tallis

If ye love me, keep my commandments.  
And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another  
Comforter, that He may 'bide with you for ever, e'en  
the spirit of truth.

Intelligibility of text is all in *If ye love me*, a work whose guiding principle seems to be Archbishop Cranmer's edict that sacred music should use only one note per syllable. Tallis opens the work with a clear declamation of the text, emphasising the word 'commandments', leaving his listener in no doubt of the importance placed on learning and teaching in the new language of the church. Despite continuing in a four-part polyphonic texture, none of the clarity of text is lost, with beautiful descending phrases passed around the voices.

## **In manus tuas**

Thomas Tallis

In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum.	Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.
Redemisti me Domine, Deus veritatis.	You have redeemed me, O Lord, O God of truth.

*In manus tuas* is one of Tallis's most simple and straightforward Latin-texted works. The opening passages are characterised by wide leaps, pining gestures that give the work a feeling of sparseness despite the five-voiced polyphonic texture. Later in the work, the voices pair off, calling to one another and imitating each other's lines at close proximity, in an almost conversational, yet intimate fashion.

## **When David heard**

Thomas Tomkins

When David heard that Absalom was slain  
He went up into his chamber over the gate and wept,  
and thus he said: my son, my son, O Absalom my son, would God I had died for  
thee!

2 Samuel 18:33

Probably composed as a lament for Henry, the young Prince of Wales who died in 1612, Tomkins' *When David heard* was later published by the composer in a set of madrigals, though it was still sung in religious services. Composed in two sections, the anthem's power lies in its unexpected shift from third-person description to a first-person outpouring of grief – suddenly, and shockingly intimate.

The first section describes King David overcome with grief at the loss of his son, Absalom. Tomkins repeats certain words with their musical figures to great effect, focusing on short-term interplay between the parts rather than extended polyphonic lines. The second, longer section puts words directly into the anguished father's mouth. The music gradually becomes more charged: the tessitura rises, the vocal texture thickens and the music convulses with funereal rhythms and heartbreaking chromatic melodies. As the work begins to subside, there are two beautiful arrival points – the first on the dominant, and the last on the major tonic, perhaps indicating the possibility of cathartic release on the other side of pain.

### **Laudate, pueri, Dominum**

William Byrd

Laudate, pueri, Dominum, laudate  
nomen Domini:  
sit nomen Domini benedictum, ex hoc  
nunc et usque in saeculum.  
Auxilium meum a Domino, qui fecit  
caelum et terram.  
Benefac, Domine, bonis et rectis  
corde.

Praise the Lord, ye children: praise ye  
the name of the Lord.  
Blessed be the name of the Lord, from  
henceforth now and for ever.  
My help is from the Lord, who made  
heaven and earth.  
Do good, O Lord, to those that are  
good, and to the upright of heart.

*Laudate pueri Dominum* is another of Byrd's contributions to the *Cantiones Sacrae*, published with Tallis in 1575. It is written in florid polyphonic style, adapted from a six-part instrumental fantasia, with a joyful text from Psalms 113, 121 and 123.

**The Gesualdo Six** is an award-winning British vocal ensemble comprising some of the UK's finest consort singers, directed by Owain Park. Praised for its imaginative programming and impeccable blend, the ensemble was formed in 2014 for a performance of Gesualdo's *Tenebrae Responsories* in Cambridge and has gone on to perform at numerous major festivals across the UK, Europe, North America and Australia. Notable highlights include a concert as part of the distinguished Deutschlandradio Debut Series and collaborations with the Brodsky Quartet, London Mozart Players, Luxmuralis, William Barton and Matilda Lloyd.

The ensemble integrates educational work into its activities, regularly holding workshops for young musicians and composers. The Gesualdo Six has curated two composition competitions, with the 2019 edition attracting entries from over three hundred composers around the world. The group has recently commissioned new works from Joanna Ward, Kerensa Briggs, Deborah Pritchard, Joanna Marsh and Richard Barnard alongside *coronasolfège for 6* by Héloïse Werner.

Videos of the ensemble performing a diverse selection of works filmed in Ely Cathedral have been watched by many thousands online. The group released its debut recording *English Motets* on Hyperion Records in early 2018 to critical acclaim, followed in late 2019 by *Christmas*, a festive album of seasonal favourites, and an album of compline-themed music titled *Fading* which was awarded Vocal & Choral Recording of the Year 2020 by Limelight.

[thegesualdosix.co.uk](http://thegesualdosix.co.uk)

**Owain Park** was born in Bristol in 1993. As well as directing The Gesualdo Six, he maintains a busy schedule of conducting projects with ensembles including the BBC Singers, the Academy of Ancient Music and London Mozart Players. He is also the Musical Director of Cambridge Chorale.

Owain's compositions are published by Novello and have been performed internationally by ensembles including the Tallis Scholars and the Aurora Orchestra. While at Cambridge University he studied orchestration with John Rutter, before undertaking a Masters degree in composition.

Owain is a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists (FRCO) and was awarded the Dixon Prize for improvisation, having been Senior Organ Scholar at Wells Cathedral and Trinity College Cambridge. He was a *Tenebrae* Associate Artist for two seasons, and has worked with ensembles including The Sixteen, Gabrieli Consort and Polyphony.

[owainpark.co.uk](http://owainpark.co.uk)

**YORK EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL** is directed by Delma Tomlin MBE and administered by the National Centre for Early Music through the York Early Music Foundation (registered charity number 1068331)

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