

Byrd

A VOTIVE MASS

OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

FROM CHRISTMAS TO THE PURIFICATION

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A VOTIVE MASS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY FROM CHRISTMAS TO THE PURIFICATION

Music of William Byrd (1542/3–1623)

I

Vide Domine
Cantiones sacre I (1589)

Introit: Vultum tuum
Gradualia I (1605)

Kyrie
Gloria
Mass for Five Voices (1594–5)

Gradual: Speciosus forma
Alleluia: Post partum
Gradualia I

Salve regina
Cantiones sacre II (1591)

intermission

Saturday, January 21, 2006, 7:30 p.m. · Christ Church of Hamilton & Wenham

Sunday, January 22, 2006, 4 p.m. · St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Brookline

Saturday, January 28, 2006, 7 p.m. · University Lutheran Church, Cambridge

II

Ne irascaris Domine
Cantiones sacre I

Credo
Mass for Five Voices

Offertory: Felix namque es
Gradualia I

Sanctus
Agnus
Mass for Five Voices

Communion: Beata viscera
Gradualia I

Hæc dicit Dominus
Cantiones sacre II

NOTES

William Byrd was born in 1543 or perhaps late 1542, in the latter years of the reign of Henry VIII. His boyhood saw the promulgation of a sternly reformed vernacular rite under the young Edward VI (r. 1547–53), the dramatic reestablishment of Catholicism during the five-year reign of Queen Mary, and then the final fall of the Catholic Church as the official church of England, and the extinction of the native Sarum rite, upon Mary's death in 1558 and the ascent to the throne of her Protestant half sister, Elizabeth. Over the course of Elizabeth's long reign, storms of conflict between Protestants and Catholics raged and abated, years of relative tolerance for recusant Catholics alternating with periods of severe repression and persecution. Byrd served his Queen faithfully and honorably, but he remained a devoted Catholic, and in the second half of his life turned his creative energies largely to music for the Roman Catholic liturgy—a liturgy which Byrd and his fellow adherents to the old faith could only celebrate in private, in the country chapels of recusant nobles, for example. Today's program samples some of this music: we present the five movements of the Ordinary of the Mass from Byrd's Mass for Five Voices (1594–5), as it could just possibly have been sung in just such a private chapel, in an exceptionally musical Votive Mass for the Blessed Virgin between Christmas and the feast of the Purification (February 2). The Propers of the Mass sung here (those items in the Mass that change depending on the liturgical occasion) are polyphonic settings drawn from Byrd's first book of *Gradualia* of 1605. The items of the Mass on each half of our program are framed with lamenting and supplicatory motets from the two volumes of *Cantiones sacrae* published in 1589 and 1591.

Around 1590 Byrd was engaged in a general project of collecting and ordering the fruits of several years of composition. Besides the *Psalmes, sonets, & songs of sadnes and pietie* of 1588, the *Songs of sundrie natures* of 1589, and Lady Nevell's manuscript virginal book of 1591, Byrd put together two books of Latin motets which he published under the title of *Cantiones sacrae* or Sacred songs. Sacred they are, with many texts drawn from the Bible, but the words of these motets are mostly not liturgical items intended for a certain feast or a particular service. Many of the texts are highly charged and emotionally powerful laments for a religious community in captivity or in exile, and there is no doubt that Byrd intended the collection as a whole as a protest against the condition of the Roman Catholic community in England ("long beaten by bitter storms and stricken, as it were, by the frost of adverse fortune," as he described the situation on another occasion), and a prayer for divine intervention which would restore the Catholic Church to its rightful place at the center of English life and society.

The *Cantiones sacrae* motets are among the most dramatically expressive of Byrd's works. *Vide domine* opens with a repeated cry of supplication, asking the Lord to behold the affliction of his people. Byrd paints the desolation of Jerusalem by turning to the flat side of the chromatic spectrum, departing from the piece's D-mode as far as A \flat to set the word "desolata," with a fleeting, extraordinary D \flat in the first tenor. The rising figure sung by the sopranos to "gaudium cordis nostri" (the joy of our hearts) is immediately inverted at "conversum est in luctum" (is turned to mourning) and the upward-leaping fourths of "jocunditas nostra" (our delight) dissolve heartrendingly into the bitter upper-neighbor figure on "amaritudine" (bitterness). Moments of hope and confidence in the *secunda pars* (on "pacem tuam," for example) give way again to despair. One cadence after another is evaded or obscured

in the lengthy passage on the words "et miserere populi tui," and the ending of the motet feels very uncertain of redemption.

Ne irascaris is a wonder of another kind: a purely lamenting motet in a very major-sounding F mode. There are touches of chromaticism (the use of pitches outside the normal diatonic scale) here and there, all the more effective for the overall restraint of the piece. One of the most marvellous moments is the homophonic setting of "Sion," with the "deserta" that follows moving into rich E \flat sonorities. One of the keys to the success of Byrd's rhetoric in this motet seems to be the balance between rising and falling motives; another is that between homophony and imitative polyphony; a third his ability to craft uncannily moving music out of deceptively simple motives. All three of these attributes contribute to the profound emotional impact of the conclusion, as the block chords of "Sion deserta facta est" give way to the beautifully judged rising-and-falling motive of "Jerusalem" and thence to the falling melody of "desolata est." Only in the last bars do all five voices sing rising figures again, as the alto sounds, twice more, a plangent E \flat .

Haec dicit dominus recalls *Vide domine* in its overt expressivity. Among the many marvels of this motet, one of the loveliest is the way its predominantly minor sonorities yield to a long section of largely major, at "there is hope in thy last days, and thy children shall return to their own borders," and this lament ends with a feeling of calm assurance.

The five-voice *Salve regina* avoids any obvious reference to the well-known plainchant melody of the Marian antiphon. It opens with fluid melismas on the word "Salve," then explores various moods of suffering and supplication, returning to melismas for the last word of the prayer, "Maria."

For a decade and a half after publishing the two books of *Cantiones sacrae*, Byrd devoted himself primarily to the creation of a corpus of music for the forbidden Roman liturgy. He began by composing three settings of the central text of Catholic worship, the Ordinary of the Mass, and subsequently produced a great cycle of Propers for the liturgical year which he published under the title of *Gradualia*. The three Masses, for four, three, and five voices, were printed (in partbooks without a title page, for political reasons) in 1592–3, 1593–4, and 1594–5, respectively. For Byrd, a religious exile within his own country, a polyphonic mass was not merely an ornament to a certain daily ritual; its composition was an assertion of the centrality of the Catholic sacrament to human life, and he approached the task with marked seriousness and a meticulous engagement with the words and phrases of the texts that is often missing from the work of composers in Catholic countries, many of whom turned out masses in enormous quantity (Palestrina wrote a hundred, Lassus around sixty).

The last of Byrd's three, the Mass in Five Voices is at once sumptuous in scoring and austere in expression. The Kyrie is a mere twenty-five breves (or measures) in length: it takes about a minute and a half to sing. But, as Joseph Kerman has observed, its harmonic balance is exquisitely calculated, sounding mostly D minor and A minor sonorities in Kyrie I, extending to B \flat major and G minor in the Christe, with its radiant G major close, and then pulling back to G minor and D minor in Kyrie II, with a half close on A major. The restrained head motive of Kyrie I (AGAB \flat A) returns to open the Gloria, Credo, and Agnus, but only in the Kyrie and the Agnus does Byrd follow this gesture, strikingly, with a B natural.

Concision, balance, and cogent expression characterize the Five-Voice Mass throughout. It is a truism of

polyphonic masses that the Credo always seems too long—all those words!—but not one note of the Credo of this Mass feels routine or lacking in specific meaning, and the movement as a whole is so persuasively structured as to make its length (at around 200 breves almost twice that of the Gloria) virtually unremarkable. Ten years later, in the dedication to the first book of *Gradualia*, Byrd described his approach to setting sacred texts in terms which seem as fitting to the Mass in Five Voices as to the propers of the later collections:

The swan, they say, when his death is near, sings more sweetly. However little I may be able to attain to the sweetness (*suavitas*) of that bird in these songs... I have had two defences or incentives of no common rate for emulating that sweetness in some sort at least. The one was the sweetness (*dulcitus*) of the words themselves... For even as among artisans it is shameful in a craftsman to make a rude piece of work from some precious material, so indeed to sacred words in which the praises of God and of the Heavenly host are sung, none but some celestial harmony (so far as our powers avail) will be proper. Moreover in these words, as I have learned by trial, there is such a concealed and hidden power that to one thinking upon things divine and diligently and earnestly pondering them, all the fittest numbers occur as if of themselves and freely offer themselves to the mind which is not indolent or inert.

(Dedication, Gradualia I, 1605, trans. Oliver Strunk)

—Scott Metcalfe

TEXTS & TRANSLATIONS

VIDE, DOMINE

Vide, domine, afflictionem nostram, et in tempore maligno ne derelinquas nos. Plusquam Hierusalem facta est desolata, civitas electa, gaudium cordis nostri conversum est in luctum, et jocunditas nostra in amaritudinem conversa est.

Behold, O Lord, our affliction, and do not forsake us in time of adversity. More than Jerusalem, the chosen city, was made desolate, the joy of our heart is turned into mourning, and our delight is turned into bitterness.

Sed veni, domine, et noli tardare, et revoca dispersos in civitatem tuam. Da nobis, domine, pacem tuam diu desideratam, pax sanctissima, et miserere populi tui gementis et flentis, domine deus noster.

But come, O Lord, and do not tarry, and call back the exiles into your city. O Lord, give us your peace, so long desired; O most holy Peace, have mercy upon your people, groaning and weeping, O Lord our God.

INTROIT

Vultum tuum deprecabuntur omnes divites plebis. Adducentur regi virgines post eam; proxima ejus adducentur tibi in lætitia et exultatione. Eructavit cor meum verbum bonum; dico ego opera mea regi.

All the rich among the people will entreat your countenance. Virgins will be led to the King after her; those close to her will be led to you in joy and exultation. My heart has declared a good word: I dedicate my works to the King.

Gloria patri et filio et spiritui sancto; sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in secula seculorum. Amen.

Glory to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever and ever. Amen.

KYRIE

Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison. Kyrie eleison.

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

GLORIA

Gloria in excelsis deo, et in terra pax hominibus bone voluntatis. Laudamus te. Benedicimus te. Adoramus te. Glorificamus te. Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam. Domine deus, rex celestis, deus pater omnipotens. Domine fili unigenite, Jesu Christe. Domine deus, agnus dei, filius patris. Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis. Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram. Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere nobis. Quoniam tu solus sanctus, tu solus dominus, tu solus altissimus, Jesu Christe, cum sancto spiritu in gloria dei patris. Amen.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to all of good will. We praise you. We bless you. We adore you. We glorify you. We give thanks to you for your great glory. Lord God, heavenly king, almighty God the Father, Lord Jesus Christ, only begotten Son, Lord God, lamb of God, Son of the Father, Who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Who takes away the sins of the world, receive our prayer. Who sits at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. For you alone are holy, you alone are the Lord, the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

GRADUAL

Speciosus forma præ filiis hominum; diffusa est gratia in labiis tuis. Eructavit cor meum verbum bonum; dico ego opera mea regi. Lingua mea calamus scribæ velociter scribentis. Alleluia.

ALLELUIA

Post partum, virgo, inviolata permansiſti: dei genitrix, intercede pro nobis. Alleluia.

SALVE REGINA

Salve regina, mater misericordie;
Vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve.
Ad te clamamus exsules filii Eve.
Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes
in hac lacrimarum valle.
Eia ergo, advocata nostra,
illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte,
Et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui,
nobis post hoc exsilium ostende.
O clemens, O pia, O dulcis virgo Maria.

NE IRASCARIS

Ne irascaris Domine satis, et ne ultra memineris iniquitatis nostræ. Ecce, respice, populus tuus omnes nos.

Civitas sancti tui facta est deserta. Sion deserta facta est. Jerusalem desolata est.

CREDO

Credo in unum deum, patrem omnipotentem, factorem celi et terre, visibilium omnium, et invisibilium. Et in unum dominum Jesum Christum, filium dei unigenitum. Et ex patre natum ante omnia secula. Deum de deo, lumen de lumine, deum verum de deo vero. Genitum non factum, consubstantialem patri: per quem omnia facta sunt. Qui propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem descendit de celis. Et incarnatus est de spiritu sancto ex Maria virgine: et homo factus est. Crucifixus etiam pro nobis sub Pontio Pilato: passus et sepultus est. Et resurrexit tertia die secundum scripturas. Et ascendit in celum: sedet ad dexteram patris. Et iterum venturus est cum gloria

Beautiful in appearance above the sons of men, grace is poured out upon your lips. My heart has declared a good word: I dedicate my works to the King. My tongue is the pen of a scribe swiftly writing. Alleluia.

After childbirth, Virgin, you remained inviolate: mother of God, intercede for us. Alleluia.

*Hail, Queen, mother of mercy,
our life, our sweetness, and our hope, hail!
To you we cry, we exiled children of Eve.
To you we sigh, weeping and wailing
in this vale of tears.
Therefore, you our advocate,
turn your merciful eyes upon us,
and show us Jesus, the blessed fruit of your womb,
after this our exile.
O merciful, O tender, O sweet virgin Mary.*

Be not angry any more, O Lord, and do not remember our iniquity any longer. Behold, see, we are all thy people.

The city of thy holy place is become a wilderness. Zion is become a wilderness. Jerusalem is forsaken.

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God. Begotten, not made; of one being with the Father, through whom all things are made. For us and for our salvation he came down from Heaven. He was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man. He was crucified for our sake under Pontius Pilate, died, and was buried. On the third day he rose again, in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge

judicare vivos et mortuos: cujus regni non erit finis. Et in spiritum sanctum dominum et vivificantem, qui ex patre filioque procedit, qui cum patre et filio simul adoratur et conglorificatur, qui locutus est per prophetas. Et unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam. Confiteor unum baptisma in remissionem peccatorum, et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum, et vitam venturi seculi. Amen.

OFFERTORY

Felix namque, es sacra virgo Maria, et omni laude dignissima, quia ex te ortus est sol justitiæ, Christus deus noster.

SANCTUS

Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, dominus deus sabaoth. Pleni sunt celi et terra gloria tua. Osanna in excelsis. Benedictus qui venit in nomine domini. Osanna in excelsis.

AGNUS DEI

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis pacem.

COMMUNION

Beata viscera Mariæ virginis quæ portaverunt æterni patris filium.

HAEC DICIT DOMINUS

Hæc dicit Dominus: Vox in excelsis audita est lamentationis, luctus et fletus, Rachæll plorantis filios suos, et nolentis consolari super eos, quia non sunt.

Hæc dicit Dominus: Quiescat vox tua a ploratu, et oculi tui a lacrimis, quia est merces opera tuo, ait Dominus: et est spes in novissimis tuis, et revertentur filii ad terminos suos.

both the living and the dead, and his kingdom shall have no end. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who together with the Father and Son is worshipped and glorified; who has spoken by the prophets. And in one holy catholic and apostolic church. I confess one baptism for the remission of sins, and I await the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

For truly, happy one, you are the holy virgin Mary, and most worthy of every praise, for out of you is risen the sun of justice, Christ our God.

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Lamb of God, you who take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you who take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you who take away the sins of the world, grant us peace.

Blessed be the womb of the virgin Mary, which bore the Son of the eternal Father.

Thus saith the Lord: A voice of lamentation was heard in heaven, mourning and weeping, Rachel crying for her children, and refusing to be comforted for them, for they are not.

Thus saith the Lord: Let thy voice rest from weeping, and thine eyes from tears, for there is a reward for thy work, saith the Lord: and there is hope in thy last days, and thy children shall return to their own borders.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Formed in 1987 and incorporated in 1990, CONVIVIUM MUSICUM has been praised by the Boston Globe for “the almost dancing lift given to the rhythms, both musical and verbal.” Convivium’s adventurous programming ranges from Josquin and Mouton to Sweelinck and Le Jeune, from Peñalosa to Victoria, from the Song of Songs to Dido’s lament, and from Europe to New Spain, including masterworks by Byrd, Guerrero, Praetorius, and many other lesser-known composers. Convivium Musicum is proud to be a corporation run by its singers, who serve on the Board of Directors, manage the group’s business affairs, design its programs and publicity materials, and seek out opportunities to perform Renaissance polyphony for new audiences.

A conductor with a repertoire extending from the fifteenth century to the eighteenth (occasionally stretching to the twenty-first), SCOTT METCALFE is in his tenth year as music director of Convivium Musicum. He also directs the vocal ensemble Blue Heron and in recent seasons has been invited to conduct Bach’s *St. John Passion*, Monteverdi’s *Vespers of 1610*, Handel’s *Messiah* and his opera *Amadigi*, in venues from Seattle to New Hampshire. An active violinist and chamber musician, Metcalfe is concertmaster of the Trinity Consort in Portland, Oregon.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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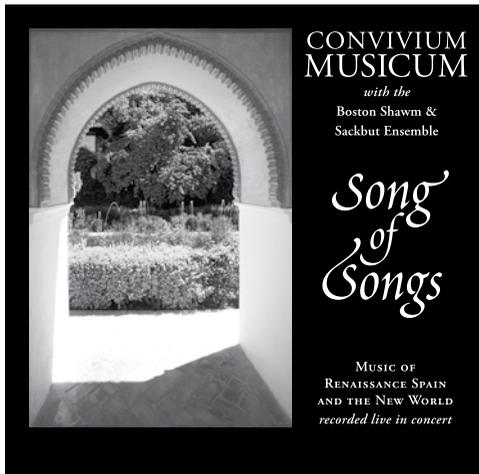
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