

The Cherwell Singers
conductor: Magnus Williamson

MUSIC *for* LENT

Lamentations ~ *Robert White (d.1574)*

Bruckner Motets

Motets by Tallis

8pm Saturday 23rd March 1991

**St. Aloysius Church, Woodstock Rd,
(near the Radcliffe Infirmary)
Oxford**

The five-part Lamentations by Robert White, set to six verses of the Lamentations of Jeremiah are amongst the longest settings of the text by an English composer. In his *Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* of 1597, Thomas Morley cites White's Lamentations as pieces of particular poignancy; the combination of highly imitative polyphony, slow moving harmony, some measure of dissonance and moments where the music almost ceases to move lend it great dignity. It dates from the beginning of the second half of the sixteenth century, together with a number of other settings by Thomas Tallis, William Byrd and Osbert Parsley. An Organist of Ely Cathedral and Westminster Abbey, Robert White was one of the most important of the early-Elizabethan composers, and his Lamentations stand shoulder to shoulder with the more famous sets by Tallis. In tonight's performance, two duets for Organ will be played at certain intervals during the White. The first is A Verse by Nicolas Carleton, the next is A Fancie for Two to Play by Thomas Tomkins. Both dating from the early seventeenth century, the duets are important landmarks in the history of the keyboard, as they are the oldest surviving true keyboard duets in existence.

The second half of the concert begins with Virtus, Honor et Potestas by Thomas Tallis, which dates from around the same time as Robert White's Lamentations. In this piece, the plainchant is set as a monorhythmic *cantus firmus* in the Tenor part, hidden in a contrapuntal web of imitation. The next two pieces date from the thirteenth century, and are taken from the so-called Worcester fragments (polyphonic music used at Worcester Cathedral in the Middle Ages). Here, the polyphony is of a much more rough-hewn nature than that of the sixteenth century, redolent of the age of the Cathedral, replete with gargoyles and grotesques. The next item is Fantasia and Fugue in g (BWV 542) by J S Bach. Amongst Bach's most majestic organ works, the Fantasia and Fugue act as a narrow causeway between the thirteenth and the late nineteenth centuries, for the last item in tonight's concert consists of four motets by Anton Bruckner, an Austrian active in Linz as Organist of the Church of St Florian in the 1860s and 1870s. Setting hymns, graduals and antiphons from the Roman Rite, Bruckner ignored their associated plainchant (something his Medieval forebears could never have done), and set the texts to freely-composed music. Presaging the monolithic nature of his symphonies, the *Geistliche Chöre* exploit the rich acoustic of the church with the large-scale chords, sudden diminuendi and frequent rhetorical silences.

P R O G R A M M E

Lamentations of Jeremiah

Robert White

in three parts

with organ interludes:

A Verse (In Nomine) Nicolas Carleton

A Fancy for Two to Play Thomas Tomkins

* * * I N T E R V A L * * *

Thomas Tallis Virtus Honor et Potestas

Anon Salve sancta parens
(English, C13th) virgo/enixa
 Salve virgo virginum

Robert Parsons Ave Maria

J S Bach Fantasia and Fugue in g
 (BWV 542)

Anton Bruckner Locus iste
 Os justi
 Virga Jesse
 Ave Maria