

The Cherwell Singers

Merton College Chapel , 24th March 2007 8pm

Miserere - European Music for Passiontide

Conducted by **John Cotton**

Miserere settings by Tommaso Bai and Gregorio Allegri, Tomás Luis de Victoria, and Thomas Tallis form the framework for an exploration of music written for the emotionally charged services throughout Holy Week across Europe. Familiar favourites lead into lesser known masterpieces, in this musical Grand Tour of Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and English responses to the climax of the ecclesiastical year.

Tommaso Bai(c.1650-1714)/**Gregorio Allegri**(1582-1652)

The point of departure is the amazing, passionate *Miserere* by Tommaso Bai. At the Vatican, a different setting of the *Miserere* was used after each the three Tenebrae services of Holy Week. Allegri's famous setting would be sung one night, Bai's the next, and a conflagration of both for the third night. Both Allegri and Bai wrote their settings to accommodate pre-existing ornamental figures called *abbellimenti*. Subsequent generations of performers embellished and altered these until, at the height of the Papal Choir, the full flourish of these ornaments was the main reason that many travelled long distances to hear Tenebrae at the Vatican. These ornaments were very jealously guarded by the Vatican choir and were, allegedly, only taught by ear to a trusted few in subsequent generations. It was believed they had never been written down, until manuscripts were recently revisited in Rome. These showed that, just before the terminal decline of the Papal Choir, their Director wrote down the ornaments, lest they be lost forever.

Psalm 50(51) Miserere mei, Deus.

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness:

according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.

Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.

For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem.

Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.

Antonio Lotti (c.1667-1740)

Antonio Lotti's Crucifixus settings were a fabled part of the Holy Week worship of St Mark's basilica in Venice, and moved the English contemporary musicologist and historian Charles Burney to tears when he heard them there. Each, in fact, started life as part of the mass setting, specifically the Credo. Many composers have responded memorably to this part of the text, but Lotti's settings were so highly valued that they quickly became extracted from the mass, and used more generally throughout Holy Week.

Crucifixus á 6, Crucifixus á 8, Crucifixus á 10

He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;
suffered death and was buried.

John IV, King of Portugal (1604-1656)

King John IV of Portugal was one of the world's most musical monarchs, and an expert in the music of Victoria. His setting of Crux Fidelis has, to this day, been the focal point of the Good Friday Veneration of the Cross ceremony.

Crux Fidelis

Trusty Cross, noblest of trees: no forest can show
your equal in branch, or blossom, or fruit;
sweet the beam, sweet the nails,
sweet the Weight that it bears!

Juan Gutiérrez de Padilla (c.1590-1664)

The music of his contemporary compatriot, Juan Gutiérrez de Padilla, was held in such high esteem that it was carried by Iberian settlers to Central and South America, to be the jewel in the musical crown of their newly-built cathedrals. The Holy Week motets selected have been edited from manuscripts found in Puebla Cathedral, Mexico. *Tristis est Anima Mea* and *Velum Templi Scissum Est* are both scored for three high voices and one lower voice, a scoring found in a number of Holy Week pieces from Toledo Cathedral at the end of the 16th Century. The tradition in Toledo was that three select boys would proceed to part of the choir enclosure with their

choirmaster and sing special motets á4, the choirmaster taking the baritone part.

Tristis est Anima Mea

Sorrowful is my soul even unto death.

Stay here, and watch with me.

And going a little further, He fell upon his face, praying and saying: My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt.

Velum Templi Scissum Est

The veil of the temple was torn down the middle, and all the earth shook.

A thief cried out from the cross, saying: Lord, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.

Stabat Mater

The grieving Mother stood beside the cross weeping where her Son was hanging.

Through her weeping soul, compassionate and grieving, a sword passed.

Interval (20 minutes)

Tomás Luis de Victoria (1548-1611)

Victoria worked both in Italy and Spain, and his two settings of Venatius Fortunatus' vespers hymn *Vexilla Regis* use the Roman and the Hispanic versions of the chant, respectively. Much of Victoria's fame as a composer stems from his Passiontide motet *O Vos Omnes*, and the monumental and sumptuous publication of music for Holy Week, the *Officium Hebdomadae*, including the *Tenebrae Responsories*, *Lamentations* and *Passion settings*. Alongside these are published lesser-known works, the *Miserere Mei* and the *Canticum Zachariae*, intended, along with the *Tantum Ergo*, for use at Lauds on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. The *Miserere* is Victoria's only authenticated falso-bordone setting, and is fascinating in its alternation of the rhythmically delineated verse section with the freely chanted chorus sections. The *alternatim* hymn settings display Victoria's compositional diversity within a limiting genre, and his

masterful combination of Italian counterpoint with Spanish rhythmic vitality and virility as well as sensitivity to the text and mood of each section. The Tantum ergo is an ethereal timeless gem of a piece, which is strangely neglected, probably because of an abundance of riches in Victoria's more familiar work from which to choose.

Psalm 50 (51) Miserere mei, Deus.

Vexilla Regis Proderunt I (Roman)

The standards of the King appear: the mystery of the Cross shines forth in glory:

the foundation of our faith, who became flesh of flesh,

is suspended on the Cross:

He, whose side, wounded by the cruel sharpness of the lance,

poured out water and blood, so that our sins may be washed away.

The words of David's true and faithful song were fulfilled,

announcing to the nations: God has reigned from a tree.

A tree of dazzling beauty, adorned with a King's purple,

from a stock worthy to bear such holy limbs.

How blessed the tree on whose branches hung the prize of the whole world:

a balance upon which his body was weighed, bearing away the spoil desired by hell.

Hail, O Cross, our only hope this season of Passiontide:

increase the righteousness of the good and give pardon to the world.

Let every soul give praise to thee, O perfect Trinity,

who, by the mystery of the Cross, saves the King for ever. Amen.

Tantum Ergo Sacramentum

Down in adoration falling,

Lo! the sacred Host we hail,

Lo! o'er ancient forms departing
newer rites of grace prevail;

Faith for all defects supplying,
where the feeble senses fail.

Canticum Zachariae

Blessed Be the Lord, the God of Israë!l, because He has visited and wrought redemption for His people. And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant, As He promised through the mouths of His holy ones, the prophets from of old: Salvation from our enemies and from the hands of all our foes. He has fulfilled His kindness to our fathers, and has been mindful of His holy covenant. In the oath to Abraham our father, by which He swore to grant us, that, delivered from the hands of our enemies, we should serve Him without fear in holiness and justice before Him all our days. And thou, O child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High; for thou shalt go before the Lord to prepare His ways, To give His people knowledge of salvation through forgiveness of their sins, Because of the compassionate kindness of our God with which the Orient from on high will visit us, To shine on those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace. 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.

Thomas Tallis (c.1505-1585)

The selected Tallis motets were all published in the *Cantiones Sacrae* of 1575, a joint publication with William Byrd. Tallis' mastery of the technical side of composition is most famously exposed in his 40-part motet, *Spem in Alium*, but the works heard tonight show no less ability. *Salvator mundi* I may be conventional imitative counterpoint, but it is a perfect example of its type, with aching arching lines and astonishing construction. *Salvator mundi* II is even tighter in construction, being a canon between the soprano and the tenor parts which, towards the end, climax in agonizing false relations. The seven-part *Miserere* shows phenomenal technical skill, with all but one of the parts being in canon, either in unison, retrograde, inversion, or diminution. The result, however, is anything other than a dry academic exercise; rather, it is a

work of heart-stopping beauty and inspirational, uplifting tranquility, an undisputed masterpiece.

Salvator Mundi I , Salvator Mundi II

O Saviour of the world, who by thy cross and precious blood hast redeemed us: save us and help us, we humbly beseech thee, O Lord.

Miserere Nostri

Have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy on us.

The Cherwell Singers

Soprano

Claire Appleton
Sue Bignal
Kipper Chipperfield
Sarah Franks
Anne Holland
Louise Locock
Eleanor Parker
Beatrix Stewart
Jo Tucker
Lucy Watson

Tenor

Paul King
Tim Nixon
Guy Peskett
David Sutton
John Tucker

Alto

Virginia Allport
Jenny Ayres
Caroline Higginbottom
Stella Holman
Helen Maidlow
Joanna McLean
Lizzy Newton
Sally Prime

Bass

Alistair Braden
Christopher Franks
Neil Herington
Paul Hodges
Simon Jones
Simeon Mitchell

Our Next Concert

Summer is Icumen in – Music for a Summer's Evening: 7th July, 2007 – Holywell Music Room

A delightful programme of balmy sun-kissed music for lovers, lasses, birds and bees with Madrigals, Partsongs, Folksongs and Jazz.

Madrigals	by Morley, Bennet and Farmer
Romantic Partsongs	by Gounod, Stanford and Poulenc
Folksong Settings	by Vaughan Williams
Birthday Madrigals for George Shearing	by John Rutter

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