

# The Cherwell Singers

present

## *Reformation 500*

*Church Music from Sixteenth and Seventeenth  
Century Germany and England*

**Benjamin Bloor**

organ

**James Brown**

conductor

Sunday, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2017

University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford



# Reformation 500

## *The changing face of Church Music in Germany and England*

This term the Cherwell Singers mark the 500th anniversary of the publication in 1517 of the 95 theses by Martin Luther that is popularly considered to have marked the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

For church music the Protestant imperative to attend more to text in general, and scripture in particular, as well as a greater focus on the human spirit and body, resulted in great change. Some argue Protestantism inaugurated a culture of greater listening, as well as participation through the congregational psalm and hymn singing in the vernacular.

In the first half of our concert we explore the response of some of the German composers to these changes, including two works by Schütz who was the leading Lutheran composer of the seventeenth century, as well as JS Bach with whom the Lutheran musical tradition reached its peak.

In the second half the response of the English composers is shown, with works by William Byrd, who was perhaps most famously caught up in the religious turmoil of the day, Thomas Tallis, John Sheppard and William Mundy.

The organist is Benjamin Bloor who will play music from the Reformation by Buxtehude and Byrd on the Metzler organ.

The University Church played an important role in the history of the Reformation in England, most notably as the setting for the trial of Bishops Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley, so provides an apt historical setting.

James Brown

## **Luther and Music**

The man who above others is credited with the start of the Protestant Reformation is Martin Luther. Of all the reformers, Luther had the most appreciation for music. Not only did he value music, being a rather accomplished musician himself, but he deliberately included music *sung by the congregation in the vernacular* as part of the church's worship. He believed that music was and is a natural outpouring of our praise to God; to know Christ's salvation should make us joyful, which should in turn cause us to sing about it. He believed strongly in the ethical power of music and that through it one could glorify God and grow closer to him.

In a letter, Luther wrote of the Psalmists: “They attached their theology not to geometry, nor to arithmetic, nor to astronomy, but to music, speaking the truth through psalms and hymns.” He recognized how applicable the Psalms were to moving human emotion, and because of this he had a deep appreciation for them. But Luther’s interest in music wasn’t limited to the psalms. He also took secular tunes, set to new texts for use in the church.

The main difference between the Catholic mass and the Lutheran Church service was the shift in emphasis from the sacramental part of the service, to the written word and the sermon. The mass (offered by the clergy) was downplayed and chorales or vernacular hymns (sung by the congregation) formed the mainstay of the music after the Gradual and during communion.

Other reformers, notably John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli, viewed music differently. Whereas Luther had a much more liberal view of music and its function in the church, Calvin was stricter. He also saw that music was powerful but instead sought to limit how much and in what way music was used within the worship service; often only the psalms were acceptable. This stricter view led in England to the extreme views of the Puritans, who went so far as to destroy all church organs in the country.

Roland Barthes suggested that Lutheranism inaugurated a culture of listening. Luther certainly developed a practice in which music took on a more highly charged value, consolidating the drama and struggles of belief within the mind of the believer rather than in the external multi-sensory panoply of traditional Catholic practice. Scripture and faith coalesce in the believer’s own mind through the practice of listening.

**JS Bach** (1685-1750) kept religious music at the centre of his output for most of his life, and the hundreds of sacred works he created manifest not just his craft, but a highly devout relationship with God; among many annotations in his copy of Luther’s translation of the Bible he wrote: “At a reverent performance of music, God is always at hand with his gracious presence”. The words of the motet *O Jesu Christ, meins Lebens Licht* are from one of the most prolific Lutheran hymnwriters of the generation after Luther himself, Martin Behm, many of whose hymns dwelt on the Christ’s Passion. Some copies of the music have a repeat, probably indicating that more verses of the hymn were to be sung (perhaps in a funeral procession).

O Jesu Christ, meins Lebens Licht,	Lord Jesus Christ, my Life, my Light,
Mein Hort, mein Trost, mein Zuversicht,	My Strength by day, my Trust by night,
Auf Erden bin ich nur ein Gast,	On earth I’m but a passing guest
Und drückt mich sehr der Sünden Last.	And sorely with my sins oppressed.

(Martin Behm, 1610; trans: Catherine Winkworth)

**Heinrich Schütz** (1585-1672) is considered the most important German composer before Bach, and possibly the finest at setting the German language before Schubert. The style of the North German organ school also derives largely from Schütz which later culminated in the organ works of Buxtehude and Bach. He was one of the last composers to write in a modal style, and his music contains much imitation, as in this setting of *Meine Seele erhebt den Herren* (Luther's translation of the canticle Magnificat) from his last publication in 1669.

Meine Seele erhebt den Herren, und mein Geist freuet sich Gottes, meines Heilandes,  
Denn er hat die Niedrigkeit seiner Magt angesehen.  
Siehe, von nun an werden mich selig preisen alle Kindeskind.  
Denn er hat große Ding' an mir getan, der da mächtig ist und des Name heilig ist.  
Er übet Gewalt mit seinem Arm und zerstreuet, die hoffärtig sind in ihres Herzens Sinn.  
Er stößet die Gewaltigen von dem Stuhl und erhöhet die Niedrigen.  
Die Hungerigen füllet er mit Gütern, und lässet die Reichen leer.  
Er denket der Barmherzigkeit und hilft seinem Diener Israel auf,  
Wie er gered't hat unsern Vätern, Abraham und seinen Samen ewiglich.  
Ehre sei dem Vater und dem Sohn und auch dem Heiligen Geiste,  
Wie es war im Anfang, jetzt und immerdar und in Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit, Amen

My soul doth magnify the Lord: And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.  
For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden:  
for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.  
For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.  
And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.  
He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.  
He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.  
He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.  
He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;  
As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.  
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost;  
As is was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

(Luke 1:46-55)

Schütz's 1648 setting of *Die Himmel erzehlen die Ehre Gottes* is full of descriptive details, such as the way the music tails off for "the ends of the world", and the running scales for the sun "running its course". It alternates between sections for full choir and solo voices.

Die Himmel erzehlen die Ehre Gottes, und die Feste verkündiget seiner Hände Werck.  
Ein Tag sagts dem andern, und eine Nacht thuts kund der andern.  
Es ist keine Sprache noch Rede, da man nicht ihre Stimme höre.  
Ihre Schnur gehet aus in alle Lande und ihre Rede an der Welt Ende.  
Er hat der Sonnen eine Hütten in derselben gemacht,  
und dieselbige gehet heraus wie ein Breutigam aus seiner Kammer

und freuet sich wie ein Held zu lauffen den Weg.

Sie gehet auf von einem Ende des Himmels und läuft um biß wieder an dasselbige Ende,  
und bleibt nichts für ihrer Hitz verborgen.

Ehre sey dem Vater und dem Sohn und auch dem Heiligen Geiste.

Wie es war im Anfang, itzt und immerdar, und von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit, Amen.

The heavens describe the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims His handiwork.

One day tells it to another, and one night makes the next aware of it.

There is no speech or language in which their voice is not heard.

Their tale is sent forth into all the lands, and their story to the ends of the earth.

He has made a tabernacle for the sun within them; and it goes forth like a bridegroom out  
of his chamber, and rejoices like a hero to run its course.

It emerges from one end of heaven and circles around again to the same point,  
and nothing remains hidden from its heat.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and also to the Holy Spirit,

as it was in the beginning, is now and always, and for ever and ever. Amen.

(Psalm 19:1-6)

**Johannes Eccard** (1553–1611) studied with Orlando de Lassus, and wrote exclusively vocal works. His setting of Luther's *Ein feste Burg* was for long the most widely performed in Germany. *Maria wallt zum Heiligtum* is best known in England in this translation by Rev J Troutbeck and often heard at Candlemas. Given our Lutheran theme, it is appropriate that we perform one piece we know best in our own vernacular language.

When to the temple Mary went, and brought the Holy Child,

Him did the aged Simeon see, as it had been revealed.

He took up Jesus in his arms and blessing God he said:

In peace I now depart, my Saviour having seen,

The Hope of Israel, the Light of men.

Help now thy servants, gracious Lord, that we may ever be

as once the faithful Simeon was, rejoicing but in Thee;

and when we must from earth departure take,

may gently fall asleep and with Thee wake.

(Trans: Rev J Troutbeck)

**Dieterich Buxtehude** (1637-1707) was admired by the young JS Bach who famously walked nearly 400 kilometres to Lübeck to hear him play. He wrote nearly fifty chorale preludes (short pieces played to introduce to the congregation the tune of the following hymn), such as this one on *Ein feste Burg*, and they constitute the most important contributions to the genre in the seventeenth century. Their style shows the kind of elaboration of the chorale theme which got the young Bach into some trouble in his more conservative area of the country where the tune was expected to be given out clearly.

**Martin Luther** (1483-1546) wrote both words and tune of *Ein feste Burg*, which is first known to have been published in 1529; we are singing it tonight in the original published rhythm.

Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott,  
Ein gute Wehr und Waffen.  
Er hilft uns frei aus aller Not,  
Die uns jetzt hat betroffen.  
Der alt böse Feind,  
Mit Ernst er's jetzt meint,  
Groß Macht und viel List  
Sein grausam Rüstung ist.  
Auf Erd ist nicht seinsgleichen.  
Mit unsrer Macht ist nichts getan,  
Wir sind gar bald verloren.  
Es streit für uns der rechte Mann,  
Den Gott selbst het erkoren.  
Fragst du, wer der ist?  
Er heißt Jesus Christ,  
Der Herr Zebaoth,  
Und ist kein andrer Gott.  
Das Feld muß er behalten.  
Und wenn die Welt voll Teufel wär  
Und wollt uns gar verschlingen,  
So fürchten wir uns nicht so sehr,  
Es soll uns doch gelingen.  
Der Fürst dieser Welt,  
Wie sau'r er sich stellt,  
Tut er uns doch nicht.  
Das macht, er ist gericht.  
Ein Wörtlein kann ihn fällen.  
Das Wort sie sollen lassen stahn  
Und kein Dank dazu haben;  
Er ist bei uns wohl auf dem Plan,  
Mit seinem Geist und Gaben.  
Nehmen sie den Leib,  
Gut, Ehr, Kind und Weib,  
Laß fahren dahin.  
Sie habens kein Gewinn.  
Das Reich muß uns doch bleiben.

Our God stands like a fortress rock  
with walls that will not fail us;  
he helps us brace against the shock  
of fears which now assail us.  
the enemy of old  
in wickedness is bold;  
this seems his victory hour,  
he fears no earthly power  
and arms himself with cunning.  
We win no battles through our might,  
we fall at once dejected;  
the righteous one will lead the fight,  
by God himself directed.  
You ask, 'Who can this be?'  
Christ Jesus it is he,  
eternal King and Lord,  
God's true and living Word,  
no one can stand against him.  
And though the world seems full of ill,  
with hungry demons prowling,  
Christ's victory is with us still,  
we need not fear their howling.  
The tyrants of this age  
strut briefly on the stage:  
their sentence has been passed.  
We stand unharmed at last,  
a word from God destroys them.  
God's word and plan which they pretend  
is subject to their pleasure,  
will bind their wills to serve God's end,  
which we who love him treasure.  
Then let us take our lives,  
goods, children, husbands, wives,  
and carry all away;  
theirs is a short-lived day,  
ours is the lasting kingdom.

(Martin Luther; trans: Stephen Orchard)

# Music in the English Church

Throughout the 16th century, composers looked to the church as their prime source of employment. In England, a musician at the Chapel Royal could expect to be constantly in demand, but as Protestant thinking took hold, the rules changed. Catholic forms of music, Latin, and traditional texts were no longer acceptable. Composers had to adapt, and fast, regardless of their personal beliefs, or the executioner's axe might be waiting.

During the lifetime of composers such as Tallis, Byrd, and Sheppard the pendulum swung from the Catholicism of Henry VIII (whose interest was more in independence from Rome than in Luther's ideals), to the hard Protestantism of Edward VI's reign, the return of Catholicism under Mary, and finally the gentler Protestantism of Elizabeth I which became the model for Anglicanism. The most valued of these composers were able to switch between writing elaborate pieces with Latin texts and more straightforward pieces which presented English texts with clarity.

The 1549 Prayer Book replaced the drama and colour of the old Latin liturgy with a diet of vernacular psalms, Bible readings and sermons; but it also left open the door for some of the accustomed traditions. In 1552, with the English liturgy safely bedded down, the first prayer book was itself superseded by a more stringently Calvinistic version, in which little room was left for either the theology or the panoply of traditional religion – music included. But now the words 'choral tradition' seem almost synonymous with 'Book of Common Prayer'; from the start composers who had previously written Latin masses now wrote "services" - English canticle settings for the new morning and evening prayer. The compilers of the 1552 prayer book, not least Cranmer himself, would have been horrified to think that their liturgy would later become the vehicle for elaborate polyphony. There is every sign that, by 1550, Cranmer and his allies were set upon the total eradication of choral singing in the English liturgy.

Cranmer had made clear his preference for simple, syllabic church music in 1544. The style of polyphonic composition was trimmed down, veneration giving way to comprehension: devotional motets were abolished; melismatic music was discouraged in favour of syllabic homophony ('a sober and distinct note'); texts must be Biblical, in English, and clearly audible. Boys' voices had been used in polyphonic music since the 1460s, adding a brilliant lustre to the choral ensemble; but after 1549, composers stopped writing for trebles, such a potent signifier of pre-Reformation 'artificiality'. The natural sonority of the mean voice was to be preferred.

Under Mary, Cranmer wrote recantations of his Protestant views. But when given the opportunity, before his execution, to state them publicly from the pulpit of this church where he had been tried, he chose instead to renounce them, and was pulled from the pulpit and taken to Broad Street to be burnt.

With Elizabeth, Protestantism returned. But the Queen allowed Tallis and Byrd to continue writing church music influenced by the older, more elaborate style of Catholicism but once again with English words. It was in this atmosphere that the “verse anthem” developed. Before the reformation, biblical texts had often been sung to plainchant, with a cantor and choir alternating. By the time of Henry VIII, English composers had given the choir harmony, and this hybrid form was called *faburden*. Finally Byrd gave the solo voice an accompaniment, and with English words (which the single solo voice could enunciate clearly) the verse anthem emerged.

**Thomas Tallis** (c1505-1585) flourished through all the changes in church practice he experienced in his post at the Chapel Royal. *If Ye Love Me*, though written in 1565 is an example of the severely plain style which was expected during Edward’s reign, whereas *O Lord, Give Thy Holy Spirit* from 1566 shows a compromise which he developed in Elizabeth’s reign between that style and his more melismatic Catholic style.

If ye love me, keep my commandments, and I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you forever; e’en the spirit of truth.

(John 4:15-17)

O Lord, give thy Holy Spirit into our hearts, and lighten our understanding, that we may dwell in the fear of thy Name, all the days of our life, that we may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

(Anon, from *Lidley’s Prayers, 1566*)

**William Byrd** (c1540-1623) was a pupil of Tallis at the Chapel Royal, where one of his early compositions was a collaboration with Tallis, Mundy and Sheppard. Later, after a period in Lincoln, he returned to the Chapel Royal and shared with Tallis a monopoly on printing music granted them by Queen Elizabeth. *Teach me, O Lord* was probably written at Lincoln, where a more severe form of Protestantism was followed; it is a verse anthem (a development from the *faburden* style). The organ *Fantasia in C* (or *A Fancie*) is an example of Byrd’s more elaborate keyboard writing, and possibly of the style of playing which caused him to be denounced as a Catholic while at Lincoln. *O Lord, make thy servant Elizabeth* was probably written either to gain his appointment in the Chapel Royal or in thanks for it; the style is more contrapuntal than that of Tallis, and is

unusual in being in six parts rather than the more common five parts. It is notable for being a direct prayer for the Queen, not an appeal to a saint; this is in keeping with the reformation ideal of men speaking directly to God rather than indirectly through the church and the saints.

Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes: and I shall keep it unto the end.  
Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law: yea, I shall keep it with my whole heart.

Make me to go in the path of thy commandments: for therein is my desire.

Incline my heart unto thy testimonies: and not to covetousness.

O turn away mine eyes, lest they behold vanity: and quicken thou me in thy way.

O stablish thy word in thy servant: that I may fear thee.

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.

(Psalm 119, vv.33-38)

O Lord, make thy servant Elizabeth our Queen to rejoice in thy strength;  
give her her heart's desire, and deny not the request of her lips;  
but prevent her with thine everlasting blessing,  
and give her a long life, e'en for ever and ever. Amen.

(Adapted from Psalm 21, vv2, 4)

**William Mundy** (1529-1591) became a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal in 1564, but little is known of his life. Like Tallis, Sheppard, and Byrd he wrote Latin masses and motets or English services (six) and anthems (some verse anthems) as times required. The date of *O Lord, the Maker of all thing* is unknown, though the setting has also been attributed to Henry VIII.

O Lord, the maker of all thing, we pray thee now in this evening

Us to defend through thy mercy from all deceit of our enemy.

Let neither us deluded be, good Lord, with dream or fantasy;

Our hearts waking in thee thou keep that we in sin fall not on sleep.

O Father, through thy blessed Son, grant us this our petition,

To whom with the Holy Ghost always in heaven and earth be laud and praise.

(from *Te lucis ante terminum*, anon, 5th century)

**John Sheppard** (c1515-1558) was *Informator choristarum* at Magdalen College during the 1540s, and sang at the Chapel Royal in the 1550s. Like our other composers, he wrote English settings under Edward (at least a service and some fifteen anthems) and Latin music under Mary (the bulk of his work); but sadly much of his music has been lost. His *Second Service* was written for Elizabeth by her command in 1558, and influenced Byrd's *Great Service*. The evening prayer canticle *Nunc Dimittis* from it was probably his last work.

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace: according to thy word.  
For mine eyes have seen: thy salvation,  
Which thou hast prepared: before the face of all people;  
To be a light to lighten the Gentiles: and to be the glory of thy people Israel.  
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.  
(Luke 2:29–32)

## Biographies

### **Benjamin Bloor** organ

Benjamin Bloor began his musical education as a chorister in Derby Cathedral where later he became the organ scholar. In 2010, he was organ scholar at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, where he resided and worked for the year, playing (on occasion for royalty) and teaching the young choristers.

Recently, Benjamin graduated with a First Class Honours degree in Music from Oxford, where he was organ scholar at New College. He toured and took part in several recording projects with New College Choir, and played for BBC Radio 3 broadcasts. He then spent a year as the organ scholar at Westminster Cathedral and subsequently as Assistant Sub-Organist at Rochester Cathedral, where he also taught piano and organ at the King's School.

Benjamin was the winner of the 2012 Northern Ireland International Organ Competition, and holds the Limpus prize for highest marks in the 2013 FRCO examinations. In 2014, he was awarded the Silver Medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians for his contribution to organ-playing.

Currently Benjamin is pursuing a freelance career as a musician in London, combining this with the posts of Organist of the Brompton Oratory, and School Organist at Westminster School.

### **James Brown** conductor

James Brown was organ scholar of Girton College, Cambridge before doing further study of organ with Lionel Rogg at the Geneva Conservatoire, Switzerland. After two years as Guest Artist in Residence at the First United Methodist Church, Lubbock, Texas, USA, he returned to England where he was Organist of Dean Close School.

In 2006 James moved to Oxford where he is Organist of the historic University Church, and teaches organ at Abingdon and New College Schools as well as pursuing freelance work as an organist and pianist. James has given recitals in the UK, USA, Belgium and Switzerland, and appeared on both BBC radio and television. He is a tenor lay clerk in the choir of New College. He also performs solo classical piano recitals for P&O and Fred Olsen cruise lines, and 2018 sees him performing in the Caribbean, Germany and the Baltic States.

# The Cherwell Singers

## **Soprano**

Helen Duncan  
Janet Johnson  
Rhiannon Lovell  
Vanessa Moir  
Sreya Rao  
Elina Screen  
Stephanie Sumner-Jones  
Marie Thebaud-Sorger  
Gayle Walker  
Lucy Watson

## **Alto**

Virginia Allport  
Jenny Ayres  
Francesca Donnellan  
Elizabeth Kreager  
Alison Le Cornu  
Jo McLean  
Anna Orłowska  
Kat Steiner

## **Tenor**

Rory Morrison  
Matthias Range  
David Read  
Alistair Sterling  
David Sutton

## **Bass**

Paul Hodges  
Jack Lovell  
Iain McLean  
Jonathan Mapley  
Tom Robinson

If you are interested in joining us please contact James Brown at:  
[director@cherwellsingers.org](mailto:director@cherwellsingers.org)

Please visit our web site to learn more about the choir, and listen to some of our recordings online. Use the web form to register yourself on our email list, to ensure you receive notification and full details of future concerts.

[www.cherwellsingers.org](http://www.cherwellsingers.org)