

Friday, April 10, 2015, 8pm
First Congregational Church

The Tallis Scholars

Peter Phillips, *director*

Soprano

Amy Haworth
Emma Walshe
Emily Atkinson
Ruth Provost

Alto

Caroline Trevor
Clare Wilkinson

Tenor

Christopher Watson
Simon Wall

Bass

Tim Scott Whiteley
Rob Macdonald

PROGRAM

Josquin Des Prez (ca. 1450/1455–1521) Gaudete virgo

Josquin Missa Pange lingua

Kyrie
Gloria
Credo
Santus
Benedictus
Agnus Dei

INTERMISSION

William Byrd (ca. 1543–1623) Cunctis diebus

Nico Muhly (b. 1981) Recordare, domine (2013)

Arvo Pärt (b. 1935) Tribute to Caesar (1997)

Byrd Diliges dominum

Byrd Tribue, domine

Cal Performances' 2014–2015 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.

THE END OF ALL OUR EXPLORING will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.” So writes T. S. Eliot in his *Four Quartets*, and so it is with tonight’s concert. A program of cycles and circles, of revisions and reinventions, this evening’s performance finds history repeating in works from the Renaissance and the present day. Setting the music of William Byrd against Nico Muhly, the expressive beauty of Josquin against the ascetic restraint of Arvo Pärt, exposes the common musical fabric of two ages, exploring the long shadow cast by the polyphonic masters and the values of clarity, conviction and drama they share with today’s choral composers.

Listening to thrilling drama of Josquin’s *Gaude Virgo*, it is hard to believe that it only employs four voices. Such is the intricacy and variety of the counterpoint that this short motet carries the dramatic weight of a far larger and grander work. Narrating the life of the Virgin, each verse of the text opens with the exhortation “Gaude”—rejoice. Josquin translates this punchy urgency into his setting which, unusually, opens with extended sections for just two voices, deferring and deferring the climactic arrival of the full vocal texture. Pairs of upper and then lower voices jostle and chase in near-canonic imitation. Remembrance of Christ’s death (“mortem”) quells the energy briefly, but soon the rivaling triple and duple meters restore the motet’s electric pulse, driving the work through to its conclusion in an ecstatic Alleluia. The five sections comprising the Ordinary of the Mass—Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus and Benedictus, and Agnus Dei—together form the backbone of the Renaissance tradition of church polyphony. Originally treated as separate musical entities, the first cyclic Mass settings of the Notre-Dame school created an entirely new musical genre: the template that would become the predominant large-scale musical form of the age, a touchstone for individual compositional skill and national polyphonic identity.

The Cyclic Mass took many forms. Foremost among its continental pioneers was

Josquin, who built on the *cantus firmus* tradition of the 15th century, developing the freer parody and paraphrase mass techniques. A celebrated example of the latter, the *Missa Pange Lingua* treats its plainsong hymn with great flexibility, often quoting more directly from it at the start of a movement—as we see here in opening soprano line of the Gloria—before moving into much more loosely developmental counterpoint. Also of note is the equality of the imitative (often canonic) vocal lines, and the textural variety Josquin creates with so few voices, only rarely bringing all four together.

Colleague, collaborator, and possibly student of the elder Thomas Tallis, William Byrd’s career spanned the greater part of the Tudor dynasty, his musical style shifting and bending to religious changes throughout. The Latin texts used by all his works in tonight’s program reflect the essential contradiction of the age in which the Latin rite persisted, though not always publically or admissibly. The six-voice motet *Cunctis Diebus* is a solemn, some might say unremitting, musical meditation on death and longed-for salvation beyond. Taken from the Book of Job, the text is concise, allowing Byrd’s waves of imitative polyphony to sustain a generalized mood rather than offering more episodic word-painting. The effect is hypnotic, colored occasionally by vivid details like the weeping suspensions that so closely mirror the text at “Ut plangam.”

Grief is further intensified with contemporary American composer Nico Muhly’s *Recordare Dominum*, written for the Tallis Scholars. Setting a text from Lamentations (“We have become orphans, fatherless, our mothers are like widows...”), the work is the natural heir to the poignant settings of Victoria, Palestrina, Tallis, and White. After the formal “Incipit” opening—rapt, almost chant-like—the music becomes consumed by a repeating, restless plea: “recordare Dominum.” Its triplet rhythms pulse through the whole score, a fluttering, uncertain heartbeat over which Muhly weaves music of exquisite painfulness.

The music of contemporary Estonian composer Arvo Pärt is an exercise in aural

simplicity. Derived, mongrel-like, from his studies of Gregorian chant, Renaissance polyphony, and Russian Orthodox music, Pärt's signature technique is a reverberant choral homophony he terms "tintinnabuli." With any conventional sense of harmonic trajectory denied, it is by varying vocal textures (including absolute silence) that he achieves his meditative musical drama.

A *Tribute to Caesar* is more typical of Pärt's choral writing, using the relationships and tensions between consonance and dissonance to paint an allusive, monochromatic musical canvass. This narrative account of Jesus's encounter with the Pharisees sees Pärt's anti-dramatic approach used to paradoxically dramatic ends. Denied more conventional developmental structures, Pärt instead uses voice pairings and ensembles to dramatize the story, deploying his forces with expressive care. As ever with the composer, there is little spare musical flesh here. Nothing extraneous or bulging deforms the pure musical silhouette that Pärt so deftly sculpts.

Both *Diliges Dominum* and *Tribue Domine* were originally published in Byrd and Tallis's *Cantiones Sacrae*—two volumes of church music united by their Latin texts, a clear indication they were intended not for the Protestant

church, but for Byrd's own community of recusant Catholics. While *Tribue* is striking for its emotional directness, in *Diliges Dominum* text and emotion are secondary to an academic musical exercise of tremendous sophistication. Scored for eight voices, the work only really consists of four parts. Each pair of voices (trebles, altos, tenors, basses) takes a single part, but while one sings it from start to finish, the other reverses this, singing from the end back to the beginning. If the resulting "crab" canon is more impressive in theory than in the ear, it's still a meticulous and fascinating testimony to Byrd's skill.

Tribue Domine has been described as "the most ambitious composition written by Byrd in his early years." Like *Cunctis Diebus*, it sees the young composer harking back to the outmoded genre of the votive antiphon, eager to prove his mastery. Divided into three sections—*Tribue Domine*, *Te deprecor*, *Gloria Patri*—the work is unified by shared motivic material. A gamut of technical processes (both advanced and rather more naïve), the work juxtaposes sections of homophony, polyphony (from two to six voices), and antiphony, all deployed in the service of the lengthy text—a heartfelt plea for faith to shore up mortal weakness.

Alexandra Coghlan, 2015

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PROGRAM

Arvo Pärt (b. 1935) Triodion (1998)

William Byrd (ca. 1543–1623) Mass for Four Voices

Kyrie
Gloria
Credo
Santus
Benedictus
Agnus Dei

INTERMISSION

Juan Gutiérrez de Padilla (ca. 1590–1664) Deus in adiutorium

Hernando Franco (1532–1585) Salve regina

Padilla Lamentations

Thomas Tallis (ca. 1505–1585) Lamentations I

Byrd Laudibus in sanctis

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A COMMISSION from Lancing College allowed Arvo Pärt to engage with the textures of England's Renaissance composers—textures previously echoed and dissolved into his music, but rarely so overtly or in such a sustained way. In *Triodion's* gently pulsing homophony, we can clearly hear the contemporary ghost-double of Faburden chant, transformed here in collision with Pärt's own Orthodox faith and spare sound world. Together, the three odes that make up this sequence form one of the composer's most understated, inward works. *Triodion* is a musical meditation on salvation and an intercession, one the work's unexpected final chord suggests may yet be answered.

A committed Catholic like Thomas Tallis, his elder colleague William Byrd worked through the tumultuous shifts of the English Reformation, shifting between the liturgies and practices of vernacular Protestantism and the Latin rites of Catholicism. One of three masses he composed during the 1590s for secret performance by recusant Catholics, it represents a profound declaration of faith in an England in which the celebration of the Catholic Mass was forbidden.

The setting for four voices is characterized above all by its expressive clarity. Rejecting the florid embellishments beloved of earlier English composers, Byrd instead favors a closely woven, imitative polyphony almost in the Flemish style. While this textural and melodic simplicity may have been enforced by the restrictions of recusant performance, Byrd transforms necessity into a virtue, with the smallest of gestures (the contrapuntal intensity of the closing "Dona nobis pacem," or the almost translucent delicacy of the dovetailing lines of the *Benedictus*) gaining almost painful impact.

It is the *Salve regina* in the version for five voices that will be performed this evening. The plainchant verses are taken from Luys de Villafranca's tutor published in Seville in 1565. Franco set "Et Jesum benedictum" in two versions, and we have used the second, which is for the high voices while the basses rest. Franco is expansive, one might say diffuse; he takes 25 bars of modern score to set the last

three words, but his music is expressive and very singable.

Of the Spanish composers who worked in Central and South America, Juan de Gutiérrez Padilla (1590–1664) is acknowledged to be the most gifted. Trained in his home city of Malaga, by 1622 he was an assistant at the cathedral of Puebla de Los Angeles in Mexico. In 1629 he was appointed maestro there, and he remained in Pueblo until his death in 1664. Padilla proved himself to be a master of most of the sacred genres of his time, and this is apparent in his six-part lamentations setting preserved in the Puebla Cathedral choir books. His careful but effective use of polyphonic, homophonic, and antiphonal elements in setting these emotional texts shows him to be as sensitive as his greatest European contemporaries.

Whether composed for liturgical use or private Catholic devotions, Thomas Tallis's *Lamentations* remain some of his most striking and emotive works. The two sets (again, we hear only the first tonight) share the bleak-est of Holy Week texts, *The Lamentations of Jeremiah*. Punctuated only by the meditative, static treatment of the Hebrew letters (Aleph, Beth), Tallis's narrative achieves its heightened poignancy through a distinctively English treatment of dissonance, reframing his harmonies such that the untroubled major tonality of "plorans, ploravit" becomes almost unbearably charged. From the weeping, scalic descent of the opening "Incipit lamentatio" to the pulsing insistence of the closing "Jerusalem," Tallis mirrors his text musically with painful mastery. Lively with syncopation and rhythmic energy, Byrd's *Laudibus in Sanctis* is frankly madrigalian in its approach to its sacred text, a Latin paraphrase of Psalm 150 "Praise God in his holiness." The composer delights in word-painting, offering up clashing cymbals, declamatory trumpets, and a mighty organ in his dexterous textural manipulation of his five voices. Dance is never far away in this musical act of praise, energizing even the simplest homophony with syncopation and culminating in pealing cries of "alleluia" that echo contrapuntally through all the parts.

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THE TALLIS SCHOLARS were founded in 1973 by their director, Peter Phillips. Through their recordings and concert performances, they have established themselves as the leading exponents of Renaissance sacred music throughout the world. Mr. Phillips has worked with the ensemble to create, through good tuning and blend, the purity and clarity of sound which he feels best serve the Renaissance repertoire, allowing every detail of the musical lines to be heard. It is the resulting beauty of sound for which the Tallis Scholars have become so widely renowned.

The Tallis Scholars perform in both sacred and secular venues, usually giving around 70 concerts each year across the globe. In 2013, the group celebrated their 40th anniversary with a world tour, performing 99 events in 80 venues in 16 countries and traveling sufficient air miles to circumnavigate the globe four times. They kicked off the year with a spectacular concert in St. Paul's Cathedral, London, including a performance of Thomas Tallis's 40-part motet *Spem in alium* and the world premières of works written specially for them by Gabriel Jackson and Eric Whitacre. Their recording of the *Missa Gloria tibi Trinitas*, by 16th-century Tudor composer John Taverner, was released on the exact anniversary of their first concert in 1973 and enjoyed six weeks at number one in the U.K. Specialist Classical Album Chart.

Their 2014–2015 season sees tours of the United States, China, South Korea, and Hong

Kong, as well as extensive touring around Europe and the United Kingdom. Their performance at the BBC Proms 2014 saw the world première of Sir John Tavener's *Requiem Fragments*, a work written especially for the group. In a departure for the group in spring 2015, the Tallis Scholars will bring out a disc of music by Arvo Pärt called *Tintinnabuli*.

Recordings by the Tallis Scholars have attracted many awards throughout the world. In 1987 their recording of Josquin's *Missa La sol fa re mi* and *Missa Pange lingua* received *Gramophone's* "Record of the Year" award, the first recording of early music ever to win this coveted award. In 1989, the French magazine *Diapason* gave two of its *Diapason d'Or de l'Année* awards for the recordings of a Mass and motets by Lassus and for Josquin's two masses based on the chanson *L'Homme armé*. Their recording of Palestrina's *Missa Assumpta est Maria* and *Missa Sicut lilium* was awarded *Gramophone's* Early Music Award in 1991; they received the 1994 Early Music Award for their recording of music by Cipriano de Rore; and the same distinction again in 2005 for their disc of music by John Browne. The Tallis Scholars were nominated for a Grammy Award in 2001, 2009, and 2010. In November 2012 their recording of Josquin's *Missa De beata virgine* and *Missa Ave maris stella* received a *Diapason d'Or de l'Année*, and in their 40th anniversary year they were welcomed into the *Gramophone* Hall of Fame by public vote.



Peter Phillips has made an impressive if unusual reputation for himself in dedicating his life's work to the research and performance of Renaissance polyphony. Having won a scholarship to Oxford in 1972, Mr. Phillips studied

Albert Rosenburg

Renaissance music with David Wulstan and Denis Arnold, and gained experience in conducting small vocal ensembles, already experimenting with the rarer parts of the repertoire. He founded the Tallis Scholars in 1973, with whom he has now appeared in almost 2,000 concerts and made over 60 discs, encouraging interest in polyphony all over the world.

Apart from the Tallis Scholars, Mr. Phillips continues to work with other specialist ensembles. He has appeared with the BBC Singers, the Collegium Vocale of Ghent, and the Netherlands Chamber Choir, and is currently working with the Chœur de Chambre de Namur, Intrada of Moscow, Musica Reservata of Barcelona, and El León de Oro of Orviedo. He gives numerous master classes and choral workshops every year around the world—among other places in Rimini (Italy), Evora (Portugal), and Barcelona (Spain). In 2014, he launched the London International A Cappella Choir Competition in St. John's Smith Square, attracting choirs from all over the world.

Mr. Phillips has made numerous television and radio broadcasts. Besides those featuring the Tallis Scholars (which include live broadcasts from the 1988, 2001, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2011, 2013, and 2014 BBC Proms), he has appeared several times on the BBC's *Music Weekly* and on the *BBC World Service*, on *Kaleidoscope* (BBC Radio 4), on *Today* (BBC Radio 4), National Public Radio in the United States, and on German, French, Italian, Spanish, and Canadian radio, where he has enjoyed deploying his love of languages. In 1990 ITV's *The South Bank Show* featured Mr. Phillips's "personal odyssey" with the Tallis Scholars, while in 2002 a special television documentary was made for the BBC about the life and times of William Byrd.

Mr. Phillips has recently been appointed a Reed Rubin Director of Music and Bodley Fellow at Merton College, Oxford, where the new choral foundation he helped to establish began singing services in October 2008. They gave their first live broadcast on BBC Radio Three's *Choral Evensong* in October 2011. In 2005 Mr. Phillips was made a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Minister of Culture, a decoration intended to honor individuals who have contributed to the understanding of French culture in the world.

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