

The armed man is to be feared.

In the Europe of the 15th century, when the anonymous French song “L’homme armé” first became popular, war was an omnipresent threat. Many watched aghast as the old order seemed to crumble before their eyes. In 1453 the Ottoman Empire had sacked Constantinople, putting an end to the thousand-year-old Byzantine empire. Later that same year, the Hundred Years War between England and France culminated in a bloody battle at Castillon. The song obviously resonated with a people preoccupied with war: the armed man was indeed to be feared.

Composers of the early Renaissance, of whom Josquin des Prez was the most renowned, frequently turned to secular songs as models for sacred compositions. Tapping into contemporary popular songs allowed them not only to pepper their music with familiar motifs, but to allude to the content of those songs, creating multiple layers of meaning. Josquin composed two masses on the “L’homme armé” theme. The later of the two, in the sixth mode or *sexti toni*, is a polyphonic tour de force, incorporating several complex canonic and imitative techniques.

Francisco Guerrero, born some years after Josquin’s death, also based mass settings on existing works. His *Missa de la batalla escoutez* derives material from a song by Janequin, an extended piece that depicts the sounds of battle in an unusually dramatic way. Guerrero’s mass tempers the exuberance of his source, using passages from the beginning of the song as his main material—though the rapid declamation of the original can be detected in the “Qui tollis” section of the Gloria.

Though written many centuries later, the work of contemporary Estonian composer Arvo Pärt owes much to the Renaissance manner of musical expression. A number of his works set passages from the Gospels, in a narrative manner that eschews overt text expression in favor of lending the words a sort of gilded clarity. “The Woman with the Alabaster Box” is an almost trance-like recitation, beautiful in its restraint, condensing the texture for Jesus’ words before expanding it again for the climax.

During the Renaissance, musicians often survived by deftly navigating the courts of the noble and wealthy and securing their favor. In return, there was an expectation that this beneficence be recognized in the output of the artists in their employ. Funeral motets were one opportunity for composers to display their gratitude (and help ensure their continued favor with the next generation). The first is a work by Jean Mouton, written to mark the passing of his patron Queen Anne of Brittany, the wife of Louis XII. “Quis dabit oculis” is appropriately sombre in character, though not without moments of powerful rhetoric, as when the name of Anna causes the voices to pause, as if from deep sadness.

In a similar vein, Alonso Lobo’s beautiful motet “Versa est in luctum” was written for the funeral of the Spanish King Philip II in 1602. The expressive imagery—“my heart is tuned to mourning”—finds a parallel in Lobo’s musical language, in which the descending lines of the six voices evoke inconsolable grief.

The first half ends with the Credo from Guerrero’s mass. It radiates hope in salvation through the resurrection, a character most evident in the awed full texture of “Et incarnatus est”—the mystery of the incarnation, words whose utterance would have been accompanied by a genuflection.

In 1603 the Dowager Empress Maria, sister of Philip II, died. It was the duty of her chaplain and choirmaster, Victoria, to provide music for her funeral rites. In doing so, he was writing for the 12 singing priests and four boys who comprised the singers of the Royal Convent, a relatively lavish set-up that enabled polyphony in many parts. Accordingly, the *Missa pro Defunctis*, the Mass of the Dead or simply Requiem, is in six parts, with divided trebles and tenors. After the intonation *Requiem aeternam*, given in the treble part, the polyphony unfolds slowly and majestically around the ancient plainchant melody. The plainchant acts as an anchor, a throughline that gives the piece as a whole an awesome solidity.

It is followed by a movement from one of Guerrero’s takes on the *L’homme armé* mass. Unusually, it is scored for four higher voices, the

tessitura giving it an intriguingly weightless feel, and one that suits the character of the Sanctus, which evokes the song of the angels. In the livelier Hosanna, the triple-time meter of the original tune is used, with the alto and tenor parts singing it in imitative canon.

John Tavener's "Song for Athene," written after the unexpected death of a family friend, Athene Hariades, became embedded in the public consciousness after it was performed at the funeral of Princess Diana in 1997. The sincerity and impact of the words, fashioned from a fusion of Orthodox ritual and Shakespeare, together with its radiantly optimistic, alleluiaic conclusion, struck an instant chord with a grieving public.

The Council of Trent, a gathering of the Catholic world that took place in the middle of the 16th century, was convened to discuss responses to the movement of Protestant reform sweeping across the continent. Many delegates felt that secular music was an inappropriate model, and that words had become unintelligible. Legend has it that the *Missa Papae Marcelli* was written to prove that polyphony could fulfill these requirements. The Agnus Dei is classic Palestrina, a seamless and smooth polyphony.

Finally, we return to Victoria's music for the Requiem Mass, and its closing cry of "Liberate me." The ancient words—angry, fearful, finally hopeful—remain deeply relevant in a world that has yet to eradicate the threat of armed conflict.

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

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. Peter Phillips has worked with the ensemble to create, through good tuning and blend, the purity and clarity of sound 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 its 40th anniversary with a world tour, performing 99 events in 80 venues in 16 countries and travelling sufficient air-miles to circumnavigate the globe four times. The group kicked off the year with a spectacular concert in St Paul's Cathedral, London, including a performance of Thomas Tallis' 40-part motet *Spem in alium* and the world premieres of works written specially for the ensemble by Gabriel Jackson and Eric Whitacre. A recording of John Tavener's *Missa Gloria tibi Trinitas* was released on the exact anniversary

of the group's first concert in 1973 and enjoyed six weeks at number one on the UK Specialist Classical Album Chart. On September 21, 2015, the Tallis Scholars gave their 2,000th concert, at St John's Smith Square in London.

Highlights in the 2017–18 season include performances at the White Light Festival at Lincoln Center in New York; Amsterdam's Musikgebouw; the Klara Festival in Brussels; the Brugge Concertgebouw; and tours throughout the United States, Europe, and the UK.

Recordings by the Tallis Scholars have earned many awards throughout the world. In 1987 their recording of Josquin's *Missa La sol fa re mi* and *Missa Pange lingua* received *Gramophone* magazine's Record of the Year award, the first recording of early music ever to win this coveted honor. 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 Grammy Awards in 2001, 2009, and 2010. In November 2012 their re-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. In a departure for the group, in spring 2015, the Tallis Scholars released a disc of music by Arvo Pärt called *Tin-tinnabuli* that has received great praise. The latest recording, of Josquin masses *Missa Di dadi* and *Missa Une mousse de Biscaye*, was released in October 2016.

Peter Phillips (*director*) 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, Phillips studied 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 over 2,000 concerts and made over 60 discs, encouraging interest in polyphony all over the world. As a result of his work, through concerts, recordings, magazine awards, publication of editions of music, and scholarly articles, Renaissance music has come to be accepted for the first time as part of the mainstream classical repertoire. The Tallis Scholars celebrated their 40th anniversary in 2013 with 99 concerts, worldwide.

Apart from the Tallis Scholars, Phillips continues to work with other specialist ensembles. He has appeared with the Collegium Vocale of Ghent, Intrada of Moscow, Musica Reservata of Barcelona, and El Leon de Oro of Oviedo, and is currently working with the BBC Singers, the Netherlands Chamber Choir, and Choeur de Chambre de Namur. Phillips gives numerous

master classes and choral workshops every year around the world—among other places, in Rimini (Italy), Evora (Portugal), and Avila (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, which successfully completed its third run in June 2017.

In addition to conducting, Phillips is well-known as a writer. For 33 years he contributed a regular music column (as well as one, more briefly, on cricket) to *The Spectator*, recently bidding a fond farewell to the magazine in May 2016. In 1995 he became the owner and publisher of the *Musical Times*, the oldest continuously published music journal in the world. His first book, *English Sacred Music 1549–1649*, was published by Gimell in 1991, while his second, *What We Really Do*, an unblinking account of what touring is like, alongside insights about the make-up and performance of polyphony, was published in 2003 and again in 2013.

In 2005 Peter 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. In 2008 he was appointed a Reed Rubin Director of Music at Merton College, Oxford, where the new choral foundation he helped to establish began singing services shortly thereafter. His involvement included many tours recordings, and broadcasts, a highlight being their first live broadcast on BBC Radio Three's Choral Evensong in October 2011. Phillips is now a patron of the choir and a Bodley Fellow of the college.

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