

Wednesday, December 13, 2023, 7:30pm
First Congregational Church, Berkeley

The Tallis Scholars *While Shepherds Watched*

The Tallis Scholars
Amy Haworth *soprano*
Daisy Walford *soprano*
Victoria Meteyard *soprano*
Lucinda Cox *soprano*
Caroline Trevor *alto*
Rosie Parker *alto*
Simon Wall *tenor*
Tom Castle *tenor*
Tim Scott Whiteley *bass*
Rob Macdonald *bass*
Peter Phillips *director*

PROGRAM

Jacobus CLEMENS NON PAPA *Pastores quidnam vidistis?*
(c. 1510–1555)
CLEMENS *Missa Pastores quidnam vidistis*
(Kyrie and Gloria)
Tomas Luis DE VICTORIA *Quem vidistis pastores?*
(c. 1548–1611)
Pedro DE CRISTO (c. 1550–1618) *Quaeramus cum pastoribus*
Giovanni CROCE (c. 1558–1609) *Quaeramus cum pastoribus*

INTERMISSION

CLEMENS *Missa Pastores quidnam vidistis* (Credo)
Jacob OBRECHT (c. 1457–1505) *Salve regina*
Peter PHILIPS (c. 1561–1628) *Salve regina* a 8
CLEMENS *Missa Pastores quidnam vidistis*
(Sanctus and Agnus)



Above: The Tallis Scholars. Photo by Hugo Glendinning.
Below: Peter Phillips. Photo by Peter Adamik.



This program takes a slightly different look from usual at the Christmas story, viewing it from the point of view of the shepherds who came to worship at the crib. Unsurprisingly there is a wealth of great music in the Renaissance period devoted to this episode. The starting point this evening is the mass by Clemens non Papa, which is based on his own motet *Pastores quidnam vidistis?* (*Who did you see, Shepherds?*), which the Tallis Scholars recorded in 1986, helping to give Clemens a new profile. The five movements of this mass act as a sandwich to similar texts by other masters from the late Renaissance, from all over Europe.

Clemens himself was Flemish. The Spanish Victoria is well-known, the Portuguese Pedro de Christo less so. Our first half ends with a magnificent double choir motet by Giovanni Croce, written within the Venetian tradition of answering choirs. The meat of the sandwich in the second half is made up of two settings of the *Salve regina*. The Obrecht was one of the first motets in history to use as many as six voices—this remained unusual in the late 15th century. By the time Peter Philips (no relation) was writing a hundred years later, six voices was the least of it. Here he joins the Italian tradition of writing for double choir in the grandest fashion. The music then concludes with the mesmerising beauty of the Clemens' Agnus.

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Why are the shepherds the first to be told about the birth of the Messiah? The vaunted Magi from the East have to make do with following a new star in the heavens, requiring advanced astrological calculations. But the lowly shepherds get an unequivocal message, delivered first by a terrifying angel and then by an awesome assembly of heavenly beings: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." It makes poetic sense that shepherds should be among the earliest wit-

nesses: they know their own, and can recognize that the infant born in Bethlehem is one of them, the Good Shepherd.

This dramatic passage in Luke's Gospel understandably lends itself to artistic interpretations; musical retellings proliferated, especially in the Renaissance. In *Pastores quidnam vidistis*, Clemens sets a dialogue to music, consisting of the imagined interrogation of the amazed shepherds, which also serves as the Responsory for Matins on Christmas morning: "Whom did you see?" Its smoothly imitative, elegant polyphony is typical of the composer, who, unlike several of his Flemish contemporaries, proved resistant to the allure of other continental styles such as those developing in Italy.

Clemens (whose flippant nickname "non Papa" was likely born more out of jest than the need to distinguish him from the Pope) spent most of his life working in and around modern-day Belgium and the Netherlands. As was common in the period, he would mine his motets for musical material to form the basis of a mass setting, as in the *Missa Pastores quidnam vidistis*. This is most audible in the opening of the Kyrie, Gloria, and Sanctus of the mass, which replicate the motet's opening of a rising fifth. Like the motet, the mass is mostly for five voice-parts, rising to six in the Agnus Dei with the addition of a further bass (another shepherd, come to worship the Lamb of God?). This has the effect of thickening the sonority for the culmination of the cycle.

In general, the music expresses the text only in the most general, abstract fashion, adopting an expansive imitative polyphony in the less wordy movements, and a more direct style for the lengthier texts of the Gloria and Credo. Only on occasion does the composer permit himself to illustrate the meaning of the words in his music; listen, for example, to the *descendit de caelis* passage of the Credo, in which some parts descend by step while others trip downwards in sequence.

Victoria's *Quem vidistis pastores* is a variation on the same text as Clemens' motet. The Spanish composer takes the essence of the dialogue into the textural structure of his motet. He begins by dividing his six voices into the three upper and three lower, before allowing them to recombine in other permutations. Both halves of the motet share a refrain in which the shepherds, unable to contain their joy, break into joyous triple meter and an elaborate, melismatic alleluia.

The text of *Quaeramus cum pastoribus* also riffs on an imagined dialogue with the shepherds, opening with an invitation to seek, with them, the Word incarnate. It also includes "Noë" refrains, which were a popular feature of Christmas music during this period (the word is interchangeable with "noël"). Pedro de Cristo sets the first part only, for four voices. The Portuguese composer's style is distinctive for the narrow range of its vocal compass; "bunched" combinations of voices, with the total range often, as here, not exceeding two octaves.

Meanwhile, Italy's Giovanni Croce sets the full text for opulent double choir. The piece was probably designed for the very place that lent the polychoral style its popularity, St Mark's in Venice, where Croce preceded Monteverdi as *maestro di cappella*. He sets the text in such open-hearted fashion that even the last line ("his songs are tears") cannot dim the enthusiasm of a final round of "noë."

In the second half, our focus shifts from the shepherds to the mother of Jesus. *Salve regina* is one of four antiphons appointed to be sung to the Blessed Virgin Mary in various seasons of the Church year. In the 15th century, it was also the central item in the

Salve service, a para-liturgical devotion that flourished thanks to the medieval cult of Mary. If we sometimes find the sheer amount of Marian music from this period surprising, it is helpful to remember that Mary was considered to have the ear of Christ in heaven—that is, she could intercede with him to reduce one's time spent in purgatory after death. Lavish musical praise was one way to move her to this act of pity.

Comparing the Flemish Jacob Obrecht's setting with that of Englishman Peter Philips, written over a century later, allows us to observe the change of musical fashions during that time. When Obrecht wrote his version, the use of as many as six different musical parts was quite rare. His setting alternates unadorned plainchant with polyphonic sections that adapt the chant melody and use it as the basis for imitation between the parts.

By the time of Peter Philips, writing in many parts was much more common, especially when disposed after the fashionable Venetian manner of two opposing four-voice choirs, which could echo and rebound off each other. Philips, an Englishman, is perhaps better identified with continental styles of composition, since, as a Catholic exile from Elizabethan England, he spent much of his career abroad. In his *Salve regina*, he uses the chant only for the incipit, and eschews imitation in favour of punchy utterances from each choir. The rapid-fire "*Ad te*" statements are closer to the world of secular madrigals than sacred music. This declamatory style then contrasts with the rapturous languor of the opening of the third section: "O clemens, O pia."

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The Tallis Scholars were founded in 1973 by their director, Peter Phillips. Through the group's recordings and concert performances, it has established itself as the leading exponent 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 serves 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, giving around 80 concerts each year. In 2013, the group celebrated its 40th anniversary with a world tour, performing 99 events in 80 venues in 16 countries. In 2020, Gimell Records celebrated 40 years of recording the group by releasing a remastered version of the 1980 recording of Allegri's *Miserere*. As they celebrate their 50th birthday, the desire to hear this group in all corners of the globe is as strong as ever. The artists have now performed well over 2,500 concerts.

Current season highlights include performances in the US, Japan, France, Germany, Italy, and Finland; and a number of appearances in London as well as the group's usual touring schedule in Europe and the UK. In a monumental project to mark Josquin des Prez' 500th anniversary, the Tallis Scholars sang all 18 of the composer's masses over the course of four days at the Boulez Saal in Berlin in July 2022, only to repeat this feat in Utrecht in summer 2023.

Recordings by the Tallis Scholars have received many honors 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 award. In 1989, the French magazine *Diapason* gave two of its Diapason d'Or de l'Année awards

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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; the group received the 1994 Early Music Award for its recording of music by Cipriano de Rore; and the same distinction again in 2005 for its disc of music by John Browne. The Tallis Scholars were nominated for Grammy Awards in 2001, 2009, and 2010. In November 2012, the group's recording of Josquin's *Missa De beata virgine* and *Missa Ave maris stella* received a Diapason d'Or de l'Année and in its 40th anniversary year, the group was welcomed into the Gramophone Hall of Fame by public vote. In a departure for the group, in the spring of 2015, the Tallis Scholars released a disc of music by Arvo Pärt called *Tintinnabuli*, which received great praise around the world.

A 2020 release including *Missa Hercules Dux Ferrarie* was the last of nine albums in the Tallis Scholars' project to record and re-release all Josquin's masses before the 500th anniversary of the composer's death. It was the winner of the *BBC Music Magazine's* much coveted Recording of the Year Award and the *Gramophone* Early Music Award in 2021. The Tallis Scholars' latest Gimell release (October 2023) is of music by John Sheppard.

Peter Phillips has dedicated his career to the research and performance of Renaissance polyphony, and to the perfecting of choral sound. He founded the Tallis Scholars in 1973, with whom he has now appeared in over 2,500 concerts world-wide, and made more than 60 discs in association with Gimell Records. As a result of this commitment, Phillips and the Tallis Scholars have done more than any other group to establish the sacred vocal music of the Renaissance as one of the great repertoires of Western classical music.

Phillips also conducts other specialist ensembles. He is currently working with the BBC Singers (London), the Netherlands Chamber Choir (Utrecht), the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir (Tallinn), The Danish Radio Choir (Copenhagen) and El Leon de Oro (Oviedo). He is also Patron of the Chapel Choir of Merton College Oxford.

In addition to conducting, Phillips is well-known as a writer. For 33 years, he contributed a regular music column to *The Spectator*. In 1995, he became the 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*, appeared in 2013. During 2018, BBC Radio 3 broadcast his view of Renaissance polyphony in a series of six hour-long programs entitled *The Glory of Polyphony*.

In 2005, Phillips was made a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Minister of Culture. In 2008, he helped to found the chapel choir of Merton College Oxford, where he is a Bodley Fellow; and in 2021 he was elected an Honorary Fellow of St John's College, Oxford.