



Thomas Tallis Society Choir
Directed by Eamonn Dougan



SONGS OF FAREWELL

PARRY - MACMILLAN - TALLIS - HARRIS

A DEDICATION

This concert is performed in memory of Jacky Flurscheim (Simms) who co-founded The Thomas Tallis Society with Philip Simms in 1965.



22 January 2022

Bring us, O Lord God**James MacMillan (b1959)**

Our concert begins and ends with John Donne's prayer *Bring us, O Lord God* as set by two very different composers. First, we perform that by James MacMillan. Though the Scottish composer first gained worldwide attention with his spectacular concerto for the percussionist Evelyn Glennie, *Veni, Veni Emmanuel*, it is almost certainly his choral music, which gives direct expression to his Roman Catholic faith, that has secured MacMillan his widest and most appreciative audience.

Written for a standard four-part choir, MacMillan's setting reaches back to the English Elizabethan age of Tallis and Byrd. Yet the anguish of its harmonies makes it unmistakably a work of our age. Its disquieted character also undoubtedly reflects the circumstances of his original commission from Schola Cantorum of Oxford. That venerable choir was not only marking its 50th anniversary in 2010, but tragically also was commemorating one of its members, Lydia Press, who had died, aged 24, only two years earlier in a mountain climbing accident. Donne's prayer asks that the Christian soul should be brought into "that house, where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light; no noise nor silence, but one equal music". MacMillan's setting underlines the nature of this plea by iterating three times the opening words "Bring us" before proceeding to the rest of the text.

Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening into the house and gate of heaven,
to enter into that gate and dwell in that house,
where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light;
no noise nor silence, but one equal music;
no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession;
no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity:
in the habitations of thy majesty and glory, world without end. Amen.

O sacrum convivium**Thomas Tallis (c1505-1585)**

Thomas Tallis, one of England's greatest composers, had particularly strong associations with Greenwich, as he lived there at the latter end of his life, and was buried in the chancel of St Alfege Church, as it was then (since replaced by the magnificent eighteenth-century building designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor where this concert is taking place). Tallis spent much of his long working life as a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal, which was based in Greenwich Palace during the Tudor reign, and served under the very different regimes of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth I. Almost certainly a Catholic throughout his life, he thrived even after Henry VIII broke with the Pope's authority and continued to provide music for the various liturgies used in service during this turbulent period.

O sacrum convivium, written for five voice parts, is a motet intended to be sung at Holy Communion. As if reflecting the character of this ritual, the vocal parts follow in close imitation of one another, with moments where the harmonies seem to glow as the phrases approach a cadence, caused by Tallis's use of 'false relations' (for instance, at the first cadence with the word "sumitur", where the sopranos sing a G sharp against the tenors' sustained G natural).

O sacrum convivium, in quo Christus sumitur;
recolitur memoria passionis ejus;
mens impletur gratia;
et futurae gloriae nobis pignus datur.

*O sacred banquet, wherein Christ is received;
the memorial of his passion is renewed;
the soul is filled with grace;
and a pledge of future glory is given to us.*

Songs of Farewell**Hubert Parry (1848-1918)**

Though famous for rousing choral works such as the coronation anthem *I was glad*, and above all for *Jerusalem*, Hubert Parry also wrote works of far more intimate expression. This he well demonstrated when in 1906 the Master of the King's Music, Sir Walter Parratt, commissioned him to write a motet for a service marking the anniversary of Queen Victoria's death, to be held at the Royal Mausoleum in Frogmore on 22 January 1907. This was the nudge Parry needed to start composing a set of *a cappella* motets, such as he had long aspired to create in emulation of the German composer he admired above all, Brahms.

First to be written was “*There is an old belief*”, a version of which was performed at the memorial service. This was eventually followed by sketches for three more motets, including “*My soul, there is a country*”, setting the poem *Peace* by the 17th-century metaphysical poet Henry Vaughan. Parry finished drafting this by September 1913, but then, on hearing Stanford’s newly composed *Three Motets, Op. 135*, he was inspired to further improve the four motets he had already substantially composed.

“*My Soul, there is a country*”

Though apparently fluent and highly effective with its sure-footed use of dramatic key changes, this opening motet was the result of a great deal of painstaking craft and was not completed until early 1915. By that time, the First World War had been raging for some months – making the lines “*There, above noise and danger, Sweet Peace sits crowned with smiles*” the more poignant. Such is Parry’s skill in word setting, even when writing for four-voice choir (very occasionally dividing into five parts), that his motet encompasses a great variety of moods in a relatively short piece, using dramatic key changes and arresting moments of homophony to dramatize the meaning of Vaughan’s poem: yet it all coheres into a single narrative span, the opening query of the motet’s first four chords ultimately answered by an assured and convincing resolution.

My soul, there is a country
Far beyond the stars,
Where stands a wingèd sentry
All skilful in the wars:

There, above noise and danger,
Sweet Peace sits crown'd with smiles,
And One born in a manger
Commands the beauteous files.

He is thy gracious Friend,
And—O my soul, awake!—
Did in pure love descend
To die here for thy sake.

If thou canst get but thither,
There grows the flower of Peace,
The Rose that cannot wither,
Thy fortress, and thy ease.

Leave then thy foolish ranges;
For none can thee secure.
But One who never changes—
Thy God, thy life, thy cure.

“*I know my Soul have power to know all things*”

In contrast to the opening motet’s use of flowing polyphony, Parry sets these verses by John Davies (1569-1626) in a relatively terse homophonic style. The chorus mostly sings the text in harmonised unison, with just occasional touches of independent vocal writing where, not coincidentally, the text describes mankind’s inflated self-image as “one of Nature’s little kings” and later “proud”.

I know my soul hath power to know all things,
Yet she is blind and ignorant in all:
I know I'm one of Nature's little kings,
Yet to the least and vilest things am thrall.

I know my life's a pain and but a span;
I know my sense is mock'd in ev'rything;
And, to conclude, I know myself a Man,
Which is a proud and yet a wretched thing.

Jesu salvator saeculi

Thomas Tallis

Tallis wrote this choral hymn for Compline (the final evening service of the day) to be performed during the Octave of Easter (the eight-day period which starts on Easter Day and ends on the following Sunday). In music of grave yet moving simplicity, plainchant verses (sung in this performance by the sopranos and tenors) alternate with largely homophonic choral settings of the second, fourth and sixth verses, with just occasional independence in the vocal parts.

Jesu salvator saeculi,
verbum Patris altissimi:
lux lucis invisibilis:
custos tuorum pervigis.

Tu fabricator omnium,
Discretor atque temporum,
Fessa labore corpora
Noctis quiete recrea.

*Jesu, saviour of the world
Word of the most high Father,
Light of invisible light,
Watchful guardian of your people.*

*Thou maker of all things,
Shaper of the seasons,
Restore our toil-worn bodies
With the peace of night.*

Ut dum gravi in corpore:
brevis manemus tempore:
sic caro nostra dormiat
ut mens in Christo vigilet.

Te deprecamur supplices,
Ut nos ab hoste libereres,
Ne valeat seducere,
Tuo redemptos sanguine.

Quaesumus auctor omnium
in hoc paschali gaudio:
Ab omni mortis impetu:
tuum defende populum.

Gloria tibi Domine,
Qui surrexisti a mortuis,
Cum Patre et Sancto Spiritu
In sempiterna saecula. Amen

*As our bodies lie heavily
For a short time,
So may our flesh sleep
That our mind stays awake in Christ.*

*We humbly beseech Thee
To deliver us from the Enemy
That he may not seduce us
Who were delivered by Thy blood.*

*We beseech thee, maker of all things,
In this Easter joy,
Defend Thy people
From every onslaught of death.*

*Glory be to Thee, O Lord,
Who rose from the dead,
With the Father and the Holy Spirit,
World without end. Amen.*

Songs of Farewell

Hubert Parry

"Never weather-beaten sail"

In this lyric, the English poet, musician and physician Thomas Campion (1567-1620) eloquently parallels the writer's spiritual exhaustion with the physical exhaustion felt by the storm-battered sailor or the weary pilgrim, and his readiness and longing for the Lord to take his soul.

After the four voice parts of the two earlier motets, Parry now adds a fifth vocal line by dividing the sopranos into two separate voices. The bright vocal colours made available through this division is particularly evident at the words "Glory there the sun outshines whose beams the blessed only see".

Never weather-beaten sail more willing bent to shore.
Never tired pilgrim's limbs affected slumber more,
Than my wearied sprite now longs to fly out of my troubled breast:
O come quickly, sweetest Lord, and take my soul to rest.

Ever blooming are the joys of Heaven's high Paradise.
Cold age deafs not there our ears nor vapour dims our eyes:
Glory there the sun outshines whose beams the blessed only see:
O come quickly, glorious Lord, and raise my sprite to thee!

"There is an old belief"

Parry's original setting of these final three stanzas (slightly adapted) of John Gibson Lockhart's poem *When youthful faith has fled* was written for the 1907 memorial service. He returned to this setting some four years later to experiment with different versions of the central stanza (beginning "Beyond the sphere of Time"), while beginning to compose its companion motets which together form the *Songs of Farewell* collection.

In this motet, Parry further enriches the choir by dividing the basses, forming a six-voice contrapuntal texture. This involved, almost orchestral sounding ensemble presents a striking contrast to the sudden *forte* unison statement at the words "That creed I fain would keep" – set to the standard introductory "Credo in unum Deum" plainchant phrase of the Mass; yet Lockhart's – and by extension Parry's – point is not to declare faith in the Lord, but fidelity to the thought that one day they might be reunited with dear, departed friends; or, failing that eventuality, that they might find eternal sleep.

There is an old belief,
That on some solemn shore,
Beyond the sphere of grief
Dear friends shall meet once more.

Beyond the sphere of Time
And Sin and Fate's control,
Serene in changeless prime
Of body and of soul.

That creed I fain would keep
That hope I'll ne'er forgo,
Eternal be the sleep,
If not to waken so.

We know this work from the volume *Cantiones Sacrae* Tallis and his fellow composer and close friend William Byrd published in 1575. Thought to be a relatively late work, it is certainly one of Tallis's most unorthodox and expressive works. He originally wrote it in a remarkably low pitch – the edition used in this performance has transposed the work up a major sixth! Its penitential text – which tells of the priests weeping at the altar and pleading for forgiveness for their people – is intended for service in Lent.

In jejunio et fletu orabant sacerdotes:
Parce, Domine, parce populo tuo, et ne des
hereditatem tuam in perditionem.
Inter vestibulum et altare plorabant sacerdotes,
dicentes: Parce populo tuo.

*In fasting and weeping the priests prayed:
Spare, O Lord, spare thy people, and give not
thine inheritance to perdition.
Between the porch and the altar the priests
wept, saying: Spare thy people.*

“At the round Earth's imagined corners”

In 1915, having had the first four motets performed by a relatively small choir at the Royal College of Music, Parry decided to add a further two, larger-scaled motets. One of his pupils, Herbert Howells, urged him to set Walter Raleigh's *Even such is time*, but Parry instead took up a suggestion from another pupil, Thomas Dunhill – to set John Donne's sonnet *At the round Earth's imagined corners*, which describes the dead rising on Judgement Day and the poet's awareness that he is yet to adequately repent of his sins. No doubt, Parry was attracted by its range of vivid imagery, which inspired him to new heights in his music's 'word painting'.

Parry added a further alto line to create a seven-voice ensemble for this setting, in which individual moments of word painting are made all the more effective by Parry's use of striking contrast: given the Baroque-style brilliance of the fanfare setting of “blow your trumpets”, the sudden harmonic change and transformation of the music's character at the word “death” is quite chilling, as a wraith-like motif sweeps through the choir's parts at the words “you numberless infinities of souls”. In further contrast follows the vigorous and unpredictable rhythms setting the words “All whom the flood did, and fire shall overthrow”.

At the round earth's imagined corners, blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go,
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow
All whom war, death, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance hath slain; and you whose eyes

Shall behold God and never taste death's woe,
But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space,
For, if above all these my sins abound,
'Tis late to ask abundance of Thy grace,
When we are there. Here on this lowly ground,
Teach me how to repent, for that's as good
As if Thou hadst seal'd my pardon with Thy blood.

“Lord, let me know mine end”

In this setting of verses from Psalm 39, Parry now presents the full potential of a double choir, each being divided into the standard four voices of soprano, alto, tenor and bass. Sometimes one choir echoes another (as at the word “nothing”), or dovetails from one to the other, as in the sustained falling line passed between the two pairs of soprano and alto parts at the words “ev'ry man living is altogether vanity”, or both choirs combine into a single 'super choir' with greatly enriched eight-part textures. All this serves a deeply felt setting of these verses, in which the psalmist – surely like Parry himself, who was already suffering from frequent heart attacks, and would finally die from the Spanish 'flu epidemic – asked “that I may recover my strength before I go hence and be no more seen”.

Lord, let me know mine end and the number of my days,
That I may be certified how long I have to live.
Thou hast made my days as it were a span long;
And mine age is as nothing in respect of Thee,
And verily, ev'ry man living is altogether vanity,
For man walketh in a vain shadow
And disquieteth himself in vain,
He heapeth up riches and cannot tell who shall gather
them.

And now, Lord, what is my hope?
Truly my hope is even in Thee.
Deliver me from all mine offences
And make me not a rebuke to the foolish.
I became dumb and opened not my mouth
For it was Thy doing.
Take Thy plague away from me,
I am even consumed by means of Thy heavy
hand.

When Thou with rebukes does chasten man for sin
Thou makest his beauty to consume away
Like as it were a moth fretting a garment;
Ev'ry man therefore is but vanity.
Hear my pray'r, O Lord
And with Thy ears consider my calling,
Hold not Thy peace at my tears!

For I am a stranger with Thee and a sojourner
As all my fathers were.
O spare me a little, that I may recover my
strength before I go hence
And be no more seen.

The King James Bible, Psalm 39: 5-8, 13, 15

Bring us, O Lord God

William H. Harris (1883-1973)

William H. Harris enjoyed a distinguished career as an organist, principally at St George's Chapel, Windsor, a post he held 1933-61. While in that post, he also taught piano to the princesses Elizabeth and Margaret. His greatest success as a composer was with *Faire is the Heaven* for double choir, composed in 1925. To an extent, he revisited its sound world with his setting of Donne's prayer composed in 1959, shortly before his retirement.

Like *Faire is the heaven*, Harris's *Bring us, O Lord God* presents a vision of the afterlife, painted – in contrast to MacMillan's setting – in richly harmonious and largely serene terms. Still, it progresses into increasingly mysterious harmonic waters as it describes the unearthly “equal light” of heaven, and there is effective word-painting with the imitative entries on “world without end”, just before the final “Amen” which contains some wonderful harmonic surprises.

EAMONN DOUGAN



Eamonn Dougan is an inspirational conductor and renowned vocal coach and baritone. He is Associate Conductor of The Sixteen and founding Director of Britten Sinfonia Voices. Informed by his singing, Eamonn is an engaging communicator with a particular passion for Bach, the French Baroque, and 16th- and 20th-century English repertoire.

Recent highlights have included the world premiere of James MacMillan's *All the Hills and Vales Along* at the Cumnock Tryst Festival; he assisted Sir Mark Elder for the world premiere concert and recording of Puccini *Le Villi* with Opera Rara and the London Philharmonic Orchestra; and conducted the off-stage chorus for Berlioz *L'Enfance du Christ* with The Hallé, Britten Sinfonia Voices and Genesis Sixteen for BBC Proms 2019 at the Royal Albert Hall. In 2019 he directed The Sixteen's highly acclaimed tour of Australia and Singapore, *Messiah* with Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León and Cappella Amsterdam, and made his Paris debut at the La Seine Musicale with renowned ensemble Accentus and in Copenhagen with Danish National Symphony Orchestra, VokalEnsemblet and KoncertKor. Eamonn directed De Profundis on their recent Hyperion release Juan Esquivel's *Missa Hortus Conclusus* to critical acclaim.

Other conducting engagements have included BBC Singers, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Irish Baroque Orchestra, Corinthian Chamber Orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Trondheim Barokk, and Wrocław Philharmonic Chamber Choir. Programming highlights have included a specially curated programme, '*Sun, Moon and Sky*', for Salisbury Festival with violinist Harriet McKenzie and the London Chamber Orchestra which featured Deborah Pritchard's double concerto for violin and harp alongside projections which were inspired by Maggi Hambling's series of paintings 'EDGE' and curating and conducting '*A Weekend of Excessively Good Taste*' (French Baroque) at Kings Place, London. Eamonn's developing opera work has included *Dido and Aeneas*, Mozart *La finta giardiniera* and *Così fan tutte* with Ryedale Festival Opera.

Eamonn is a Visiting Professor to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London, where he teaches ensemble singing and directs the Guildhall Consort. Eamonn read music at New College, Oxford, before continuing his vocal and conducting studies at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Eamonn Dougan is managed worldwide by Percius. www.percius.co.uk

THOMAS TALLIS SOCIETY CHOIR

The Thomas Tallis Society, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in the 2015-16 season, takes its name from the 16th century composer who worked in the Royal Court in Greenwich and is buried in the crypt of the Parish Church of St Alfege.

The choir was founded by Philip Simms, who was organist and choirmaster at the church from 1964 to 2000, and our links with the church continue to the present.

Philip was succeeded by Stephen Dagg, Director of the Centre for Young Musicians at Morley College, London and organist at St Alfege Church, in 2006. During our 50th anniversary year we were delighted to appoint Eamonn Dougan as our new Musical Director.

With around 60 auditioned voices TTS presents four or five concerts a year in the beautiful setting of St Alfege Church. Although many of the choir members live locally in Greenwich, TTS attracts musicians from all over London owing to the high standards it maintains. All singers are required to have very good sight-reading abilities as the choir works on a few concentrated rehearsals before each concert.

We are always keen to recruit new voices. If you are interested, please contact our membership secretary Kathryn Strachan strac157@ntlworld.com.

Follow us on Twitter: @TTSoc. Look out for updates on facebook.com/ThomasTallisSociety and www.thomas-tallis-society.org.uk.

Sopranos Eleanor Caine, Alana Clark, Imogen Clark, Imogen Faris, **Emily Jennings**, Philippa Kent, Rachel Lethbridge, Jill Pollock, Becky Ryland-Jones, Kathryn Strachan, **Emma Wilkins**

Altos Thomas Bridges, Caitlin Brooks, Rosemary Burch, Joanna Clark, Susan Dean, Sian Evans, Moira Fitzgerald, Emma Humphries, Emily John, Alice Shelton

Tenors Justin Eeles, Nick Entwisle, Andrew Green, Andrew Lang, David Lowick, Alexander MacLaren, John Parsons, Paul Renney

Basses Dermot Agnew, Rick Brooks, Cyril Cleary, Simon Gallie, David Houghton, Daniel Jaffé, Jonathan Louth, Nigel Press, John Sutton, Geoff Woodhouse

Bold denotes TTS Ambassadors

FRIENDS AND PATRONS

We are very grateful to our faithful group of Patrons and Friends that have been loyally supporting us for a number of years, especially throughout the pandemic. Their generosity and support have really helped the Society to keep going. A reliable yearly income is a huge benefit in planning programmes and means we can budget more accurately.

We are very keen to increase the number of Patrons and Friends to help us go forward in a sustainable manner and we would love your support as either a Patron or Friend.

A Friend contributes £30 per year and this special relationship with the choir is recognised by:

- A newsletter with early notification of concerts
- An invitation to the annual Friends and Patrons party
- Recognition of support in TTS programmes.

As a Patron of the Society you receive additional benefits in recognition of an annual donation of £150:

- A complimentary top price ticket to all concerts
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- Separate interval or pre-concert complimentary drinks table
- Acknowledgment of support of the Society in the programme
- An invitation to the annual Friends and Patrons party.

Please consider whether you could support TTS by becoming a Patron or a Friend of the Society. Speak to Carole tonight or contact her at carolelowe@rocketmail.com.

We would like to recognise the important contribution of the following TTS Patrons:

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FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday 9th April 2022

Art and Music, Part I

Saturday 2nd July 2022

A programme of music by female composers

With thanks to the Churchwardens of St Alfege for their continued support.