

ST CATHARINE'S COLLEGE CHOIR

Temple Church: Friday 15 March 2024

PROGRAMME

Pace	Errollyn Wallen
Lamentations a6	Robert White (c1538-1574)

Prelude in B minor BWV 544	J.S. Bach (1685-1750)
June Rippon <i>organ</i>	

Fürchte dich nicht	J.S. Bach

All might, all majesty <i>from Humble Verses</i>	Christopher Fox
Sanctus & Benedictus <i>from Mass for Four Voices</i>	William Byrd
Our joy and grief compounded <i>from Humble Verses</i>	Christopher Fox
Agnus Dei <i>from Mass for Four Voices</i>	William Byrd
His sweetness <i>from Humble Verses</i>	Christopher Fox

Be present, O merciful Lord	Sam Thackray
I will be with you	Annie Chown
five four three two one (and breathe)	Annie Chown

Litanies	Jehan Alain (1911-1940)
John Zhang <i>organ</i>	

Sobre un éxtasis de alta contemplación	Jonathan Harvey (1939-2011)

St Catharine's Choir

The College Choir is drawn mainly from the college's undergraduate cohort and its main function is to maintain the weekly round of services in the college's 18th century chapel; but its work extends beyond, to broadcasts, recordings and concert tours. The choir undertakes a foreign tour each year; recent destinations include Italy (Venice and Rome) the Czech Republic and France; this summer the choir will visit Hungary (Szeged and Budapest). The choir has released several discs on the Resonus Classics label, championing the best in contemporary British choral music as well as little-known Renaissance repertoire; and last December sang live as part of Radio 4's *Sunday Worship* programme. St Catharine's also boasts a children's girls' choir – the first of its kind in an Oxbridge college.

Edward Wickham has been Director of College Music at St Catharine's since 2003. As well as his duties in Cambridge, he maintains an active career as a conductor, choral coach and academic. With his Gramophone award-winning vocal consort The Clerks, he recorded over 20 CDs, and performed in many of the country's most prestigious concert halls. His work with choirs has taken him to the United States, the Far East and festivals throughout Europe, and he is founder and artistic director of The Oxford and Cambridge Singing School, which delivers music courses for children in the UK, Far East and Australia.

Sopranos

Hala Al-Haboubi
Lucy Birch
Annie Chown
Grainne Dignam
Rosanna Fenn Parente
Anna Geary
Julia Hinton

Tenors

Zak Ahmed
Jamie Dawes
Samuel Thackray
Ned Woodley

Altos

Sophie Ennis
Anna Grayson
Jessica Palfreyman
Esha Patel

Basses

Skye Collins
Daniel Possener
Giles Shaw
Hector Wolff
with Matthew Gouldstone

June Rippon	Neville Burston Organ Scholar
John Zhang	Junior Organ Scholar

Edward Wickham	Director
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Pace

Pace is a choral vocalisation on one word. In the composer's words, 'Pace is best understood as a single human breath; as a single line; as a world's long, long journey to light.'

Born in Belize, Errollyn Wallen gave up her training at the Dance Theater of Harlem, New York to study composition at the universities of London and Cambridge. She founded her own Ensemble X, and its motto 'We don't break down barriers in music... we don't see any' reflects her genuine, free-spirited approach and eclectic musicianship. She has been commissioned by outstanding music institutions from the BBC to the Royal Opera House and performed her songs internationally.

Lamentations a6

HETH.

Peccatum peccavit Hierusalem, propterea instabilis facta est. Omnes qui glorificabant eam spreverunt illam, quia viderunt ignominiam eius: ipsa autem gemens et conversa est retrorsum.

Jerusalem has sinned greatly, and so she was made infirm. All who honoured her then spurned her, because they saw her shame: sighing, she has turned away.

TETH.

Sordes eius in pedibus eius: nec recordata est finis sui. Deposita est vehementer: non habens consolatorem. Vide, Domine, afflictionem meam: quoniam erectus est inimicus.

Her filth hung about her feet: she had no care for her fate. She was degraded violently: having no comforter. See, Lord, my affliction: how the enemy has stood firm.

JOD.

Manum suam misit hostis ad omnia desiderabilia eius: quia vidit gentes ingressas sanctuarium suum de quibus praeceperas ne intrarent in ecclesiam tuam.

The enemy stretched out his hand to all her treasures: she saw entering her sanctuary gentiles whom you forbid from entering into your temple.

CAPH.

Omnis populus eius gemens et quaerens panem: dederunt preciosa pro cibo ad refocillandam animam. Vide, Domine, et considera: quoniam facta sum vilis.

All her people groan and plead for bread: they surrendered their treasures for food to revive their spirit. Look, Lord, and consider: how I have been brought low.

LAMED.

O vos omnes qui transitis per viam, attendite et videte si est dolor sicut dolor meus: quoniam vindemiavit me, ut locutus est Dominus in die irae furoris sui.

O you who pass by on the road, take heed and see if there is sorrow like my sorrow: because he has punished me, as the Lord said in the day of his anger.

MEM.

De excelso misit ignem in ossibus meis: et erudivit me. Expandit rhete pedibus meis, convertit me retrorsum. Posuit me desolationem: tota die maerore confectam.

Hierusalem, convertere ad Dominum Deum tuum.

He sent fire from on high into my bones: and he instructed me. He spread out a net for my feet, and turned me back. He made me an example of desolation: the whole day racked with sickness.

Jerusalem, turn to the Lord your God.

The birthdate of Robert White is unknown; the first glimpse we get of him in the archives is as a chorister and then an adult singer in the choir of Trinity College, Cambridge from 1554-1562. During that time, in 1560, he received a Bachelorship of Music from Cambridge University, and in 1562 he moved the few miles to Ely, where he succeeded his father-in-law Christopher Tye as master of the choristers. Following a stint at Chester Cathedral from 1566, he returned in 1569 to his birthplace, London to take up the post of Master of Choristers at Westminster Abbey. This successful career was, however, cut short by the plague in 1574, an outbreak which also claimed his wife and youngest daughter.

White's setting of the Lamentations in six parts have often been regarded as the poor relation of the same composer's five part version, as bold and inventive a work of extended polyphonic composition as anything in the 16th century. While not as harmonically eccentric, the six part setting is nevertheless infused with the same powerful rhetoric, the same Phrygian pathos and the same (if not a greater) control of large-scale structures as its sibling, and consequently deserves to be better known. Both in harmonic language and in form, the six part Lamentations are more conservative - the division of the work into triple followed by duple mensuration, for instance, is reminiscent of the votive antiphons of the early Tudor period - but this conservatism also produces a satisfying symmetry in the work, with its alternation of full and reduced voice sections.

White's two settings of the Lamentations are good examples of a genre which flourished in England and the Continent in the 16th century. As part of the liturgy these settings, which take as their texts verses from the Lamentations of Jeremiah, were intended to replace the lectiones or readings at the services of Tenebrae, held during Holy Week. Each verse is introduced by a Hebrew letter, and the reading concludes with the line "Jerusalem, convertere ad Dominum tuum". However, White's settings, which use the same lines of text, conform to no known Sarum Tenebrae lectio - rather they set six verses which in the liturgy would have been divided up between lectiones, Lamentations, I vv 8-13. Bearing in mind that they were composed at a time when the Roman Catholic Sarum ritual was in decline due to government religious policy, this anomaly is not surprising: it may be the case that these sets of Lamentations were intended primarily for domestic devotions, in the households of those who mourned the passing of the old religious order. Certainly the pattern of survival of sources would suggest that by the end of the 16th century, sections of the Lamentations were popular amongst amateur musicians.

Prelude in B minor BWV 544

This most dramatic of Preludes was composed sometime between 1727 and 1731, early in Bach's tenure at Leipzig. It is possible that, like the motet which follows, the work had funerary associations.

Fürchte dich nicht

Fürchte dich nicht, ich bin bei dir,
weiche nicht, denn ich bin dein Gott;
ich stärke dich, ich helfe dir auch,
ich erhalte dich durch die rechte Hand
meiner Gerechtigkeit.

*Do not fear, I am with you
Do not give way, for I am your God;
I strengthen you, I also help you
I uphold you with the right hand
of my righteousness.*

Fürchte dich nicht,
denn ich habe dich erlöst
ich habe dich bei deinem Namen gerufen,
du bist mein. Fürchte dich nicht, du bist mein.

*Do not fear,
for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by your name,
you are mine.*

Herr, mein Hirt, Brunn aller Freuden!
Du bist mein, ich bin dein;
niemand kann uns scheiden.
Ich bin dein, weil du dein Leben
und dein Blut, mir zu gut,
in den Tod gegeben.

*Lord, my Shepherd, source of all joys!
You are mine, I am yours
No one can separate us.
I am yours, since by you your life
And your blood, for my benefit,
Have been given in death.*

Du bist mein, weil ich dich fasse,
und dich nicht, o mein Licht,
aus dem Herzen lasse!
Laß mich, laß mich hingelangen,
wo du mich, und ich dich
ewig werd' umfassen.

*You are mine, since I seize you
and, O my light, never
Shall I let you leave my heart!
Let me, let me come
where you by me and I by you
Shall be embraced in love.*

The designation 'motet' to six (possibly seven) of Bach's choral works suggests a degree of precision in the term which it had not enjoyed for at least two centuries. Bach's motets share characteristics which set them apart from, for instance, his cantatas – including the fact that they require no independent instrumental accompaniment – and it seems they were intended originally for performance at funerals. In other respects, however, Bach's motets are structurally and stylistically diverse; exemplifying Bach's dizzying ability to manipulate pre-existing chorale tunes, and find in them harmonic possibilities beyond the imagination of contemporaries.

Whether composed for the funeral of a Leipzig dignitary in 1726, or earlier during his sojourn in Weimar, *Fürchte dich nicht* seems to be one of the earliest of the motets. It takes its text from Isaiah (chapter 41) and a hymn by the 17th century Lutheran pastor Paul Gerhardt. The work broadly divides into two sections. The first for double choir and resembling in its antiphonal affects the more celebrated motets such as *Komm, Jesu, komm* and *Singet dem Herrn*. The second is an extended treatment of the chorale tune *Warum sollt ich mich den grämen* (verse starting: 'Herr mein Hirt'), in which the inherent harmonic character of the tune is brilliantly and beautifully distorted. It is a reminder that early protestant hymn tunes, as with Gregorian chant, were known primarily as single-line melodies without fully-realised harmonies. We can only imagine the frisson that this highly original presentation of a familiar tune must have elicited in Bach's audiences.

Motets from Five Humble Verses

Movements from Mass for Four Voices

This is that great almightie Lord that made
Both heaven and earth, and lives for evermore;
By him the worlds foundation first was laid:
He fram'd the things that never were before:
The Sea within his bounds by him is staid,
He judgeth all alike, both rich and poore:
All might, all majestie, all love, all lawe
Remaines in him that keepes all worlds in awe.

Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt celi et terra gloria tua. Osanna in excelsis.
Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of thy glory. Hosanna in the highest.
Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini. Osanna in excelsis.
Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

O wonder, more than man can comprehend,
Our Joy and Griefe both at one instant fram'd,
Compounded: Contraries contend
Each to exceed, yet neither to be blam'd.
Our Griefe to see our Saviours wretched end,
Our Joy to know both Death and Hell he tam'd:
That we may say, O Death, where is thy sting?
Hell, yeeld thy victory to thy conq'ring King.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi: miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi: miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi: dona nobis pacem.

Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world: have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world: have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world: grant us peace.

This hony dropping dew of holy love,
Sweet milke, wherewith we weaklings are restored,
Who drinkes thereof, a world can never move,
All earthly pleasures are of them abhorred;
This love made Martyrs many deaths to prove,
To taste his sweetnesse, whom they so adored:
Sweetnesse that makes our flesh a burthen to us,
Knowing it serves but onely to undoe us.

Christopher Fox writes:

The three motets come from a set of five written to mark the 400th anniversary of the death of William Byrd, a composer whose music I have loved ever since I first heard his Mass settings in an A Level Music class. My Five Humble Verses may be sung individually, as a sequence, or interpolated between the movements of any of Byrd's Mass setting (as suggested below). The music sets five verses from *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* by Aemilia Lanyer (1569-1645), a poet who was a contemporary of William Byrd and whose circles of acquaintance were closely linked with his. Lanyer's extended poem (it runs to 1840 lines) is full of praise for her patron, Margaret Clifford, Countess of Cumberland, but is primarily concerned with weaving together the story of Creation, parts of the Old Testament and the narrative of Christ's birth, life and death. My chosen verses, however, are less concerned with these narratives and instead focus on different aspects of the Trinity.

So firmly established in the Anglican choral repertory are William Byrd's masses that we forget how daring they were when first printed in the 1590s; not just politically, since the celebration of the Latin mass was banned at that time in England, but musically, bearing in mind that the last mass settings in England were by then almost half a century old. Nor does Byrd's writing conform to anything we find on the continent in the late Renaissance. These are truly unique creations, arising from Byrd's own motet style; the word-setting concise yet importunate, the harmonic language restrained yet highly expressive. The final paragraph of the four-voice *Agnus Dei* is rightly one of the most celebrated passages of vocal music from any age.

Be present, O merciful God

Be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the silent hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this fleeting world, may rest upon thy eternal changelessness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This is a setting of one of the short, beautiful prayers offered in the college chapel's weekly Nightsongs service. I wanted to respond to this compositionally with a brief and relatively simple piece, that aside from a few repetitions avoids manipulating the text too far. A tonal centre of F-sharp major reveals itself at key moments in the structure, representing an underlying changelessness despite the persistent deviations to darker, flatter keys that accompany the more troubled lines of the text. The final 'Amen's' echo the opening's suspended soprano and alto lines, answered by the lower voices in a quasi-spoken style.

I will be with you

When you pass through the waters,

I will be with you;

And when you pass through the rivers,

they will not sweep over you.

When you walk through the fire,

you will not be burned;

the flames will not set you ablaze.

'I will be with you' is a reflective, prayer-like meditation, based on a text from Isaiah which reassures the listener that God is present with them even during difficult times. The choral piece has a 'sister' electronic piece, five four three two one (and breathe), which, while transforming the traditional chapel choral work into a contemporary electronic setting, continues the theme of finding comfort and peace in 'something else'; here, the self-soothing 5-4-3-2-1 method of grounding to combat anxiety. The piece features two versions of the musical material played on the piano which are continually looped back through themselves, until all that remains are the resonant frequencies of the recording space, the music reaching a dynamic stasis. Listeners are encouraged to reflect on their current sensory surroundings while listening.

Litanies

Litanies is based on a plainsong phrase which opens the music and is repeated thereafter as (in the composer's words) a 'passionate incantation'. The work carries a quotation referring to the death of Alain's sister in 1937: 'When the Christian soul is in distress and cannot find any fresh words to implore God's mercy, it repeats the same prayer unceasingly with overwhelming faith. The limit of reason is past. It is faith alone which propels its ascent.' The promise of this and other works for the organ was never realised, as Alain died aged 29 in the early stages of World War II.

Sobre un éxtasis de alta contemplación

Entréme donde no supe,
Y quedéme no sabiendo
Toda ciencia trascendiendo.

*I entered into unknowing,
and there I remained unknowing
transcending all knowledge.*

Yo no supe dónde entraba,
Pero, cuando allí me vi,
Sin saber dónde me estaba,
Grandes cosas entendí;
No diré lo que senti,
Que me quedé no sabiendo,
Toda ciencia trascendiendo.

*I entered into unknowing,
yet when I saw myself there,
without knowing where I was,
I understood great things;
I will not say what I felt
for I remained in unknowing
transcending all knowledge.*

De paz y de piedad
Era la ciencia perfecta,
En profunda soledad,
Entendida via recta;
Era cosa tan secreta,
Que me quedé balbuciendo,
Toda ciencia trascendiendo.

*That perfect knowledge
was of peace and holiness
held at no remove
in profound solitude;
it was something so secret
that I was left stammering,
transcending all knowledge.*

Estaba tan embebido,
Tan absorto y ajenado,
Que se quedó me sentido
De todo sentir privado;
Y el espíritu dotado
De un entender no entendiendo,
Toda ciencia trascendiendo.

*I was so o'erwhelmed,
so absorbed and withdrawn,
that my senses were left
deprived of all their sensing,
and my spirit was given
an understanding while not understanding,
transcending all knowledge.*

El que allí llega de vero
De sí mismo desfallece;
Cuanto sabia primero
Mucho bajo le parece
Y su ciencia tanto crece
Que se queda no sabiendo,
Toda ciencia trascendiendo.

*He who truly arrives there
cuts free from himself;
all that he knew before
now seems worthless,
and his knowledge so soars
that he is left in unknowing
transcending all knowledge.*

Cuanto más alto se sube
Tanto menos entendía
Que es la tenebrosa nube
Que a la noche esclarecía;
Por eso quien la sabía
Queda siempre no sabiendo
Toda ciencia trascendiendo.
Y es de tan alta excelencia
Aqueste sumo saber
Que no hay facultad ni ciencia
Que le puedan emprender;
Quien se supiere vencer
Con un no saber sabiendo,
Irá siempre trascendiendo.

*The higher he ascends
the less he understands,
because the cloud is dark
which lit up the night;
whoever knows this
remains always in unknowing
transcending all knowledge.
And to attain this height
Is such perfection
It cannot be undertaken
By any power of knowledge
Even if we knew how
With an unknowing knowledge
Forever transcending.*

Y, si lo queréis oír,
Consiste esta suma ciencia
En un subido sentir
De la divinal esencia;
Es obra de su clemencia
Hacer quedar no entendiendo
Toda ciencia Trascendiendo.

*And if you should want to hear:
this highest knowledge lies
in the loftiest sense
of the essence of God;
this is a work of his mercy,
to leave one without understanding,
transcending all knowledge.*

Jonathan Harvey was a leading composer in the British avant-garde – a pioneer of electronic music who worked for a time at IRCAM with Pierre Boulez – who, unusually, also contributed significant works to the British choral tradition. Motets such as *I love the Lord* and *Come, Holy Ghost* remain in the choral repertoire; though *Sobre un éxtasis*, composed for the Cambridge University Chamber Choir in 1975 is less well-known. This 'chant and transcendental sequence' sets a poem by the 16th century mystic Saint John of the Cross. The poem is recited in a hypnotic triad over which a solo tenor hovers, as if levitating.

The consonant harmony is increasingly disrupted, until the choir – now divided into two groups – sing against one another at the symbolically antagonistic interval of a tritone. At the frenzied conclusion, even the 'ciencia' of music cannot contain the transcendent state and shatters into fragments of sound.