



UGA
presents.

24|25 SEASON

THE SIXTEEN
HARRY CHRISTOPHERS, conductor
The Deer's Cry

TUES, OCT 22, 7:30 pm
Hodgson Concert Hall

Supported by
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Please silence all mobile phones and electronic devices. Photography, video and audio recording, and texting are prohibited during the performance.



PROGRAM

WILLIAM BYRD (ca. 1540-1623)

Diliges Dominum [3:00]

BYRD

Christe qui lux es et dies [5:00]

ARVO PÄRT (1935-)

The Deer's Cry [4:20]

BYRD

Emendemus in melius [4:00]

PÄRT

the woman with the alabaster box [6:00]

BYRD

Miserere mihi Domine [2:10]

BYRD

Ad Dominum cum tribularer [11:00]

INTERMISSION

THOMAS TALLIS (1505-1585)/**BYRD**

Miserere nostri [2:52]

TALLIS

When Jesus went [2:30]

BYRD

O lux beata Trinitas [4:15]

PÄRT

Nunc Dimittis [7:00]

BYRD

Laetentur coeli [3:22]

BYRD

Tribue Domine [11:30]

Program is subject to change.

THE SIXTEEN

Soprano

Julie Cooper

Katy Hill

Kirsty Hopkins

Alexandra Kidgell

Charlotte Mobbs

Emilia Morton

Alto

Robin Blaze

Daniel Collins

Stephanie Franklin

Kim Porter

Tenor

Jeremy Budd

Mark Dobell

Steven Harrold

George Pooley

Bass

Robert Davies

Rob Macdonald

Ben McKee

Stuart Young



Harry Christophers' Introduction

Although separated by over four centuries, the music of William Byrd and Arvo Pärt make for a perfect match. Both spent many years facing adversity and persecution, and both sought solace through their sacred music.

Byrd's later life was lived under constant threat of religious persecution – a devout Catholic and, moreover, a practising Catholic in a country where only the Anglican faith could be celebrated. However, Queen Elizabeth I not only loved music but also possessed a private empathy for Catholicism and in 1575 she granted a patent to William Byrd (now in his 30s) and the aged Tallis to publish music. The result was *Cantiones sacrae*, containing 17 pieces by each of them.

Six of the works included in this programme come from this collection, the most monumental of which is *Tribue, Domine*. Its long text comes from the book of Meditations attributed to St Augustine, and Byrd treats us not only to a variety of vocal combinations, but also clear codes to his unswerving Catholic faith. In *Ad Dominum cum tribularer* the urgent words of the psalmist are heard: "I speak peace to them and they clamour for war" (*Ego pacem loquebar et illi bellum conclamabant*), while in *Tribue, Domine* Byrd portrays the word "kingdom" (*imperium*) with a certain triumphalism.

Pärt spent most of his life in Soviet-controlled Estonia – remember, it was not until the summer of 1994 that the last Russian troops withdrew from that country. For the young Pärt it all seemed normal. "We had what we had...it wasn't until I was older that I began to appreciate what it was to live in the Soviet Union, everything enclosed or forbidden." In 1979 Pärt and his family acquired exit visas to leave the Soviet Union and moved to Berlin; it was around this time that he began to experiment with tintinnabulation – which is what? Perhaps best for Pärt himself to explain: "it is an area I sometimes wander into when I am searching for answers – in my life, my music, my work. Here I am alone with silence. I have discovered that it is enough when a single note is beautifully played. This one note, or a silent beat, or a moment of silence, comforts me. I work with very few elements – with one voice, with two voices. I build with the most primitive materials – with the triad. The three notes of the triad are like bells. And that is why I called it tintinnabulation."

The result is music where the text has total clarity but is highly charged in a very specific manner. Pärt's setting of the *Nunc dimittis* is at times tender and serene – "for mine eyes have seen thy salvation" (*quia viderunt oculi mei salutare tuum*) – but then bursts out into exhilarating joy at "a light to lighten the gentiles" (*Iumen ad revelationem gentium*). The *Woman with the Alabaster Box* is even more extraordinary, with Jesus' words eloquently delivered and made even more powerful by the silences.

Unlike Byrd, Pärt did not write for the liturgy, but that does not mean his music is any less sacred – far from it. I have no doubt his music will resonate for years to come just as Byrd's has done for centuries.

PROGRAM NOTES

by John Milsom ©2015

The music of the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt (b.1935) speaks in ancient accents, shot through with flashes of modernity. Lean, pure, and fired by the enduring tenets of the Christian faith, it shuns everything Romantic, and instead hints at arcane rituals acted out in solemn ways. Its medieval quality means that Pärt combines supremely well with genuinely old music, and some thrilling combinations can be imagined. Pärt and Pérotin; Pärt and Machaut; Pärt and Ockeghem; Pärt and Josquin. For this programme, Harry Christophers has aligned Pärt with two Tudor composers, Thomas Tallis (d.1585) and William Byrd (d.1623), a pairing made all the more apt by Harry's choice of some English works that are themselves composed rigorously according to logic and rule, or address the fusion of old with new. Here, Tallis and Byrd meet Pärt on common ground.

There are times when a composer may concern himself with aspects of craft that are hard or even impossible for the listener to follow. Audiences find this puzzling, and deem such works to be cryptic and mathematical. If music is by definition sound – humanly organized sound – then why organize sounds in such ways that the listener is excluded? The point is neatly made by this programme's opening work, Byrd's eight-voice motet *Diliges Dominum*. Words apart, it sounds the same as it does forwards. The piece is a perfect palindrome, yet no one could possibly know that from performance alone. Our brains cannot process temporal symmetry in the way we instantly see visual symmetry.

Why, then, was this weird work written? At least three answers come to mind. First, Byrd composed it because he could. If carefully chosen, chordal sequences and melodies will work both forwards and backwards, and Byrd must have loved the challenge of working this out for himself. Second, he wrote this crab canon for the delight of the eight singers who, using Byrd's original notation, must read from only four melodic lines. Four of them sing these melodies forwards, the other four sing them backwards; and by doing so, their eyes unlock the work's musical conceit. But Byrd's third reason for composing this piece may be the most important, for he placed it in a book that ensured its readership across Europe. In 1575, Byrd and Tallis jointly published a collection of motets called *Cantiones sacrae* ('Sacred songs'). It was dedicated to Queen Elizabeth, and it was explicitly made for export, to display the brilliance of Tudor culture to the outside world. Small wonder, then, that both Tallis and Byrd do some musical showing off in these motets.

The most breathtaking piece in the 1575 book is the one placed at its end: the seven-voice *Miserere nostri*. Usually this work is credited to Tallis alone, but more likely it is by Tallis and Byrd, the two men working collaboratively: first four voices composed by Byrd, then three more added by Tallis. The strange beauty of this piece hints that something arcane lurks under its sonorous surface, and indeed it does – but it can only be grasped by viewing the piece from the singer's perspective, since it too is concerned with sight as well as sound. Just three notated lines are needed to convey this work's seven-voice polyphony, two of them bearing instructions (or 'canons') telling how they must be deciphered.

The first melody, attributed to Byrd in the 1575 *Cantiones sacrae*, is to be read by four low voice singers, all starting on the same note at the same time. The first of them sings the line exactly as written. The second doubles all the durations of the notes (x2), and turns all the intervals upside down. The third singer quadruples the durations (x4) and restores the intervals. The fourth octuples the durations (x8) and re-inverts the intervals. Thus four different versions of the same melody sound simultaneously, in various states of augmentation and inversion—a conceit that is utterly impossible to follow in sound. Byrd then handed this to Tallis, who deftly added a superstructure: two sopranos sing in straightforward canon at the unison (very easy for listeners to hear), and a free seventh voice plugs some polyphonic gaps. *Miserere nostri, Domine* ('Have mercy on us, Lord') are all the words supplied for this lean and logical motet.

Other works in this program play compositional games, some more easily discerned than others. Simplest to follow is the two-voice canon in Tallis's *When Jesus went*, in which the soprano replicates the baritone an octave higher after two beats. In the 1575 *Cantiones sacrae* this work was published as a motet, *Salvator mundi*, in which form it is most often heard today; but some Elizabethan manuscripts transmit the music with an English text telling the story of Jesus and the woman with the alabaster box (Matthew 26:6), and our programme opts for this version, to pair with Pärt's *The Woman with the Alabaster Box*.

Byrd's game in *Christe qui lux es et dies* is also quite easy to follow. Five voices are in play here, and five stanzas of text are set to polyphony. In turn, each



voice sings the traditional plainchant melody used for this hymn, starting with the bass (polyphonic stanza 1), then rising through the texture to the soprano (polyphonic stanza 5). Each statement is harmonized in simple block chords filled with surprises—not unlike the choral chanting favoured by Arvo Pärt, in which strings of consonant chords are locally spiced with piquancies.

Cleverer by far are two further Byrd motets from the 1575 *Cantiones sacrae*—"cleverer" in the sense that they took immense skill to devise, even though that skill frankly bypasses us in sound. *O lux beata Trinitas*, a paean of praise to Father, Son and Holy Spirit, ends with a trinitarian three-voice canon which in Sudoku terms would be classed as "fiendish;" and Byrd does this because he can, not because he expects us to hear it. In *Miserere mihi, Domine* he does ingenious things with

the plainchant melody of the same name—including, near the end, a two-voice canon made from the chant, interwoven with a second and totally different canon sung by two more voices. Strange rituals indeed.

The theme of craftsmanship connects all the works mentioned so far; but this programme also features pieces on another theme that has long been of special interest to Arvo Pärt: the judicious balancing of the old against the new. William Byrd too was deeply concerned with this, and four pieces lead us along his pathway of thought. That path starts with *Tribue, Domine*, a vast six-voice motet cast in three big sections, in which Byrd quite openly pays homage to his Tudor ancestors—composers such as Robert Fayrfax and John Taverner—and the youthful Thomas Tallis. *Tribue, Domine* behaves as if it were a votive antiphon, in which sections for reduced choir alternate with ones for *tutti*. Byrd, however, has modernized the form into something more declamatory and expressive, and the subject-matter of its text is different: not a hymn to the Virgin Mary, as in pre-Reformation antiphons, but now an address to the Trinity.

Elsewhere, Byrd weighs old against new by turning his gaze to continental Europe, and redefining his English style in relation to foreign fashion. His mighty eight-voice motet *Ad Dominum cum tribularer* tackles the musical texture known as 'imitation', in which long and distinctive thematic subjects pass among the eight voices, densely packed together in tight interlock—a craft Byrd knew from works by mid-century continental masters such as Nicolas Gombert and Jacobus Clemens non Papa. In *Emendemus in melius*, Byrd turned instead to his musical friend and contemporary Alfonso

Ferrabosco, an Italian composer-cum-spy resident at the Tudor court, who became Byrd's musical sparring partner in the 1570s. Hence *Emendemus in melius*, Byrd's first contribution to the 1575 *Cantiones sacrae*, which builds on (and frankly improves upon) a piece by Alfonso himself. As for *Laetentur coeli*, it reveals Byrd's fully mature style in which Italian and English elements are perfectly fused, and it therefore sets the tone for the rest of Byrd's composing career.

The three pieces by Arvo Pärt all belong to the decade 1997-2007. They speak in Pärt's unmistakable voice, with its unique blend of ancient and modern. Spare textures, drones, notes left hanging as if suspended, structures built around scales, others that open and close like scissors—and above all, the solemn chanting of words in ways that hint at Orthodox chant: all these are locally present, though differently permuted in each piece. *The Woman with the Alabaster Box* of 1997 sets the narrative text of Matthew 26:6-13, and is the most dramatic of the three. *Nunc dimittis* of 2001, composed for liturgical use, is remarkable for its doxology ('Gloria Patri'), which is crafted in Pärt's bell-like 'tintinnabuli' style; it leaves the listener wondering whether its undulating scales and arpeggios, which gently collide with one another (and against a drone), follow some arcane system or are merely random. Finally *The Deer's Cry* of 2007 sets part of the lorica (incantation) attributed to the fifth-century St Patrick. This powerful text has come to be known by various names; the one chosen by Pärt has also been used for this programme.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Harry Christophers

Harry Christophers stands among today's great champions of choral music. In partnership with The Sixteen, he has set benchmark standards for the performance of everything from late medieval polyphony to important new works by contemporary composers.

Under his leadership The Sixteen has established its hugely successful annual *Choral Pilgrimage*, created the *Sacred Music* series for BBC television, and developed an acclaimed period-instrument orchestra. Highlights of their recent work include an Artist Residency at Wigmore Hall, a large-scale tour of Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610*, the world premiere of James MacMillan's Fifth Symphony at the 2019 Edinburgh International Festival and a live-streamed performance of MacMillan's *Stabat mater* from the Sistine Chapel. Their future projects, meanwhile, comprise extensive tours of the USA and The Netherlands, as well as a continuation of the Choral Pilgrimage 2024 tour.

Harry Christophers served as Artistic Director of the Handel and Haydn Society from 2008 to 2022, and is now their Conductor Laureate. He has worked as guest conductor with, among others, the London Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic, the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra and the Deutsches Kammerphilharmonie. Christophers's extensive commitment to opera has embraced productions for English National Opera and Lisbon Opera and work with the Granada, Buxton and Grange festivals.

In 2019 collaborated with BBC Radio 3 presenter Sara Mohr-Pietsch to produce a book entitled *A New Heaven: Choral Conversations* in celebration of the group's 40th anniversary.

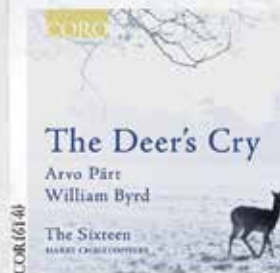
Harry Christophers was awarded a CBE in the Queen's 2012 Birthday Honours list. He is an Honorary Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, as well as the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, and has Honorary Doctorates in Music from the Universities of Leicester, Northumbria, Canterbury Christ Church and Kent.



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HARRY CHRISTOPHERS

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