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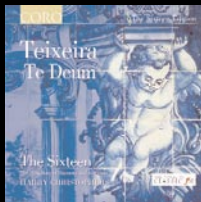
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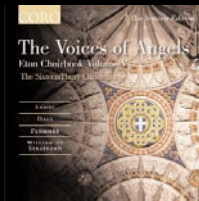
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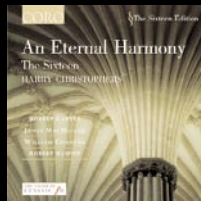


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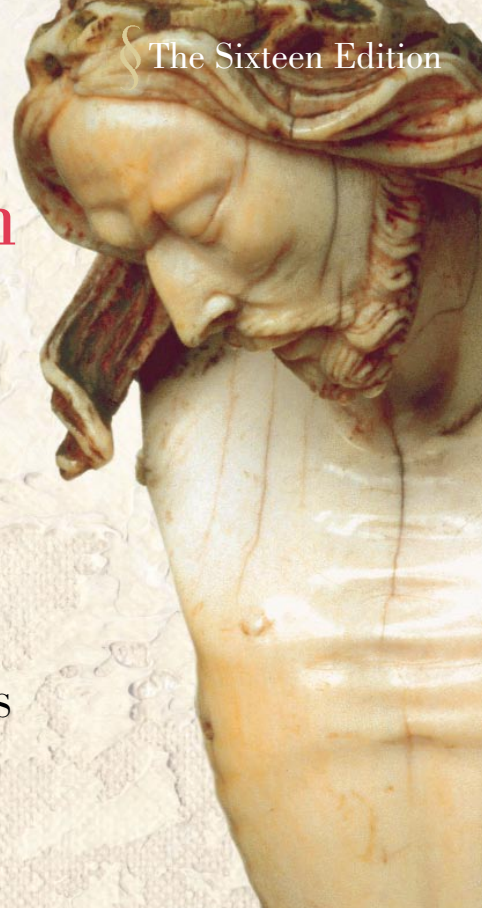
§ The Sixteen Edition

The Crown of Thorns

Eton Choirbook
Volume II

The Sixteen
HARRY CHRISTOPHERS

THE VOICES OF
CLASSIC *fm*



THE SIXTEEN

TREBLE

Fiona Clarke,
Ruth Dean,
Carys Lane

MEAN

Sophie Daneman,
Sally Dunkley,
Julia White

ALTO

Andrew Giles,
Michael Lees,
Philip Newton,
Christopher Royall

TENOR

Philip Daggett,
Andrew Gant*,
Robert Johnston,
Duncan Mackenzie,
Leigh Nixon*,
Matthew Vine

BASS

Simon Birchall,
Donald Greig,
Timothy Jones,
Francis Steele,

**Stabat Mater*,
(*Cornysh and Browne*) only

Jesu, mercy,
how may this be?
(Browne)

SOPRANO:

Carys Lane (verse),
Sophie Daneman,
Ruth Dean

ALTO

Michael Lees (verse),
Andrew Giles,
Christopher Royall

TENOR

Robert Johnston (verse),
Philip Daggett,
Duncan MacKenzie

BASS

Simon Birchall (verse),
Timothy Jones,
Francis Steele

Ah,
gentle Jesu
(Sheryngham)

SOPRANO

Sally Dunkley (verse),
Sophie Daneman,
Ruth Dean

ALTO

Andrew Giles (verse),
Michael Lees,
Christopher Royall

TENOR

Duncan MacKenzie (verse),
Philip Daggett,
Robert Johnston

BASS

Simon Birchall (verse),
Timothy Jones,
Francis Steele



I remember well, some years ago, sitting in the library at Eton College with Christopher Page and recording a programme for BBC Radio 3 about the Eton Choirbook, by far the most outstanding of a handful of choirbooks to survive the Reformation. We turned the parchment pages of this vast book, admiring the vividly illuminated capitals, marvelling at some of the, obviously frequently performed, motets, the corners of which were heavily thumbed by fingers of a past century. My abiding thought was how incredibly talented these sixteen choristers must have been to sing this highly complex music, difficult by any standard, while crowding around a lectern, straining to read by candlelight. Today we have modern editions, electricity and aids for failing sight and it still seems difficult!

Our edition represents very much the grass roots of our work and our overwhelming desire to rejoice in the survival of this great music.

*Harry
Animans,*

For the late medieval English composer, there were three principal forms of religious observance that regularly required him to put pen to paper. The first was the liturgy itself. In the larger choral foundations such as cathedrals, college chapels, and the royal household chapels, both the Mass and the Offices were regularly adorned with new compositions. A second form of worship, practised largely by confraternities and educational establishments, were acts of communal devotion. These too were held in chapels, but for their structure and contents they followed the statutes of individual institutions, not the liturgy. Prayers, sung as well as spoken, formed the substance of such daily observances. A third category of sacred music belonged not to consecrated buildings at all, but rather to the rooms in which members of a community or court kept company together. Here, purely secular entertainment extended into music for spiritual recreation: songs with seasonal religious texts, expressed not in Latin but rather in the homely English language, were as much a part of daily life as attendance at services.

None of the music performed by The Sixteen on this record belongs to the first, liturgical category. Instead, the programme gives us glimpses into those acts of private devotion that took place in the chapel of Eton College at the end of the day, and in the hall of the college, where elaborate religious songs would have been sung in the evenings on special occasions.

For information about the corporate devotional services held at Eton, we need look no further than the college's original statutes of 1444. According to these, the choir was to proceed reverently to the chapel at a suitable time each evening, kneel at the crucifix to recite the Lord's Prayer, then rise before the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary (to whom the college was dedicated), where they were to sing an antiphon in her praise, the text of which could be chosen according to the time of year. By 1500 this daily performance had become a major event – or at least, so it would seem from the contents of the Eton Choirbook, a sumptuous manuscript created for use by the choir at Eton. In it we find a wide variety of suitable pieces, a few by Eton composers, the majority borrowed from other British choirs. Among them are three settings of the Stabat Mater, an antiphon to the Virgin especially suitable for use during Passiontide. These three great works, by Davy, Cornysh, and Browne, form the framework of this record.

Eton College no longer owns a companion book of songs and seasonal carols for use outside the chapel, but there are good reasons for believing that such a book once existed. Like other colleges founded in the fifteenth century, Eton adopted a statute first introduced at Winchester College, which allowed fellows and scholars to have a fire in the college hall on important feast-days and special occasions. On such evenings (to quote

from the Winchester statutes), 'recreations suitable to the clerical state' were allowed, of which the singing of carols and songs would have been one. At Eton's sister foundation, King's College, Cambridge, a list of the college's books drawn up in 1529 included "iiii bokys in papyr off carrolls. Nowell." These too are lost; but another book, closely linked with the court of Henry VII, survives to give us an idea of what such anthologies must have been like. This is the so-called 'Fayrfax' manuscript, now in the British Library. We have chosen two songs from this manuscript, both of them suitable for Passiontide, to reconstruct another part of Eton College's musical diet in the late fifteenth century.

All three settings of the Stabat Mater in the Eton Choirbook were imported from choirs elsewhere in the country. Richard Davy's work may have been sung first at Magdalen College, Oxford where Davy was master of the choristers in the 1490s. Virtually nothing is known about the career of John Browne, but he too seems to have been an Oxford man, this time from New College. Since William Cornysh was a court composer, the most likely destination for his setting would have been the Chapel Royal. Their chronology and relationship remain a mystery. Possibly Cornysh knew Davy's setting, since the two works (both for five-part choir) share several features of design that are absent from Browne's (which is for six-part choir). It may also be more than coincidence that all three

works are in the same key. But differences are more conspicuous than connections; each composer responded to the text quite independently, using it largely as an excuse for elaborate musical fantasy (in the manner so typical of English composers of the period), and only loosely underpinning the pathos of the words.

The two songs, by Browne and the unidentified Sheryngham, are broadly similar in style to the three antiphons, but more intimate in scale. Technically speaking they must be classed as carols, since their alternation of a refrain (or 'burden') with verses has its origin in the structure of the carole, the common round-dance of medieval Europe. The Franciscans, however, brought the carol into the service of piety, and there is still a Franciscan ring about the words set by Sheryngham and Browne, bluntly plain and direct as they are in their expression. In this respect they complement the harrowing sentiments of the Stabat Mater, itself a text of Franciscan origin. Perhaps the most striking contrast is in the different focus of their attention. Whereas Stabat Mater addresses the Virgin in her role as mediatrix between man and God, the carols either speak directly to Christ or – more painfully still – they express the agony of the Crucifixion through a paraphrase of Christ's own words to mankind.

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John BROWNE (fl c1490)

Jesu, mercy, how may this be?

Jesu, mercy, how may this be,
That God himself for his sole mankind
Would take on Him humanity?
My wit nor reason may it well find:

Jesu, mercy, how may this be?

Christ that was of infinite might,
Egall to the Father in deity,
Immortal, impassible, the worldes light,
And would so take mortality!
Jesu, mercy, how may this be?

He that wrought this world of nought,
That made both paines and joy also,
And suffer would pain as sorrowful thought
With weeping, wailing, sowning for woe.
Jesu, mercy, how may this be?

Ah, Jesu! Why suffered thou such entreating,
As beating, bobbing, yea, spitting on thy face?
Drawn like a thief, and for a pain sweating
Both water and blood, crucified, an heavy case?

Jesu, mercy, how may this be?

Lo, man, for thee, that were unkind,
Gladly suffered I all this.
And why, good Lord? Express thy mind!
Thee to purchase both joy and bliss.
Jesu, mercy, how may this be?

Richard DAVY (c1465-c1507)

William CORNYSH the elder (d1502)

John BROWNE (fl c1490)

Stabat Mater

Stabat mater dolorosa
Juxta crucem lacrimosa
Dum pendebat Filius.
Cuius animam gementem,
Contristantem et dolentem,
Pertransivit gladius.

O quam tristis et afflicta
Fuit illa benedicta
Mater unigeniti!
Quae moerebat et dolebat
Dum videbat et gerebat
Poenas nati incliti.

*At the cross her station keeping
Stood the mournful Mother weeping
Close to Jesus at last.
Through her soul, of you bereaved,
Bowed with anguish, deeply grieved,
Now at length the sword hath passed.*

*O, that blessed one, grief-laden,
Blessed Mother, blessed Maiden,
Mother of the all-holy one;
O that silent, ceaseless mourning,
O those dim eyes never turning
From that wondrous suffering Son.*

Quis est homo, qui non fleret
Matrem Christi si videret
In tanto supplicio?
Quis non potest contristari
Matrem Christi contemplari
(*Browne: Piam Matrem contemplari*)
Dolentem cum Filio?

Eia Mater fons amoris,
Me sentire vim doloris,
Fac ut tecum lugeam.
Fac ut ardeat cor meum
In amando Christum Deum,
Ut sibi complaceam.

Stabat mater, rubens rosa,
Iuxta crucem lacrimosa,
Videns ferre criminosa,
Nullum reum crimine.
Et dum stetit generosa,
Iuxta natum dolorosa,
Plebs tunc canit clamorosa:
“Crucifige, crucifige!”

*Seeing now her face imploring,
Gazing on her Son adoring,
Who the man who would not weep?
Who on Christ's dear Mother thinking,
Such a cup of sorrow drinking,
Would not share her sorrow deep?*

*O thou Mother, fount of love,
Touch my spirit from above,
Make my heart with thine accord;
Help me feel as thou hast felt,
Cause my soul to glow and melt
With the love of Christ my Lord.*

*Stood the Mother, Rose of red,
Weeping at the Cross's head,
Innocence to see thus led,
To a felon's punishment.
Thus she stood, so full of heart,
Mourning at her dear Son's smart
When the people cried in wrath,
“Crucify him, Crucify”.*

O quam gravis illa poena
Tibi, virgo poenae plena,
Commemorans praeamaena
Iam versa in maestitiam.

Color erat non inventus
In te, Mater, dum detentus
Stabat natus, sic contentus
Ad debellandum Sathanam.

Per haec, nata praeamata,
Natum tuum, qui peccata
Delet cuncta perpetrata,
deprecare dulciflue.
Ut, nostra tergens ingrata,
In nobis plantet firme grata,
Per quem dando praelibata
Praestet aeterna requie.
Amen.

*O! that grief more bitter yet
Laid on thee with great beset,
Virgin, thus to recollect
Former joys now turned to woe.*

*From thy cheek all colour drained,
Dearest Mother, when arraigned,
Thy Son stood, willingly constrained,
In defeat of th'ancient foe.*

*By this, most beloved maid,
To thy Son, who for us paid,
All sin's debt upon us laid,
Pour thy kind entreaty sweet.
That he may all our sin efface
And firm in us establish grace;
Through whom, to us in eternal rest
Do thou show forth his promises.
Amen.*

SHERYNGHAM (fl c1500)

Ah, gentle Jesu!

Ah, gentle Jesu!

Who is that, that doth me call?

I, a sinner, that oft doth fall.

What would'st thou have?

Mercy, Lord, of thee I crave.

Why, lov'st thou me?

Yea, my Maker I call thee.

Then leave thy sin, or I will thee.

And think on this lesson that now I teach thee.

Ah, I will, gentle Jesu!

Upon the cross I was nailed for thee,
Suffered death to pay thy ransom.
Forsake thy sin, man, for the love of me
Be repentant, make plain confession;
To contrite hearts I do remission.
Be not despaired, for I am not vengeable;
'Gain ghostly en'mies think on my passion.
Why art thou froward, sith I am merciable?
Ah, gentle Jesu!
Who is that, that doth me call? (et cetera)

My bloody woundes down railing by this tree,
Look on them well and have compassion;
The crown of thorn, the spear, the nails three,
Pierced hand and foot of indignation,
My heart riven for thy redemption.
Let us now twain in this thing be treatable:
Love for love by just convention.
Why art thou froward, sith I am merciable?
Ah, gentle Jesu!
Who is that, that doth me call? (et cetera)

I had on Peter and Mawdlen pity;
Forthi contrite of thy contrition;
Saint Thomas of Indes incrudelity,
He put his hands deep in my side adown.
Roll up this mater; grave it in thy reason!
Sith that I am kind, why art thou unstable?
My blood best treacle for thy transgression;
Be thou not froward, sith I am merciable!
Ah, gentle Jesu!
Who is that, that doth me call? (et cetera)

Think again, pride, on my humility!
Come to school, record well this lesson;
'Gain false envy think on my charity,
My blood all spent by distillation.
Why did I this? To save thee from prison;
Afore thine heart hang this little table,
Sweeter than balm 'gain ghostly poison:
Be thou not afraid, sith I am merciable.
Ah, gentle Jesu!
Who is that, that doth me call? (et cetera)

Lord, on all sinful, here kneeling on knee,
Thy death remembering of humble affection,
O Jesu grant of thy benignity
That thy five wells plenteous of fusion,
Called thy five wounds by computation,
May wash us all from surfeits reprovable.
Now for thy mother's meek mediation,
At her request be to us merciable.
Ah, gentle Jesu!
Who is that, that doth me call? (et cetera)

Producer: Mark Brown
Engineer: Antony Howell

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