# AVE VERUM CORPUS

## Motets and anthems of William Byrd

The Cambridge Singers + directed by John Rutter

Collegium RECORDS

'. . . For even as among artisans it is shameful in a craftsman to make a rude piece of work from some precious material, so indeed to sacred words in which the praises of God and the Heavenly host are sung, none but some celestial harmony (so far as our powers avail) will be proper. Moreover in these words, as I have learned by trial, there is such a profound and hidden power that to one thinking upon things divine and diligently and earnestly pondering them, all the fittest melodies occur as if of themselves and freely offer themselves to the mind which is not indolent or inert.'

William Byrd
(translated from the Latin dedication of Book I
of his *Gradualia* to the Earl of Northampton, 1605)



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This recording presents a selection of fifteen of the 150 or so Latin motets and three of the dozens of English anthems that, between them, form the larger part of the life's work of William Byrd (1543–1623), the greatest English composer of his era. The chosen motets and anthems represent just some of the many facets of Byrd's sacred music, now recognized after three centuries of neglect as among the most glorious ever written for choir.

# AVE VERUM CORPUS

## Motets and anthems of William Byrd

The Cambridge Singers • directed by John Rutter

Total playing time: 71' 00"

**English anthems**

1 Sing joyfully (2'18")
2 Turn our captivity (4' 38")
3 Praise our Lord, all ye Gentiles (2' 28")

**Motets of penitence and prayer**

4 Emendemus in melius (4' 08")
5 Siderum Rector (2' 50")
6 Plorans plorabit (5' 10")
7 Visita, quaesumus Domine (4' 08")

**Motets of praise and rejoicing**

8 Attollite portas (4 '16")
9 Laudibus in sanctis (5' 20")

**Motets for the Church's year**

10 Gaudeamus omnes (2' 40")
11 Ave verum Corpus (4' 05")
12 Veni, Sancte Spiritus (5' 45")
13 Christus resurgens (4' 10")
14 Solve iubente Deo (2' 30")
15 O magnum misterium (5' 42")
16 Non vos relinquam (1' 55")
17 O quam suavis (4' 48")
18 Justorum animae (2' 35")



**Byrd's church music**

William Byrd's place of honour as the greatest English composer of his era was hardly disputed in his lifetime and is hardly disputed now; yet only a small proportion of his large output is regularly performed, and indeed much of his sacred choral music, the core of his life's work, is virtually never performed. A handful of favoured motets, three Mass settings and some English Service music scarcely represent all the extraordinary richness, variety and expressive range to be found in the 150 or so Latin motets and over fifty English anthems into which he poured prodigious invention, unsurpassed technical mastery and passionate religious conviction.

The reasons for this neglect are, in part, understandable. Byrd's position in English musical life was anomalous: despite living and working in post-Reformation Protestant England, and despite writing some fine music for the new Anglican rite, he remained a staunch Catholic, writing and publishing Latin church music for the obsolete and indeed illegal Roman liturgy. Such performances as took place of his Latin church music were clandestine, held in Catholic country houses such as that of Byrd's patron Lord Petre who, like many others, risked the harsh penalties meted out to Catholic recusants for the sake of practising his faith. After Byrd's death his Latin publications were forgotten and only his English church music, some of which circulated in manuscript, remained in use. Thus matters remained until the early twentieth century when advocacy by such musicians as the organists H. B. Collins and R. R. Terry and the composer Holst led to a revival of interest; in the 1920s Byrd's church music was republished as part of the monumental *Tudor Church Music* edition, then in 1937 the musicologist E. H. Fellowes began work on a second, practical edition, a project he finally completed in 1950 (a new complete edition is currently in progress: see Bibliography). Yet comparatively few of the pieces in these great collected volumes were ever published separately and to this day most of Byrd's church music is to be found only in large books more suited to libraries than to choir stalls.

If the Reformed liturgy, inaccessibility of much of the music, and the lack of a continuous tradition of performance are obvious factors in over three centuries of neglect, there are perhaps other more subtle factors too. Like most of his contemporaries, Byrd himself remains a shadowy figure. Only the outward events of his life were recorded, and we have none of the biographical infilling that, at its best, can help to illuminate the work of a Mozart

or a Beethoven. Such personal qualities ascribed to Byrd as his stubbornness, shrewd business and political skills and so forth are deduced from the few known facts of his career, not chronicled in the memoirs of those who knew him. As with his greatest English artistic contemporary, Shakespeare, all that really remains of Byrd is his work, a legacy almost too daunting to take hold of on its own without the prior familiarity Shakespeare has enjoyed from continuous performance since his lifetime. Accident of revival, moreover, has favoured Byrd's English church music (by far the smaller part of his sacred work), together with the three Masses which, magnificent as they are, seem to have been conceived as essentially functional settings, intentionally more austere and impersonal then the gloriously rich and colourful motets.

Byrd's commitment to the motet—which in England, it must again be stressed, was a liturgically obsolete and unusable form except possibly in the Chapel Royal and Oxbridge chapels—seems paradoxically to have deepened as his life went on. A motet is defined as a polyphonic setting of a Latin sacred text, to be sung at a certain point in the Mass: but it is clear that the young Byrd divorced the form from its liturgical function in his three collections of *Cantiones Sacrae* (1575, 1589 and 1591). He describes the pieces in the 1575 volume as 'cantiones, quae ab argumento sacrae vocantur' (songs which, from their subject-matter, are called sacred)—a form of words perhaps designed to avoid any accusation of papistry but perhaps also suggesting that domestic and not church performance was envisaged. Byrd chose his texts freely without consideration for the liturgy: it has often been remarked that a number of them can be construed as laments for the plight of the English Catholics. The idea that amateurs might perform sacred pieces in their own homes was not, incidentally, far-fetched: Byrd's English publications, the *Psalmes, Sonets and Songs* (1588), *Songs of Sundrie Natures* (1589) and *Psalmes, Songs and Sonnets* (1611), all consist of a mixture of sacred and secular pieces for home performance. There can be no doubt, however, that by the time Byrd published his two books of *Gradualia* in 1605 and 1607 he had taken up the more 'committed' (and traditional) position of thinking of the motet specifically as a liturgical form: all the hundred or so motets in these two collections are ordered according to their appropriate place in Masses and Offices at various times in the church's year—with considerable precision,



moreover (see Bibliography, 'Jackman'). Kerman[1] has pointed out that in the dedication of Book 2 to Lord Petre Byrd refers to the contents as having 'mostly proceeded from your house (truly most friendly to me and mine)', a broad hint that Petre's extensive household at Ingatestone Hall in Essex—near Byrd's home in Stondon Massey—had used the music at undercover masses.

Evidence that Byrd's Latin church music was indeed sung, perhaps in the composer's presence, is cheering; yet his monumental achievement in composing, setting in order and publishing such varied and finely-wrought motets seems to transcend purely practical intentions. Like Bach's publications—the *Clavierübung*, the *Canonic Variations*, the *Art of Fugue*—Byrd's *Cantiones Sacrae* and more especially his *Gradualia* seem to stand as testaments. It is tempting, but fanciful, to suppose that Byrd published his Latin church music in readiness for the day the Catholic faith might return to England; more likely, he wanted to codify and set down in print his achievement, so that the musical styles it represented and the liturgy it was intended to adorn should not be completely forgotten.

For us today, this music is a treasure house that, thanks to the work of such as Fellowes, Kerman and Brett has been explored and examined; it now cries out for wider public exposure.

1. *The Masses and Motets of William Byrd*, p. 50.

## Some performance considerations

It is folly to imagine that we can today faithfully recreate performances of Byrd's church music such as he might have heard and approved: too many parameters remain uncertain. First, it should be said that to listen to a seventy-minute sequence of anthems and motets, many of which were intended to be heard singly in the context of religious ritual, is rather like attending a complete performance of Bach's '48': worthwhile, but utterly different from the composer's intention. This apart, Byrd poses a number of specific questions not easily answered. Unlike most of his English contemporaries, he had publication in mind when he wrote sacred music, even though in some cases publication represented little more than a gathering together of music previously circulated in manuscript. The *Cantiones Sacrae* books

must have been intended primarily for amateurs to buy and perform in their own homes, just like the flood of madrigal publications in the 1590s and later. It seems likely that these home performances would have involved small adult groups, with female sopranos. A similar situation probably applied to the *Gradualia*: if Byrd had immediate practical performances in mind, they must have been scraped together from any available singers (and maybe instrumentalists) in the Catholic households secretly celebrating masses at this time. Jackman and Kerman both cite interesting evidence of this practice, though dating from somewhat earlier (1586):

> . . . the place [a Berkshire country house] was most suited to our work and ministrations, not merely for the reason that it was remote and had a congenial household, but also because it possessed a chapel, set aside for the celebration of the Church's offices. The gentleman was also a skilled musician, and had an organ and other musical instruments and choristers, male and female, members of his household. During these days it was just as if we were celebrating an uninterrupted Octave of some great feast. Mr Byrd, the very famous English musician and organist, was among the company . . . [1]

Byrd, then, was obviously willing to accept an element of makeshift. But if he had an ideal performance in mind, what was it like? Did he keep forever in his mind the rich sonority of the Lincoln Cathedral choir of his youth—a choir which in 1535 had as many as sixty members, boys and men? Or the sound of the Chapel Royal choir, which, at full strength, numbered twelve boys and thirty-two men?[2] On the other hand, might he have looked rather to the modest forces and less reverberant acoustic of madrigal performances for his sound-ideal? The music, I believe, supports elements of both contentions. Some pieces such as *Solve iubente Deo*, *Gaudeamus omnes* and *Laudibus in sanctis*, with their intricate and fast-

1. From the autobiography of William Weston, a Jesuit missionary.
2. These figures from le Huray (see Bibliography), p.15. By *c.*1600 Lincoln Cathedral choir had shrunk to twenty-seven members. No figures are given for Byrd's time there in the 1560s. It should be remembered that not all those on the choir register necessarily sang at once.



moving textures, have a decidedly madrigalian aspect and seem to call for clarity and slenderness. Others, such as the solemnly homophonic *Emendemus in melius* invite a fuller, richer sound. For this recording, the Cambridge Singers numbered twenty-eight voices: five adult female first sopranos, five adult female second sopranos, five female altos and one male alto, six tenors, and six basses. Tempting as it might have been to reduce forces for the 'madrigalian' pieces, this would have created anomalies of its own: in *Solve iubente Deo*, for instance, intricate polyphony is found side by side with massive homophonic alleluias. The guiding principle adopted has been to aim for textural clarity in complex passages, while allowing a natural increase of vocal sonority in homophonic passages. *A cappella* performance was opted for, though many other possibilities involving instrumental doubling and/or substitution would have been historically likely, especially if madrigal performance practice is taken as one of Byrd's precedents.

Pitch remains a controversial issue in the performance of all Renaissance music, though Byrd's penchant for wide-ranging alto, tenor and bass parts (the altos often low and the tenors high) tends to dictate within a semitone or two the practical pitch for a modern mixed choir: Byrd seems to have written his inner voice parts for male singers having an extended range of tenor-plus-alto, an extinct breed nowadays.

Text pronunciation has recently opened up as a topic of debate in Renaissance music, both Latin and vernacular. Despite evidence that Byrd's singers would not have sung Italianate Latin[2], it has been adopted for this recording as being an acceptable *lingua franca* for modern singers and listeners, its bright, clear vowels and crisp consonants being undeniably helpful in articulating the often complex music. Modern English has likewise been unashamedly adopted: it avoids a minefield of speculation about the 'authentic' pronunciation of Byrd's English, and, more importantly in terms of the purpose of this recording, it avoids the possible erection of a barrier between the music and a listener's concentration on its meaning. Finally, the interpretative principles we have generally adopted rest on the assumption that Byrd's use of the relatively abstract, impersonal pre-Reformation motet form was irreversibly changed by his personality and post-Reformation consciousness: his aim to write music 'framed to the life of the words', articulated on the title page of his *Psalmes, Songs and Sonnets* of 1611,

1. See Brown, preface to 1589 *Cantiones Sacrae (The Byrd Edition)*

informed his motet writing also, resulting in music whose often intense and passionate expressiveness is contained within disciplined, 'classic' structures of great variety and resource. Every Byrd motet is different; most have a strong individual character springing out of the text; some are more like madrigals than motets, calling for brisk, dance-like tempos; others are grave and solemn. It is a measure of the greatest of Byrd's church music (and here, parallels with Bach spring to mind) that no performance can ever capture all that it has to offer, because some of its qualities are mutually exclusive: grandeur and intimacy, complexity and clarity, liturgical objectivity and personal expressiveness. Yet Byrd's own implicit acceptance of radically different kinds of performance gives encouragement to his interpreters not to pursue slavishly the Will-o'-the-wisp of authenticity: but rather to seek the expressive core of each piece and to draw it out—a joyous task when his structures are so lucid, his voice-writing so expert and rewarding to sing, and the emotional power and conviction of his writing so vivid and compelling to performer and listener alike.

JOHN RUTTER

## The Cambridge Singers

**Sopranos:** Caroline Ashton, Donna Deam, Karen Kerslake, Jo Maggs, Jocelyn Miles, Mary Mure, Penelope Stow, Nancy-Jane Thompson, Clare Wallace, Susanna Watson
**Altos:** Nicola Barber, Peter Gritton, Frances Jellard, Nicola-Jane Kemp, Melanie Marshall, Sandra Schulze
**Tenors:** Harvey Brough, Andrew Gant, Paul Gordon, Mark LeBrocq, Angus Smith, Nicholas Wilson
**Basses:** Donald Greig, James Mure, James Ottaway, Charles Pott, Christopher Purves, Benjamin Thompson



## English anthems

### 1 Sing joyfully (SSAATB)

This concise and delightfully festive anthem was never published by Byrd himself, but it gained very widespread popularity in his lifetime, appearing in about a hundred early seventeenth-century manuscript and printed sources. On stylistic grounds le Huray believes it to date from Byrd's later years; it is not unlike his *Sing we merrily*, published in 1611. Word-painting, notably at 'blow the trumpet in the new moon' helps bring the familiar psalm text vividly to life.

> Sing joyfully unto God our strength. Sing loud unto the God of Jacob. Take the song and bring forth the timbrel, the pleasant harp and the viol. Blow the trumpet in the new moon, even in the time appointed, and at our feast day. For this is a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob.
>
> *(Psalm 81, vv. 1–4)*

### 2 Turn our captivity (SSAATB)

Published in *Psalmes, Songs and Sonnets* of 1611, this is a rare example of an English anthem by Byrd with a text that can be taken to refer to the 'captivity' of the English Catholics (a significant number of his earlier Latin motets have this political undertone). The style of the music shows the influence of the madrigals and consort music of the time—appropriately enough, since the 1611 collection seems to have been intended for home rather than church performance. Byrd uses the six-voiced texture with resourceful economy, frequently contrasting groups of high and low voices and only rarely using all six at once. A nice musical pun is found at the opening, where the three-note rising phrase on the word 'turn' is immediately 'turned' upside down.

> Turn our captivity, O Lord, as a brook in the south. They that sow in tears, shall reap in joyfulness. Going they went and wept, casting their seeds; but coming, they shall come with jollity, carrying their sheaves with them.
>
> *(Psalm 126, vv. 5–7)*

### 3 Praise our Lord, all ye Gentiles (SSATBB)

Also from the 1611 publication, this magnificent anthem seems to belong more in a great cathedral than in a music room; perhaps Byrd wrote it for the Chapel Royal and later put it in *Psalmes, Songs and Sonnets* rather than let it be forgotten. Fellowes singles out its spacious Amen as 'one of the most perfect settings of the word in the whole realm of music'.

Praise our Lord, all ye Gentiles, praise him, all ye people: Because his mercy is confirmed upon us. And his truth remaineth for ever. Amen.

*(Psalm 117, vv. 1–2)*

## Motets of penitence and prayer

### 4 Emendemus in melius (SATTB)

This was the piece Tallis and Byrd chose to open their joint 1575 collection of *Cantiones Sacrae*. Byrd was no doubt rightly proud of it, and must have remembered it in later years when writing his very similar *Miserere mei* (1591) and the final section (also to the *Miserere* text) of his monumental *Infelix ego* (1591). Yet it is easy to overlook how novel the deceptively simple, hymn-like texture of *Emendemus* would have seemed in 1575; nothing quite like it had been written in England, though there is a clear model in a motet by the Italian Ferrabosco, whose work Byrd studied and admired. The text is solemnly intoned in richly-spaced chords, with dramatic silences between almost every line; imitative polyphony is stripped away, save tor the final 'libera nos'. The overall effect was aptly described by Kerman: 'It does not often happen with Byrd (or any other composer) that a piece breathes such immediacy; however modest in style and scope, the piece is red hot, with its rush of phrases, its flux of melodic style, its brazen climax, and its amazing resolution doubly powerful and doubly solid because in the few bars infinite power seems held in reserve.' ('On William Byrd's *Emendemus in melius*', *The Musical Quarterly*, 1963, p. 431)

Emendemus in melius, quae ignoranter peccavimus: ne subito praeoccupati die mortis, quaeramus spatium pœnitentiae, et invenire non possumus. Attende, Domine, et miserere: quia peccavimus tibi. Adiuva nos, Deus salutaris noster: et propter honorem nominis tui libera nos.

*(Respond at None, Ash Wednesday)*

*(Let us atone for the sins we have committed in our ignorance; lest, suddenly surprised at the day of our death, we seek time for repentance and cannot find it. Lord, hear us and have mercy, for we have sinned against thee. Help us, O God of our salvation: and according to the honour of thy Name, deliver us.)*

### 5 Siderum Rector (SSATB)

Also from the 1575 *Cantiones Sacrae*, this heart-easingly gracious and flowing hymn-setting (Byrd calls it 'hymnus') is, like *Emendemus in melius*, an experiment based on a Ferrabosco model. The experiment consisted in following the metre of a hymn text in music whose note values matched the long and short syllables of the poetry rather exactly. (This idea, *vers mesuré*, had been in the air for a while.) Byrd, aware of the risk of monotony inherent in the rather insistent Sapphic metre of *Siderum Rector*, wisely set only two stanzas, and provided variety by swapping the melody between soprano and tenor and adding a little polyphonic elaboration to the plain texture.

Siderum Rector, Deus alme, nostris
Parce iam culpis, vitia remittens:
Quo tibi puri resonemus almum
Pectoris hymnum.

*Ruler of the heavens, merciful God,*
*Forgive our sins and pardon our offences:*
*Let our hearts and voices sweetly resound*
*With a hymn to thee.*

Gloria Patri, genitaeque Proli,
Et tibi, compar utriusque semper,
Spiritus alme, Deus unus omni
Tempore saecli. Amen.

*Glory be to the Father, to the Son,*
*And to thee, Holy Spirit,*
*One God, world without end.*
*Amen.*

*(from the hymn 'Virginis proles')*

### 6 Plorans plorabit (SAATB)

This is one of the few non-liturgical motets in the 1605 *Gradualia*: its text is clearly one of the several chosen by Byrd for musical setting (mainly in the 1589 and 1591 *Cantiones Sacrae*) because of their relevance to the English Catholic 'captivity'; its double meaning even extends to the warning that the King and Queen (James I and Anne) who are keeping 'the Lord's flock' captive will be brought low. The sombre character of this text is reflected in its vocal layout, with only one soprano line but divided altos. In 1622 Henry Peacham, in *The Compleat Gentleman*, wrote that Byrd was 'of him selfe naturally disposed to Gravitie and Pietie', and in this piece he wrote one of the finest and most eloquent of his laments. Apart from a half-close in its thirty-sixth bar, the eighty-six-bar piece sweeps forward from beginning to end as if in one intense flood of grief, controlled only by the discipline of its tightly-knit polyphony.

Plorans plorabit, et deducet oculus meus lacrimas, quia captus est grex Domini. Dic regi et dominatrici: Humiliamini, sedete, quoniam descendit de capite vestro corona gloriae vestrae.

*(Jeremiah 13, vv. 17–18)*

*(Mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the Lord's flock is carried away captive. Say unto the king and to the queen, Humble yourselves, sit down: for your principalities shall come down, even the crown of your glory.)*

### 7 **Visita, quaesumus Domine** (SSAT)

This inexplicably neglected little piece must be one of the loveliest and most affecting Byrd ever wrote. It comes from the 1605 *Gradualia*, and presents an unexpectedly serene, gentle aspect of his musical personality. In a texture of magical transparency, without basses, he paints a sound-picture of guardian angels hovering overhead, akin in atmosphere to the peace and radiance of a Raphael Nativity. The office of Compline, itself a jewel of liturgy, can seldom have been so sensitively and evocatively adorned.

> Visita, quaesumus Domine, habitationem istam, et omnes insidias inimici ab ea longe repelle: Angeli tui sancti habitent in ea, qui nos in pace custodiant; et benedictio tua sit super nos semper. Per Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen.
>
> *(Benediction at Compline)*

> *(Visit, we beseech thee, O Lord, this dwelling, and drive far from it all snares of the enemy. Let thy holy angels dwell herein to preserve us in peace, and may thy blessing be upon us evermore; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.)*

## Motets of praise and rejoicing

### 8 **Attollite portas** (SSAATB)

One of the boldest and most ambitious of Byrd's earlier compositions, this psalm-motet was published in the 1575 *Cantiones Sacrae* and also appears, adapted to English words, in manuscript sources. As in *Turn our captivity*, Byrd uses a six-voiced texture not only for intricate imitative polyphony but also for echo effects between high and low voices.

> Attollite portas, principes, vestras, et elevamini, portae aeternales: et introibit Rex gloriae. Quis est ipse Rex gloriae? Dominus fortis et potens in prœlio. Quis est ipse Rex gloriae? Dominus virtutum ipse est Rex gloriae. Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto: Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.
>
> *(Psalm 24, vv. 7, 8, 10)*

> *(Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors: and the King of glory shall come in. Who is the King of glory? It is the Lord strong and mighty, even the Lord mighty in battle. Who is the King of glory? even the Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost: as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.)*



### 9 **Laudibus in sanctis** (SSATB)

This joyful and quite extended setting of an anonymous poetic paraphrase of Psalm 150 opens the 1591 *Cantiones Sacrae*. It is interesting that Byrd wrote very few madrigals but was willing, here and elsewhere in his sacred works, to adopt madrigal techniques—word-painting, dance rhythms and clear sectional construction—if he so chose. *Laudibus in sanctis* is one of the most madrigalian of Byrd's motets, a feature that in 1591 would have seemed novel and even revolutionary. An interpretative conundrum presents itself in the 'laeta chorea pede' section: Brown (in *The Byrd Edition*) and Kerman are categorically certain that the dotted minim here is equivalent to the semibreve of the preceding and following sections. We tried it that way. But singers and producer rebelled; the dancing feet referred to in the text obstinately plodded. We adopted Thurston Dart's solution (dotted minim = minim), which doubles the speed, and the music instantly danced. There are no manuscript sources for this piece; is it possible that there is a mistake in the only source we have, Byrd's printed edition? Proportional notation was confusing and sometimes ambiguous even to sixteenth-century musicians.

| | |
|---|---|
| Laudibus in sanctis Dominum celebrate supremum; | *In holy praises celebrate the Lord most high;* |
| Firmamenta sonent inclyta facta Dei; | *Let the heavens echo the glorious acts of God:* |
| Inclyta facta Dei cantate sacraque potentis | *Sing of the glorious acts of God, and with holy voice* |
| Voce potestatem saepe sonate manus. | *Ever magnify his power and handiwork.* |
| Magnificum Domini cantet tuba martia nomen: | *Let the martial trumpet praise the great name of the Lord* |
| Pieria Domino concelebrate lyra. | *And the Muses' lyre join in celebration.* |
| Laude Dei resonent resonantia tympana summi: | *Let the loud timbrel resound in praise of the most high God,* |
| Alta sacri resonent organa laude Dei. | *Likewise the lofty organ.* |
| Hunc arguta canant tenui psalteria corda, | *Praise him with the psaltery's nimble string;* |
| Hunc agili laudet laeta chorea pede. | *Praise him with joyful dancing feet.* |
| Concava divinas effundant cymbala laudes, | *Let the hollow cymbals pour forth his holy praises* |
| Cymbala dulcesona laude repleta Dei. | *And the sweet-sounding cymbals be filled with the praise of God.* |
| Omne quod aethereis in mundo vescitur auris, | *Let everything in the world that lives and breathes* |
| Halleluia canat, tempus in omne Deo. | *Sing an endless alleluia to God.* |

*(Psalm 150, paraphrased in Elegiac verse)*

## Motets for the Church's year

### 10 Gaudeamus omnes (SSATB)

This brightly-voiced motet, published in the 1605 *Gradualia*, celebrates the Feast of All Saints with spirited merriment; the rejoicing of the angels is delightfully depicted in a passage calling for vocal and verbal agility.

Gaudeamus omnes in Domino, diem festum celebrantes sub honore Sanctorum omnium:
de quorum solemnitate gaudent angeli, et collaudant Filium Dei. Exultate, justi, in Domino:
rectos decet collaudatio. Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto:
Sicut erat in principio, et nunc et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

*(Introit for the Feast of All Saints)*

*(Let us all rejoice in the Lord, celebrating the feast day in honour of all the saints: the angels are glad at their festival and praise the Son of God. Rejoice, ye righteous, in the Lord: it becometh well the just to be thankful. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost: as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.)*

### 11 Ave verum Corpus (SATB)

Published in the 1605 *Gradualia* but believed by Kerman to have been written earlier, this motet in honour of the Blessed Sacrament has long been one of Byrd's best-loved pieces, and indeed it does distil in a short space many of his special qualities: perfectly controlled polyphony that is wonderful to sing; clear structure; an element of the unexpected (as in the progression of the first three chords); and, above all, an unmistakable sense of fervour and conviction that reaches out and takes hold of the listener.

| | |
|---|---|
| Ave verum Corpus, natum de Maria Virgine: | *All hail, O true Body, of the blessed Virgin born,* |
| Vere passum, immolatum in cruce pro homine: | *Which in anguish to redeem us didst suffer upon the cross;* |
| Cuius latus perforatum unda fluxit sanguine: | *From whose side, when pierced by spear there came forth both water and blood:* |
| Esto nobis praegustatum in mortis examine. | *Be to us at our last hour the source of consolation.* |
| O dulcis, O pie, O Jesu Fili Mariae, Miserere mei. Amen. | *O loving, O holy, O Jesu, thou Son of Mary, have mercy on me. Amen.* |

*(Pope Innocent VI, d.1342: Sequence hymn for the Feast of Corpus Christi)*



### 12 Veni, Sancte Spiritus, et emitte (SSATB)

The text of this mellifluously fervent motet from the 1607 *Gradualia* is the so-called 'Golden Sequence', proper to Pentecost, a prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Facing the challenge of a longer-than-usual text, Byrd skilfully contrives to set the words concisely and without repetition, yet without the slightest sense of haste or lack of overall coherence. The opening invocation 'Veni' is as simple and effective as can be imagined.

Veni, Sancte Spiritus,
Et emitte coelitus
Lucis tuae radium.
Veni, pater pauperum,
Veni, dator munerum,
Veni, lumen cordium.

Consolator optime,
Dulcis hospes animae,
Dulce refrigerium.
In labore requies,
In aestu temperies,
In fletu solatium.

O Lux beatissima,
Reple cordis intima
Tuorum fidelium.
Sine tuo numine,
Nihil est in homine,
Nihil est innoxium.

Lava quod est sordidum,
Riga quod est aridum,
Sana quod est saucium.
Flecte quod est rigidum,
Fove quod est frigidum,
Rege quod est devium.

*Come, thou holy Paraclete,*
*And from thy celestial seat*
*Send thy light and brilliancy:*
*Father of the poor, draw near;*
*Giver of all gifts, be here;*
*Come, the soul's true radiancy.*

*Come, of comforters the best,*
*Of the soul the sweetest guest,*
*Come in toil refreshingly:*
*Thou in labour rest most sweet,*
*Thou art shadow from the heat,*
*Comfort in adversity.*

*O thou Light, most pure and blest,*
*Shine within the inmost breast*
*Of thy faithful company.*
*Where thou art not, man hath naught;*
*Every holy deed and thought*
*Comes from thy Divinity.*

*What is soilèd, make thou pure;*
*What is wounded, work its cure;*
*What is parchèd, fructify;*
*What is rigid, gently bend;*
*What is frozen, warmly tend;*
*Strengthen what goes erringly.*

Da tuis fidelibus
In te confidentibus
Sacrum septenarium.
Da virtutis meritum,
Da salutis exitum,
Da perenne gaudium. Amen.

*(13th cent.)*

*Fill thy faithful, who confide*
*In thy power to guard and guide,*
*With thy sevenfold Mystery.*
*Here thy grace and virtue send:*
*Grant salvation in the end,*
*And in heaven felicity.*

*(tr. J. M. Neale)*

## 13 **Christus resurgens** (SATB)

Motets of this type, where one of the voice parts (in this case the tenor) consists of a plainchant *cantus firmus* in slow notes, passed out of favour after the Reformation, not least because plainchant was itself jettisoned by the reformers. Byrd wrote about a dozen specimens of this essentially archaic form, mostly in his early years; *Christus resurgens* was published in the 1605 *Gradualia*, but may well have been written much earlier. If so, Byrd had good reason to remember it and want to see it in print: it has an atmosphere unlike any other of his pieces—defiant, powerful, gritty, bespeaking the struggle and victory of the Resurrection.

Christus resurgens ex mortuis iam non moritur: mors illi ultra non dominabitur. Quod enim vivit, vivit Deo. Alleluia. Dicant nunc Iudaei, quomodo milites custodientes sepulchrum perdiderunt Regem ad lapidis positionem. Quare non servabant petram iustitiae? Aut sepultum reddant, aut resurgentem adorent nobiscum dicentes Alleluia.

*(Sarum Antiphon for Easter Day)*

*(Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Let the Jews now say how the soldiers guarding the sepulchre sealed with a stone lost the King. Why did they not guard the tombstone? Let them either return him buried, or with us worship him risen, saying Alleluia.)*

## 14 **Solve iubente Deo** (SSATTB)

It is worth studying the text of this exceptionally sonorous and resplendent motet from the 1607 *Gradualia*; Byrd illustrates it; phrase by phrase, with vividness and imagination, from the bold opening command 'Solve', to the rapid passage on 'catenas' suggestive of rattling chains, and finally to the calm vistas of the 'caelestia regna beatis'. St Peter, as the founder of the Church, was clearly a figure of special significance to Byrd, and his festivals are honoured in the *Gradualia* with two other notably fine six-voice motets, *Tu es Petrus and Tu es pastor ovium.*



Solve, iubente Deo, terrarum, Petre, catenas, qui facis ut pateant caelestia regna beatis. Alleluia.

*(Alleluia verse for the Mass of St Peter's Chains)*

*(Peter, break the fetters of earth at God's command so that the heavenly realms may open up to the blessed ones. Alleluia.)*

## 15 **O magnum misterium** (SATB)

Byrd's setting of this much-loved text was published in the 1607 *Gradualia. Beata Virgo*, although shown as a separate motet, was intended to follow it immediately in the liturgy and is here included. Awe and wonder are fittingly conveyed in music of great simplicity and tenderness.

O magnum misterium, et admirabile sacramentum, ut animalia viderent Dominum natum iacentem in praesepio. Beata Virgo, cuius viscera meruerunt portare Dominum Christum. Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum. Beata Virgo, cuius viscera meruerunt portare Dominum Christum.

*(Matin Responsory for Christmas Day)*

*(O great mystery and wonderful sacrament, that animals should see the new-born Lord lying in a manger. Blessed is that Virgin, whose womb deserved to bear Christ our Lord. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed is that Virgin, whose womb deserved to bear Christ our Lord.)*

## 16 **Non vos relinquam** (SSATB)

This poignantly brief and tightly-knit motet from the 1607 *Gradualia* conceals its contrapuntal complexity (including beautifully interwoven alleluias) behind a deceptively simple, flowing texture. Byrd somehow manages to combine a feeling of the sadness of Christ's parting from the Apostles with the joy he promises for them in the future.

Non vos relinquam orphanos. Alleluia. Vado, et venio ad vos. Alleluia. Et gaudebit cor vestrum. Alleluia.

*(Magnificat Antiphon at First Vespers, Whit Sunday)*

*(I will not leave you comfortless. Alleluia. I will come to you. Alleluia. And your heart shall rejoice. Alleluia.)*

17 **O quam suavis** (SATB)
The text of this eucharistic motet from the 1607 *Gradualia* is curious, beginning as it does with mystical contemplation of the Sacrament but moving on to echo a verse from the Magnificat (to which it serves as an antiphon), and ending somewhat vindictively with the rich being sent empty away. Byrd encompasses the changes of subject and mood in a seamlessly unified setting remarkable for the chromatic harmonies with which it opens.

> O quam suavis est, Domine, Spiritus tuus, qui, ut dulcedinem tuam in filios demonstrares, pane suavissimo de coelo praestito, esurientes reples bonis, fastidiosos divites dimittens inanes.
> *(Magnificat Antiphon for First Vespers, Feast of Corpus Christi)*

> *(O how sweet, Lord, is thy Holy Spirit: thou who, to show thy loving kindness unto thy children, sent sweetest bread from heaven, filling the hungry with good things but sending the rich empty away.)*

18 **Justorum animae** (SSATB)
Peace—or, at least, peace of mind—is something Byrd can scarcely have experienced in his own life. The practice of his illegal faith made him forever vulnerable to informers, enemies and a hostile government; a life spent in fear, however subconscious, of the knock on the door at midnight cannot be a relaxed one. *Justorum animae*, from the 1605 *Gradualia*, evokes the profound and eternal peace to be hoped for in the next life. It belongs to musical history's small and select company of pieces that speak of heaven as if from personal knowledge.

> Justorum animae in manu Dei sunt, et non tanget illos tormentum mortis. Visi sunt oculi insipientium mori: Illi autem sunt in pace.
> *(Offertory for All Saints' Day)*

*(The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die; but they are in peace.)*



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For a fuller bibliography, see 'Byrd' article in *The New Grove II*.

## Byrd's life: principal events and publications

| | |
|---|---|
| 1543 | Born, possibly in Lincoln. Believed to have become a pupil of Tallis in London (dates and details unknown) |
| 1563 | Appointed Organist and Master of the Choristers at Lincoln Cathedral. Begins to compose prolifically, mainly keyboard and vocal music |
| 1568 | Marries Juliana Birley (who died *c.* 1586) |
| 1570 | Appointed Gentleman of the Chapel Royal (later Organist, jointly with Tallis) |
| 1572 | Leaves Lincoln, moves to London (settles then or later in Harlington, Middlesex) |
| 1575 | He and Tallis granted a joint 21-year monopoly by the Queen in the printing and publication of music and music paper. Byrd and Tallis publish *Cantiones Sacrae* (34 motets: 17 by Byrd, 17 by Tallis), dedicated to the Queen |
| 1577 | Byrd's wife begins to be cited for recusancy (and Byrd himself from 1585) |
| 1588 | Publishes *Psalmes, Sonets and Songs* (35 sacred and secular consort songs for domestic performance) with great success |
| 1589 | Publishes *Songs of Sundrie Natures* (47 similarly assorted vocal pieces) and a second volume of *Cantiones Sacrae* (16 of his own motets; he confusingly called this volume 'Book I') |
| 1591 | Anthologizes 42 of his virginal pieces in a manuscript collection, *My Ladye Nevells Booke* |
| | Publishes *Cantiones Sacrae II* (21 of his own motets) |
| 1592–6 | Publishes his *Mass for Three Voices, Mass for Four Voices* and *Mass for Five Voices* |
| 1593 | Byrd and his family (with second wife Ellen) move to a large house in Stondon Massey, Essex. They are believed to have thereafter participated in Catholic activities based at nearby Ingatestone Hall, seat of Byrd's patron Lord Petre |
| 1605 | Publishes *Gradualia I* (63 motets and related pieces for liturgical use) |
| 1607 | Publishes *Gradualia II* (46 motets and related pieces for liturgical use) |
| 1611 | Publishes *Psalmes, Songs and Sonnets* (a miscellany of 32 English sacred and secular vocal and choral pieces) |
| 1623 | Byrd dies at Stondon Massey |

Photo: David E. Henderson

The Cambridge Singers
in the Lady Chapel of Ely Cathedral

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by the BBC Transcription Unit, April 1989
Balance engineer: Campbell Hughes
Cover design: Rowie Christopher
Cover picture: EyeWire
Layout: Nick Findell
Printed in Great Britain
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