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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cover: Master of Castelnuovo Scrvia, early 16th century, Saint Sebastian and Saint Roch kneeling before baby Jesus Milano, Museo Bagatti Valsecchi - akg-images / Electa

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Mapa Mundi (Tallis: Videte miraculum), and David Fraser (Byrd propers).

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# *Puer natus est*

TUDOR MUSIC FOR ADVENT & CHRISTMAS

stile antico

PRODUCTION **USA**

# *Puer natus est*

## TUDOR MUSIC FOR ADVENT & CHRISTMAS

<b>1</b>		THOMAS TALLIS (c. 1505–1585)	Videte miraculum	11'39
<b>2</b>		JOHN TAVERNER (c. 1490–1545)	Audivi vocem de caelo	4'09
<b>3</b>		WILLIAM BYRD (c. 1540–1623)	Rorate caeli desuper ( <i>Gradualia I, 1605</i> )	4'42
<b>4</b>		THOMAS TALLIS	Gloria ( <i>Missa Puer natus est</i> )	9'28
<b>5</b>		WILLIAM BYRD	Tollite portas ( <i>Gradualia I</i> )	2'10
<b>6</b>		THOMAS TALLIS	Sanctus & Benedictus ( <i>Missa Puer natus est</i> )	8'55
<b>7</b>		WILLIAM BYRD	Ave Maria ( <i>Gradualia I</i> )	2'08
<b>8</b>		THOMAS TALLIS	Agnus Dei ( <i>Missa Puer natus est</i> )	8'23
<b>9</b>		WILLIAM BYRD	Ecce virgo concipiet ( <i>Gradualia I</i> )	2'15
<b>10</b>		ROBERT WHITE (c. 1538–1574)	Magnificat	13'51
<b>11</b>		PLAINCHANT	Puer natus est	1'11
<b>12</b>		JOHN SHEPPARD (c. 1515–1558)	Verbum caro	9'17

### *stile antico*

*Helen Ashby, Kate Ashby, Rebecca Hickey, Katy Hill (2, 4, 6, 8), sopranos*  
*Emma Ashby, Eleanor Harries, Carris Jones, altos*  
*Jim Clements, Andrew Griffiths, Benedict Hymas, tenors*  
*James Arthur, Will Dawes, baritones*  
*Oliver Hunt, Matthew O'Donovan, basses*

## Tudor Music for Advent and Christmas

The backbone of this programme of Advent and Christmas music is Thomas Tallis's extraordinary, yet incomplete, Christmas mass, *Missa Puer natus est*. In spite of the work's phenomenal scope, there is no conclusive evidence as to its origin. One attractive theory holds that the mass was first performed by the joint forces of Queen Mary's Chapel Royal and Philip II of Spain's renowned *Capilla Flamenca* in December 1554 (Philip and Mary had married earlier in the year). It is based on the plainchant *Puer natus est nobis* – the introit for Christmas Day Mass – and it has been suggested that the plainchant may well have held a *double entendre* for its first hearers, as Mary was at the time erroneously believed to be pregnant with a much hoped-for heir. The work's lavish and unusual seven-part scoring – and the presence of Flemish influences in Tallis's writing – lend weight to this theory. On the other hand, the question of exactly when the first performance might have taken place presents a problem. We know that such a 'joint service' took place at St Paul's Cathedral on 2 December, but that is unlikely to have been the occasion on which this mass was performed: Tallis surely knew the difference between Advent and Christmas – and cared! Furthermore, as one scholar has argued, it seems improbable that Tallis 'would have been so insensitive as to use a text beginning "Puer natus est nobis" to celebrate the Queen's rumoured pregnancy when the sex of the child, the survival of both child and mother and the stability of the realm would all have been causes of trepidation rather than rejoicing'.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever the work's original purpose, what is not in doubt is its extraordinary scale and virtuosic compositional intricacy. The impression it leaves is one of immense grandeur, an effect created at least in part by the steady progression of the cantus firmus, coupled with the almost unbroken use of a seven-part texture throughout. While the manner of his imitation seems to reflect the latest trends of continental composition, the use of a different plainchant melody as a cantus firmus is very much a nod to the conventions of earlier generations. Indeed, Tallis's treatment of the plainchant is governed by an extraordinarily complex quasi-medieval numerological scheme, whereby each note is assigned a value based on its vowel in the original text. We even hear the melody in retrograde at one point during the mass. This elaborate cantus firmus treatment, Tallis's varied palette of contrapuntal techniques and the work's carefully proportioned structure together render this magisterial mass setting one of the most strikingly unusual and innovative works of the period.

The second thread running through the programme is the group of four Byrd Propers – the seasonal liturgical texts set for Votive

Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary during Advent. These come from the *Gradualia* of 1605, the first of two books in which William Byrd set out to provide the recusant Catholic community with a comprehensive array of musical settings of the Mass Propers throughout the year. As was Byrd's custom in *Gradualia*, these works are models of concision; each one is perfectly proportioned and compellingly individual, yet Byrd develops his musical ideas over a comparatively short space of time, and is as economical with his use of material as he is efficient in his (mostly syllabic) word setting. Nonetheless, his masterful control of texture ensures that each point of imitation is clearly declaimed.

Perhaps it is Byrd's tonal resourcefulness and his genius for striking motivic invention that stand out here, though. *Tollite portas* is a prime example of the latter, where the opening point – festive and fanfare-like as the King of Glory is welcomed through the gates of Heaven – gives way to an ascending scale as the psalmist asks 'Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?' *Rorate caeli* is similarly memorable for its persistent ascending and descending motifs – as if to illustrate the believer calling up to the heavens, which, in turn, pour down justice. By contrast, the power of *Ecce virgo* is in the awe and wonder created by the unexpected shifts in tonality in the opening passage. These lend a palpable sense of anticipation which is only fulfilled at the final return to the tonic key of C minor as the name of the promised child – 'Emmanuel' – is revealed. In *Ave Maria*, Byrd creates another striking effect by effectively interrupting the opening platitudes of the angel's greeting – set to short, graceful phrases in the tonic minor – with an astonishingly luxuriant cadence in the relative major at the claim 'the Lord is with thee'. It is as if – just for a moment – he involves us deeply in the emotive power of those words, before re-adopting a more detached contemplative stance; the final alleluias graciously ooze simplicity itself.

The earliest polyphonic work in the programme, Taverner's *Audivi vocem de caelo*, follows the common pattern of alternating polyphony and plainchant, and is, liturgically speaking, a responsory for All Saints Day, though the gospel passage from which the text originates is closely associated with Advent. The piece is striking for its close-knit four-part texture and narrow tessitura, making it particularly suitable for performance by upper voices alone; indeed, there is evidence to suggest that it might have been sung by a quartet of boy trebles. In other respects, the soaring musical language of this piece is very typical of Taverner's style, though there are also some interesting turns – perhaps most notably the bold passing dissonance in the very first phrase of the polyphony, which results in a peculiarly arresting start to the piece.

If Taverner's motet is notable for its narrow compass, the opposite can be said of Robert White's expansive and virtuosic *Magnificat*, a work which rivals many of John Sheppard's for its huge range – well over three octaves spread over up to six parts. White's consistently inventive musical ideas and his imaginative and varied approach to melodic writing render this work a veritable contrapuntal 'tour de force'. Again, plainchant verses alternate with counterpoint, but the contrapuntal verses themselves vary in conception: some are scored for full six-part choir, with the plainsong Magnificat tone sung as a cantus firmus in the tenor; others use smaller configurations of voices requiring subdivision of parts, changing at a chosen point in each verse, affording the composer the opportunity to exploit a wonderful diversity of different textures. At one point the plainchant moves to the mean voice; in others it disappears almost completely, left only as a fragmented memory in some points of imitation.

The remaining two works are both based on a strict monorhythmic cantus firmus according to the old tradition: the plainchant appears in regular semibreves in the tenor voice throughout the polyphonic sections of the piece, which alternate with plainchant. The two composers, however, create startlingly different works. *Videte miraculum*, which opens the programme, is one of Tallis's most sublime: through careful control of texture and harmonic rhythm, lulling use of repetition on several levels, and a masterfully-paced development of motifs, Tallis's motet effuses an extraordinary sense of rapt adoration, stillness and mystery; to hear it is to stand awestruck before a fine painting of the Virgin and Child. In *Verbum caro*, by contrast, Sheppard creates a radiant and sensuously enveloping sound-world spanning a huge vocal range, characterized by thrilling harmonic turns, his uniquely quirky approach to part-writing, and some truly daring sonorities. Never one to sacrifice a thrilling effect on the altar of contrapuntal integrity, Sheppard calls upon his trebles to divide into a three-part *gymel* at the very end of the polyphony, in order to finish on a glorious eight-part chord.

MATTHEW O'DONOVAN

<sup>1</sup> David Humphreys, "Tallis's *Suscipe quaeso*", *Early Music* XXVIII no. 3 (August 2000), 508.

1 |

**Videte miraculum** matris Domini: concepit virgo virilis ignara consortii, stans onerata nobili onere Maria; et matrem se laetam cognoscit quae se nescit uxorem.  
Haec speciosum forma prae filiis hominum castis concepit visceribus, et benedicta in aeternum Deum nobis protulit et hominem.  
Stans onerata...uxorem.  
Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.  
Et matrem se laetam...uxorem.

*Vespers Respond,  
Purification of the BVM*

2 |

**Audivi vocem** de caelo venientem: venite omnes virginis sapientissimae. Oleum recondite in vasis vestris dum sponsus advenerit. Media nocte clamor factus est. Ecce sponsus venit. Oleum recondite in vasis vestris dum sponsus advenerit.

*After Matthew 25:1-12  
Matins Responsory, All Saints Day*

3 |

**Rorate caeli** desuper, et nubes pluant justum: aperiat terra, et germinet salvatorem. Benedixisti Domine terram tuam, avertisti captivitatem Jacob.  
Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto. Sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.  
Rorate caeli... salvatorem.

*Isaiah 45:8, Psalm 85:1  
Introit, Votive Mass of the BVM during Advent*

4 |

**Gloria** in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis. Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te, gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam, Domine Deus, Rex caelestis, Deus Pater omnipotens. Domine Fili Unigenite, Jesu Christe, Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis; qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram. Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere nobis. Quoniam tu solus Sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu solus Altissimus, Iesu Christe, cum Sancto Spiritu: in gloria Dei Patris. Amen.

**Behold the miracle** of the Mother of the Lord: the Virgin Mary conceives though she knows not a man; standing laden with her noble burden; she knows herself to be a joyful mother, though she knows herself not to be a wife.  
She has conceived in her chaste womb one who is beautiful in form beyond the sons of men, and, blessed for ever, she has brought forth for us God and man.  
Standing laden . . . be a wife.  
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.  
She knows . . . be a wife.

**I heard a voice** coming down from heaven: Come, all you most wise virgins. Store up oil in your jars until the bridegroom comes. At midnight there was a cry: Behold, the bride-groom comes. Store up oil in your jars until the bridegroom comes.

**Drop down, heavens**, from above, and let the clouds rain down justice; let the earth be opened and bring forth the Saviour.  
Lord, you have blessed your land; you have turned away the captivity of Jacob.  
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.  
Drop down . . . the saviour.

**Glory to God** in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory, Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father almighty. Lord Jesus Christ, only-begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you who take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; you who take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer. You who are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. For you alone are holy, you alone are Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

5 |

**Tollite portas** principes vestras, et elevamini portae aeternales, et introibit Rex gloriae. Quis ascendet in montem Domini, aut quis stabit in loco sancto ejus? Innocens manibus et mundo corde. Alleluia.

*Psalm 24:7,3-4  
Gradual, Votive Mass of the BVM during Advent*

6 |

**Sanctus**, Sanctus, Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua. Hosanna in excelsis.

Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.  
Hosanna in excelsis.

7 |

**Ave Maria**, gratia plena, Dominus tecum; benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui. Alleluia.

*Offertory, Votive Mass  
of the BVM during Advent*

8 |

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

9 |

**Ecce virgo concipiet**, et pariet filium, et vocabitur nomen ejus Emmanuel.

*Isaiah 7:14  
Communion, Votive Mass  
of the BVM during Advent*

**Lift up your gates**, O princes, and be lifted up, you everlasting doors, and the King of glory will come in. Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord, or who shall stand in his holy place? He who has innocent hands and a pure heart. Alleluia.

**Holy, holy, holy**, Lord God of Hosts: Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.

**Hail Mary**, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Alleluia.

**Lamb of God**, you who take away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Lamb of God, you who take away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Lamb of God, you who take away the sins of the world, grant us peace.

**Behold, a virgin shall conceive** and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel.

4

**10** |

**Magnificat** anima mea Dominum,  
et exsultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo,  
quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae. Ecce enim  
ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes,  
quia fecit mihi magna, qui potens est,  
et sanctum nomen ejus, et misericordia ejus in  
progenies et progenies timentibus eum. Fecit  
potentiam in brachio suo, dispersit superbos  
mente cordis sui; deposuit potentes de sede  
et exaltavit humiles; esurientes implevit bonis  
et divites dimisit inanes. Suscepit Israel puerum  
suum, recordatus misericordiae, sicut locutus  
est ad patres nostros, Abraham et semini eius in  
saecula.

*Luke 1:46-55*

Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto. Sicut erat  
in principio et nunc et semper et in saecula  
saeculorum. Amen.

**11** |

**Puer natus est** nobis, et filius datus est nobis:  
cujus imperium super humerum ejus: et vocabitur  
nomen ejus, magni consilii angelus.

*After Isaiah 9:6  
Introit, Christmas Day Mass*

**12** |

**Verbum caro** factum est et habitavit in nobis;  
cujus gloriam vidimus quasi unigeniti a patre  
plenum gratiae et veritatis.

In principio erat verbum et verbum erat apud  
Deum et Deus erat verbum.

Cujus gloriam... et veritatis.

Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.

Plenum gratiae et veritatis.

*John 1:14,1  
Matins Respond, Christmas Day*

**My soul magnifies the Lord**, and my spirit rejoices  
in God my Saviour; for he has looked upon the  
lowliness of his handmaid. For behold, from  
henceforth all generations will call me blessed;  
for he who is mighty has magnified me, and holy  
is his name, and his mercy is on those who fear  
him from generation to generation. He has shown  
strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud  
in the imagination of their hearts; he has put  
down the mighty from their thrones and exalted  
the humble; he has filled the hungry with good  
things, and sent the rich away empty. He has  
helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his  
mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and  
to his offspring forever.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the  
Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is now and  
ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

**To us a boy is born**, and to us a son is given, and  
the government is upon his shoulders, and his  
name shall be called Angel of Great Counsel.

**The Word was made flesh** and dwelt among us,  
and we have seen his glory, as of the only Son  
from the Father, full of grace and truth.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was  
with God, and the Word was God.

And we have seen . . . and truth.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the  
Holy Spirit.

Full of Grace and Truth.



**stile antico** is an ensemble of young British singers, now established as one of the most original and exciting new voices in its field. The group is much in demand in concert, performing regularly throughout Europe and North America. Their recordings on the harmonia mundi label have enjoyed great success, receiving the *Diapason d'or de l'année* and the *Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik*, and twice earning them a Grammy® nomination. Their release *Song of Songs* won the 2009 Gramophone Award for Early Music and reached the top of the US Classical Billboard Chart.

Working without a conductor, the members of Stile Antico rehearse and perform as chamber musicians, each contributing artistically to the musical result. Their performances have repeatedly been praised for their vitality and commitment, expressive lucidity and imaginative response to text. Stile Antico's repertoire ranges from the glorious legacy of the English Tudor composers to the works of the Flemish and Spanish schools and the music of the early Baroque. They are regularly invited to lead courses at Dartington International Summer School, and their commitment to educational work has been recognised through generous funding from the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

Stile Antico's recent performances include debuts in New York (*Music before 1800*), at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw and the Boston, Bruges and Utrecht Early Music Festivals. They have toured extensively with Sting, appearing throughout Europe, Australia and the Far East as part of his Dowland lute-song project *Songs from the Labyrinth*. Notable engagements in 2010-11 include debuts at the BBC Proms and at London's Wigmore and Cadogan Halls, extensive touring in the USA, and performances in Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, Switzerland and Mexico.