



presents

stile antico
early music vocal ensemble

Sopranos: Helen Ashby, Kate Ashby, Rebecca Hickey
Altos: Emma Ashby, Eleanor Harries, Kathy Nicholson
Tenors: Jim Clements, Andrew Griffiths, Benedict Hymas
Basses: James Arthur, Will Dawes, Oliver Hunt, Ed Elias

10 December 2011 at 7:30 – Cathedral of St. John, the Evangelist

Puer Natus Est

Veni Emmanuel	Plainchant
Videte miraculum	Thomas Tallis (c. 1505-1585)
Tollite portas	William Byrd (c. 1540-1623)
Gloria from Missa <i>Puer natus est</i>	Thomas Tallis
Ave Maria	William Byrd
Magnificat	Robert White (c. 1538-1574)
Audivi vocem de caelo	John Taverner (1490-1545)
Sanctus and Benedictus from the Missa <i>Puer natus est</i>	Thomas Tallis
Rorate caeli	William Byrd
Agnus Dei from the Missa <i>Puer natus est</i>	Thomas Tallis
Ecce Virgo concipiet	William Byrd
Puer natus est	Plainchant
Verbum Caro	John Sheppard (c. 1515-1558)

This programme is centred on Thomas Tallis's magnificent 7-part mass, written for the combined choirs of the Spanish and English Chapels Royal and first performed in December 1554. Based on the Christmas plainsong 'Puer natus' - 'a boy is born' - it celebrated not only the Advent season, but also the apparent pregnancy of Queen Mary. The mass is interspersed with contemporary liturgical settings for Advent and Christmas, from the perfect miniatures of William Byrd's propers for the fourth Sunday of Advent to Robert White's extended Magnificat and John Sheppard's extraordinary Verbum Caro.

About Stile Antico

Stile Antico is an ensemble of young British singers, now established as one of the most original and exciting voices in its field. Much in demand in concert, the group performs regularly throughout Europe and North America. Their recordings on the Harmonia Mundi label have enjoyed great success, winning awards including the *Diapason d'or de l'année* and the *Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik*, and have twice attracted GRAMMY nominations. Their recent release *Song of Songs* won the 2009 Gramophone Award for Early Music and reached the top of the US Classical 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 engagements include debuts at the BBC Proms, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, early music festivals in Boston, Bruges, Barcelona and Utrecht, and at the Cervantino Festival in Mexico. The group has toured extensively with Sting, appearing across Europe, Australia and the Far East as part of his Dowland project *Songs from the Labyrinth*. During 2011, Stile Antico makes its debut at London's Wigmore Hall, appears at leading festivals throughout Europe and twice tours the United States.

Stile Antico is a Harmonia Mundi Recording Artist. Stile Antico is represented in North America by Knudsen Productions.

Puer natus est: 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 2nd 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."¹

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.

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

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 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 readopting 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, 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 for 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.

Texts and Translations

Veni, veni Emmanuel: Captivum solve Israel,
Qui gemit in exilo, Privatus Dei Filio

Gaude! Gaude! Emmanuel
Nascetur pro te, Israel.

Veni, O Jesse Virgula; Ex hostis tuos ungula,
De specu tuos tartari, Educ, et antro barathri.

Veni, veni, O Oriens; Solare nos adveniens;
Noctis depelle nebulas, Dirasque noctis tenebras.

Veni, Clavis Davidica; Regna reclude celica;
Fac iter tutum superum, Et claude vias inferum.

Veni, Veni Adonai, Qui populo in Sinai
Legem dedisti vertice In maiestate gloriae.

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

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.

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, Iesu 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.

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

*O come, O come, Emmanuel! Redeem thy captive Israel That
into exile drear is gone, Far from the face of God's dear Son.*

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*O come, thou Branch of Jesse! Draw The quarry from the
lion's claw; From the dread caverns of the grave, From nether
hell, thy people save.*

*O come, O come, thou Dayspring bright! Pour on our souls the
healing light; Dispel the long night's lingering gloom, And
pierce the shadows of the tomb.*

*O come, thou Key of David, come, And open wide our heavenly
home; Safeguard for us the heavenward road, And bar the
way to death's abode.*

*O come, O come, Adonai, Who in thy glorious majesty
From Sinai's mountain, clothed in awe, Gavest thy folk the
elder Law.*

*Behold the miracle of the mother of the Lord;
a virgin has conceived though she knows not a man,
Mary, who stands laden with her noble burden;
knowing not that she is a wife, she rejoices
to be a mother. She has conceived in her chaste womb
one who is beautiful beyond the sons of men,
and blessed for ever, she has brought forth God
and man for us. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and
to the Holy Ghost.*

*Lift up your gates, O ye princes; and be ye lifted up, O
eternal gates: and the King of glory shall enter in. Who
shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord, or who shall
stand in His holy place? The innocent in hands and clean
of heart. Alleluia.*

*Glory be to God on high,
and on earth peace, good will towards men.
We praise thee, we bless thee, we worship thee, we glorify
thee, we give thanks to thee for thy great glory,
O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty.
O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ;
O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takest
away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.
Thou that takest away the sins of the world, receive our
prayer. Thou that sittest at the right hand of God the
Father, have mercy upon us. For thou only art holy; thou
only art the Lord; thou only art most high, O Christ, with
the Holy Ghost, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.*

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art
thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.
Alleluia*

Magnificat anima mea Dominum

Et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo.
Quia respexit humilitatem ancillæ suæ: ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes. Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est, et sanctum nomen eius. Et misericordia eius a progenie in 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 misericordiæ suæ, Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros, Abraham et semini eius in sæcula. Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto: Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in sæcula sæculorum. Amen.

Audivi vocem de caelo venientem: Venite omnes virgines sapientissimæ; Oleum recondite in vasis vestris, dum sponsus advenerit. Media nocte clamor factus est. Ecce sponsus venit.

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua. Osanna in excelsis. Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini. Osanna in excelsis.

Rorate caeli desuper, et nubes pluant justum: aperiatur 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.

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

Ecce Virgo concipiet et pariet filium: et vocabitur nomen ejus Emmanuel.

Puer natus est nobis, et filius datus est nobis: cujus imperium super humerum ejus: et vocabitur nomen ejus, magni consili Angelus.

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.

Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto. Sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper. Et in Saecula saeculorum, amen.

My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden. For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath magnified me and holy is his Name. And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations. He hath showed strength with his arm he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble and meek. He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent empty away. He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed, for ever. 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.

I heard a voice from heaven saying: Come, all you wise virgins; Lay up the oil in your vessels when the bridegroom cometh. At midnight there was a cry made: Behold the bridegroom cometh.

Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Drop down ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: Let the earth open and bring forth a Saviour. Lord, thou hast blessed thy land: Thou hast turned away the captivity of Jacob. 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.

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

Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bring forth a son: and His name shall be called Emmanuel.

A Child is born to us, and a Son is given to us: Whose government is upon His shoulder: and His Name shall be called, the Angel of Great Counsel.

The Word was made flesh and lived with us and we saw his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten by the Father, full of grace and truth.

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

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.

