

CAMBRIDGE TAVERNER CHOIR

Owen Rees, director



Durer: Death and the Lansquenet

*What is our life? A play of passion,
Our mirth the music of division.
Our mother's wombs the tiring-houses be
Where we are dressed for this short comedy.
Heaven the judicious sharp spectator is,
That sits and marks still who doth act amiss.
Our graves that hide us from the searching sun
Are like drawn curtains when the play is done.
Thus march we, playing, to our latest rest:
Only we die in earnest, that's no jest.*

Sir Walter Raleigh

PROGRAMME

Ahi caso acerbo! (from *Orfeo*, 1607)

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

*Ahi caso acerbo, ahi fat'empio e crudele,
Ahi stell'ingiuriose, ahi Ciel avaro.
Non si fidi huom mortale
Di ben caduco e frale
Che tosto fugge, e spesso
A gran salita il precipiozio e presso.
(Ah, bitter chance! Ah, wicked and cruel destiny!
Ah, baleful stars! Ah, rapacious heaven!
Mortal man, put not your trust
In a transient and frail benevolence
Which soon will vanish -
And the higher the leap, the greater the fall.)*

This chorus is sung at the moment in *Orfeo* when Eurydice's death is announced, and voices one of the major concerns of artists of all kinds during the Renaissance - man's mortality and transience, and the insignificance of worldly achievement. In an age of unprecedented discovery, enlightenment and wealth, and its accompanying humanism, the relationship of man to God and the nature and extent of human power came under intense scrutiny. The fate after death of those who were mighty on earth was a central theme in the literature of the period - as seen, for instance, in the 'over-reaching' central characters of *Macbeth* and *Dr Faustus*. Artists, such as Holbein in *The Ambassadors*, painted great men in their finery, but accompanied them by vivid 'mementi mori'. "The higher the leap, the greater the fall" is also a recurrent theme in our concert tonight, which is dominated by laments for royalty, nobility and great composers.

**Nymphes des bois
O mors inevitabilis**

**Josquin Desprez (c.1440-1521)
Jheronimus Vinders (fl. 1510- 1550)**

*Nymphes des bois, deesses des fontaines,
Chambres experts de toutes nations,
Changez vos voix fort cleves et haultaines
En cris tranchantz et lamentations.
Car d'Atropos les molestations
Vostr' Ockeghem par sa rigeur attrape
Le vray tresior de musigu' et chief d'ouvre
Qui de trepas desormais plus n'eschappe,
Dont grant doumaigne est que la terre coeuvre.
Accoutrez vous d'abits de deuil,
Josquin, Brumel, Pierchon, Compere,
Et plorez grosses larmes d'oeil,*

*Perdu avez vostre bon pere.
Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine
Et lux perpetua luceat eis.
Requiescat in pace. Amen.*

(Wood-nymphs, goddesses of the springs, skilled singers of all nations, change your clear and lofty voices into sharp cries and lamentations. For the harsh molestations of Atropos have inescapably ensnared your Ockeghem, Music's very treasure and master, who henceforth can no longer escape death. It is a great misfortune that he is covered by earth. Dress yourself in clothes of mourning, Josquin, Brumel, Pierchon, Compere; and weep great tears from your eyes, you who have lost your good father. Give them eternal rest, O Lord, and let the perpetual light shine on them. May he rest in peace. Amen.)

*O mors inevitabilis, mors amara, mors crudelis, Josquin de Pres dum necasti, illum nobis abstulisti, qui suum per harmoniam illustravit ecclesiam. Propterea tu musice dic: requiescat in pace. Requiem aeternam dona ei Domine, et lux perpetua luceat ei.
(O inescapable death, bitter death, cruel death, by slaying Josquin des Prez you stole him from us, who by his harmony gave lustre to the church. Now say thou with music: may he rest in peace. Eternal rest grant unto him O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him.)*

In the late fifteenth century it became increasingly common to lament the death of the greatest composers in poetry and music, a genre now usually termed 'deploration'. The largest numbers of such works took as their subjects the deaths of Johannes Ockeghem in 1497 and Josquin des Prez in 1521. The text of *Nymphes des bois* is an elegy by Jean Molinet on the death of Ockeghem, while Vinders' *O mors inevitabilis* commemorates Josquin; this latter text was apparently the epitaph included with a portrait of Josquin at Ste Gudule in Brussels.

**Planxit autem David
Absalon fili mi
Lugebat David Absalon**

**Josquin Desprez
Josquin Desprez
Nicolas Gombert (c.1495- c.1560)**

Planxit autem David planctu huicemodi super Saul et Jonathan filium eius: Doleo super te, frater mi Jonathan, decore nimis, et amabilis valde super amorem mulierum. Super mater amat unicum filium suum, sic ego te diligebam. Quomodo ceciderunt robusti, et perierunt arma bellica.

(David lamented for Saul and his son Jonathan with this lament: I am desolate for you, my brother Jonathan, you of great virtue; and your love surpassed the love of women. As a mother loves her only son, so I loved you How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war destroyed.)

Absalon fili mi, quis det ut moriar pro te, fili mi Absalom? Non vivam ultra, sed descendam in infernum plorans.

(Absalom my son, would that I might die for you, my son Absalom. Let me live no longer, but descend into hell weeping)

Lugebat David Absalon, pius pater filium, tristis senex puerum: heu me fili mi Absalon, quis mihi det ut ego pro te moriar. O fili mi Absalon? Rex autem David filium cooperto flebat capite. Poro rex operuit caput suum, et clamabat voce magna: fili mi Absalon.
(David mourned for Absalom, a pious father for his son, a sad old man for his boy: Alas, my son Absalom, would that I might die for you, O my son Absalom. King David wept with covered head for his son. Then the King uncovered his head, and cried with a great voice: my son Absalom.)

Many composers from Josquin onwards were moved to produce expressive settings of David's laments on the deaths of his son Absalom, and the son of King Saul, Jonathan (as recorded in the Second Book of Samuel). Josquin's *Absalon fili mi* was probably composed to mark the death either of Pope Alexander's son in 1497, or of the Emperor Maximilian I's son in 1506. It is most famous for its use of extreme flat keys, and for the repeated musical 'descent' with which it ends, accompanying the words 'let me descend into hell weeping.' Gombert's treatment of the same subject is altogether more grand, the eight-voice parts engaging in pungent clashes which mirror in music the grief of the king.

**Versa est in luctum
Si pie Domine
Versa est in luctum**

**Alonso Lobo (c.1555-1617)
anon, (composed 1520)
Tomas Luis de Victoria (1548-1611)**

Versa est in luctum cithara mea, et organum meum in vocem flentium. Parce mihi, Domine, nihil enim sunt dies mei.
(My harp is turned into mourning, and my music into the voice of those that weep. Spare me, Lord, for my days are nothing.)

Si pie Domine defecit nobis Alphonsus rex noster, gaudium cordis nostri conversum est in luctum. Cecidit corona capitis nostri. Ergo ululate populi, plorate sacerdotes, lugete pauperes, plangite nobiles, et dicite: anima regis nostri Alphonsi requiescat in pace.
(If, Holy Lord, our King Alphonsus has been lost to us, the joy of our heart is turned into weeping. The crown of our head is dead. Therefore cry out o ye people, weep ye priests, mourn ye poor, lament ye nobles, and say: may the soul of our king Alphonsus rest in peace.)

All great occasions of state in the Renaissance - whether dynastic marriages, victories in war, or royal and noble deaths - were marked with specially commissioned music. Tonight we perform three works from Spain and Portugal written in commemoration of royalty. Alonso Lobo's powerful motet was printed in 1602, under the title "Ad Exsequias Philip II Cathol. Regis Hisp." ("for the funeral of Philip II, Catholic King of Spain"), and must therefore have been composed in 1598. The second motet in this group commemorates an equally important figure in Iberian history - the first king of Portugal, Alfonso Henriques, who gained independence from Spain, and began his reign in 1128. In 1520 his body was moved to a splendid new tomb within the monastery church of Santa Cruz in Coimbra, and the motet performed tonight was written for this occasion. The final work within this group

was composed by Victoria for the obsequies in 1603 of the Dowager Empress Maria (sister of Philip II of Spain), whom the composer had served as choirmaster and chaplain. The motet forms the emotional climax of Victoria's great *Requiem* published in 1605.

INTERVAL OF 15 MINUTES

What is our life?
Sleep, fleshly birth
Know you not
When David heard
O Jonathan
When David heard
How are the mighty fallen!
When David heard

Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625)
Robert Ramsey (fl. 1612-1644)
Thomas Tomkins (1527-1656)
Thomas Tomkins
Thomas Weelkes (1576-1623)
Thomas Weelkes
Robert Ramsey
Robert Ramsey

*What is our life? A play of passion,
Our mirth the music of division.
Our mother's wombs the tiring-houses be
Where we are dressed for this short comedy.
Heaven the judicious sharp spectator is,
That sits and marks still who doth act amiss.
Our graves that hide us from the searching sun
Are like drawn curtains when the play is done.
Thus march we, playing, to our latest rest:
Only we die in earnest, that's no jest. (Text by Sir Walter Raleigh)*

*Sleep fleshly birth in peaceful earth,
And let thine ears list to the music of the spheres,
While we around this fairy ground
Thy doleful obit keeping
Make marble melt with weeping.
With num'rous feet we'll part and meet,
Then chorus-like in a ring thy praises sing,
While showers of flowers bestrew thee.
Rest in soft peace, sweet youth, and there remain
Till soul and body meet to join again.*

Know you not that a prince, a great prince, is fall'n this day in Israel. Alas, woe worth the day. The precious son of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how is he esteemed as a pitcher, the work of the hand of the potter. Surely, as men of low degree are vanity, so men of high degree are but a lie. Great Britain mourn, let every family mourn. O family of David, family of Levi, sorrowing for him as for thy first born, sigh and say, sob and sing: Ah Lord, ah his glory!

When David heard that Absalom was slain, he went up to his chamber over the gate, and wept. And thus he said: O my son Absalom, would God I had died for thee, O Absalom my son.

How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thy high places. O Jonathan, woe is me for thee, my brother Jonathan: very kind hast thou been to me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war destroyed!

The second part of tonight's concert concentrates on the works of English composers active during the reign of James I. James's eldest son and heir, Henry, became during his short life the focus for the nation's hopes of future glory, and his private court a centre for artistic endeavour - including music. Several composers, including Tomkins and Ramsey, wrote pieces commemorating the prince: the verse anthem *Know ye not* is one of Tomkins' most impressive works. It may well be that some of the remarkable English settings of King David's laments, with which the concert ends, were intended as elegies for Prince Henry; certainly, their textual theme of death in youth could most appropriately have been applied to the prince.

One might draw parallels also with the untimely death (like Absalom and Jonathan, in battle) of Sir Philip Sidney, whose funeral is pictured on our poster. Sidney had, like Henry, combined patronage of the arts with his life as a statesman, and was considered the epitome of the Renaissance gentleman. His death in 1596 was much lamented by the poets, notably by Spenser in *Astrophel*, and moved Byrd to compose a musical elegy (in the form of a consort song). Sir Walter Raleigh, whose text *What is our life?* Gibbons set to music, occupied a similar position. He fell from grace, however, and his death by execution was less exalted. How are the mighty fallen!

Cambridge Taverner Choir, director Owen Rees.

Sopranos: Sally Terris, Caroline Preston Bell, Margaret Simper, Rachel Sutton, Tanya Wicks, Sarah Caldwell, Josie Dixon, Bernadette Nelson, Helen Garrison.

Altos: Rupert Preston Bell, Simon Godsill, Toby Gee, Tim Cronin.

Tenors: David Thomson, Finlay Lockie, Paul Baumann, Stephen Lawrence, Meurig Bowen, Jonathan Wells

Basses: James Durran, Damian Kerney, Frank Salmon, Paul Watson, Gary Snapper.

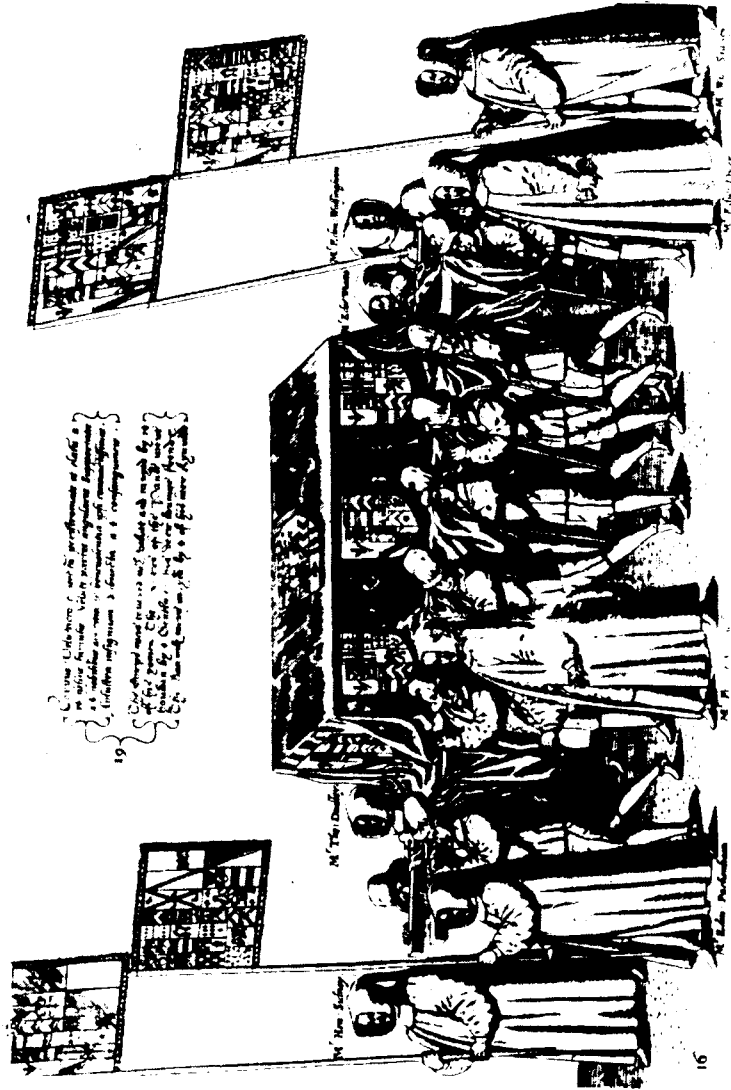
We would like to thank the Master, Fellows and Chaplain of Jesus College for their permission to use the chapel.

Forthcoming concerts in Jesus College Chapel:

APRIL 5th: TAVERNER - WESTERN WYNDE MASS

MAY 31st: THE SONG OF SONGS: music by Victoria, Morales, Lobo etc.

AUGUST 9th: Cambridge Early Music Festival concert.



19. *Handwritten text in cursive script, likely a Latin inscription or commentary related to the funeral scene.*

The funeral of Sir Philip Sidney

TO-MORROW, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

Shakespeare