

CAMBRIDGE TAVERNER CHOIR

The Golden Age

Victoria & the Empress Maria

Victoria Requiem

Little St Mary's Church, Cambridge

Sunday 28 March 2004

7.45pm

PROGRAMME

for the Vigil (first nocturn of Matins of the Dead)

Tædet animam mea

Missa pro defunctis

Introit: *Requiem æternam*

Kyrie

Gradual: *Requiem æternam*

Offertory: *Domine Jesu Christe*

Sanctus

Benedictus

Agnus Dei

Communion: *Lux æterna*

Motet: *Versa est in luctum*

Responsory at the Absolution: *Libera me, Domine*

INTERVAL of 10 minutes

Quem vidistis, pastores

Ave Maria (8vv)

Sancta Maria, succurre miseris

Vidi speciosam

The Cambridge Taverner Choir

Director: Owen Rees

sopranos: Helen Arnold, Diana Baumann, Josie Dixon,
Helen Garrison, Hester Higton, Katharine Medlow, Margaret Simper, Sally Terris

altos: Janet Bullard, Toby Gee, Zara Wright, Helen Zimmer

tenors: Paul Baumann, Mark Dourish, Will Cramer, David Thomson

basses: James Durran, Rupert Preston Bell, Gary Snapper, Paul Watson

The Cambridge Taverner Choir is a member of the National Federation of Music Societies
Our thanks to the Vicar and PCC of Little Saint Mary's for their kind permission to use the church.

Of all the eminent musicians who served the Hapsburg rulers of Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Tomás Luis de Victoria (c. 1548–1611) has long been the most famous. Born in Avila, Victoria studied in Rome and then worked there for many years as a musician and a priest. In the 1580s he petitioned King Philip II of Spain to be allowed to return to his native country, and was appointed chapel-master to Philip's sister (and daughter of the Emperor Charles V), the Dowager Empress Maria. Victoria served Maria at the Royal Convent of Discalced Nuns in Madrid, until her death on 26 February 1603. For the obsequies of the Empress, Victoria composed a collection of polyphonic items which were subsequently published by the royal press in Madrid in 1605, with the title *Officium Defunctorum, sex vocibus, in obitu et obsequiis Sacrae Imperatricis*. This music has come to be recognised as among his finest, and indeed to include one of the most powerful treatments of the Requiem Mass texts of all time.

Victoria's polyphony begins with a setting of one of the lessons from the first nocturn of Matins of the Dead, *Tædet animam meam*. The length of such lesson texts meant that it was traditional to set them in straightforward syllabic and homophonic style, and this Victoria does, but his homophony is an extraordinarily charged piece of musical rhetoric, evoking the passionate pleas and complaints of the text.

The music of the Requiem Mass itself is for six voices. Again following tradition, Victoria bases his polyphony on the relevant plainchants, placed here usually in the second superius part. Victoria clothes the chant in a wonderful richness and variety of textures and harmonies. The shaping of some chant phrases is here 'magnified' by the contributions of the other voices, as in the rise and fall of the opening section of the Introit, and the powerful manner in which the first Kyrie's opening flowers from a subdued beginning. Sometimes the free voices emphasise the chant by clashing with it, as in the battling suspensions between the two superius parts in the final Kyrie. The Offertory shows again the vividness with which Victoria responds to text, portraying on the one hand 'the pains of hell', 'the deep pit', and 'the lion's mouth', and on the other 'the holy light' of heaven.

In some ways the emotional core of Victoria's *Officium defunctorum* is not, however, a liturgical item, but an added motet, setting the text *Versa est in luctum* (the same text set by Alonso Lobo for the exequies of King Philip II). The poignancy of this music seems to us to lie partly in the mixture of major and minor. This is exceptional—one might say incomparable—music, full of the most contrasting musical gestures (such as the extraordinary leap upwards of a fifth for the last note of a phrase, to the peak note in note of the first superius part, at 'Domine') and emotions.

Finally comes an extended item for the Absolution at the catafalque, the responsory *Libera me, Domine*, its text concerned with the day of judgement. Here, as was traditional, chant and polyphony alternate, ending with the simple threefold 'Kyrie'.

In the second part of the concert we sing four of Victoria's motets. The first and last are jubilant six-voice works making much use of antiphonal contrasts between groups of high and low voices. *Quem vidistis, pastores* is for Christmas, with a text in question-and-answer form, inviting the shepherds to tell of what they have seen. The music breaks into triple time at the angels' praising of God. The other three motets are in honour of Mary, evoked in the perfumed language of the Song of Songs in *Vidi speciosam*, and called on as mediatrix in *Ave Maria* and *Sancta Maria, succurre miseris*. The latter is beautifully crafted four-voice piece, while the former is one of the composer's masterpieces of polychoral writing, beginning with two four-part choirs answering one another, and building to imposing climaxes at the name of Jesus and at the final evocation of the heavenly bliss.

* * * * *

Owen Rees began his academic and conducting career as Organ Scholar at St Catharine's College, Cambridge, studying with Peter le Huray and Iain Fenlon. After a period as College Lecturer in Music at St Peter's College and St Edmund Hall, Oxford, he joined the Music Department at the University of Surrey. In 1997 he returned to Oxford, where he is Fellow in Music and Organist at the Queen's College, Lecturer at Somerville College, and Lecturer in the Faculty of Music. His published studies include work on musical sources and repertoires from Coimbra, and on the music of, for example, Francisco Guerrero and William Byrd. His work as a scholar has consistently informed his work as a performer. He has conducted at festivals in the UK, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, France, and the Netherlands. Choirs under his direction have released CD recordings on the Herald, Hyperion, and Unicorn Kanchana labels, to consistently high critical acclaim.

The Choir

The Cambridge Taverner Choir is one of Britain's leading early music chamber choirs. Like The Tallis Scholars and The Sixteen, the choir emerged from the Oxford and Cambridge choral tradition and has built a reputation for powerful and expressive performances of Renaissance polyphony. Since reaching the shortlist for the Gramophone Early Music Award in 1994, the choir has received acclaim for its concerts and recordings of Renaissance choral music. In 2002, the choir performed at the York Early Music Festival and released its fourth CD, *Music from Renaissance Portugal Vol.2* which was voted one of the top ten CDs of 2002 by the Daily Telegraph. In March 2003 it appeared at the Oslo Church Music Festival to critical acclaim. In addition to appearances throughout Britain and abroad, the choir regularly performs to enthusiastic audiences in the beautiful church of Little St Mary's, Cambridge.

NEXT CONCERT

in the series

The Golden Age: Music for the Royal Houses of Spain and Portugal

Cardoso & King John IV of Portugal

Cardoso: Missa Paradisi portas

and motets by

Duarte Lobo

Sunday 20 June 2004, 7.45 pm. Little St Mary's Church

If you would like to receive further information about concerts and are not currently on the choir's mailing list, please speak to someone at the desk at the back of the church. If you would like to receive notification of future events by e-mail (even if you are currently on the mailing list), please fill in the sheet at the desk.

The choir's CD recordings *Music from Renaissance Portugal II* (including Duarte Lobo's two-choir *Missa Cantate Domino*) and *The Song the Virgine Soong* (Christmas Music from Tudor England) are on sale at the back of church, price £13.