



The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music

Monday 14 May 2018, 8.30pm
St Pancras Parish Church

Tuesday 15 May 2018, 8.30pm
St Cuthbert's Church, Earl's Court

“Night Prayer: Compline Renewed”

The Lacock Scholars
Greg Skidmore

Programme

Ben Rowarth
1992 –

Night Prayer: Compline Renewed

- i. The Lord almighty grant us a quiet night
- ii. Before the ending of the day
- iii. Psalm 4: Hear me when I call
- iv. Psalm 91: Whoso dwelleth under the defence of the Most High
- v. Psalm 134: Behold now, praise the Lord
- vi. Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit
- vii. Preserve us, O Lord, while waking
- viii. Lord, have mercy upon us

Night Prayer: Compline Renewed sets the service of compline as a through-flowing musical sequence. The music looks at the themes explored in the compline liturgy and the historical context behind the daily performance of this service, and attempts to present all of this in a new and engaging medium.

Compline was historically the final service of the day to be sung in monastic orders and is therefore mainly focussed around night, darkness and preservation. Its engagement with “night”, however, unearths something of a dichotomy: the focus is as much on night-time and darkness as on looking forward to morning and light. Night and day act as metaphors for death and rising to new life; there is also a practical request for deliverance through ‘the dangers of the night’ that we might live on to the next day. The constant back-and-forward “call and response” antiphonal technique that is used throughout the service structure reflects the need for reassurance, as those praying are about to enter into night with all its dangers. A gradual move away from working and worshipping as a collective, to each individual finding their own space and going to sleep – a state in which they are truly alone – is also reflected in the music.

This sense of dichotomy is reflected in the structure of tonight’s performance. The work’s tonality is created by two sets of keys that are contrasting but heard simultaneously throughout: one that, step by step, moves up one tone at a time, and one that moves down over the course of the piece. Each movement features crossing scales and chord progressions and constantly inverting themes. The music is influenced by plainsong, particularly near the beginning of the work; it features most strongly in the opening hymn and psalm settings. The work examines new techniques in positioning sound inside large spaces, reflecting the crossing musical and liturgical themes and also allowing the listener to hear both music and text from the perspective of different, moving individual singers as well as from an overall viewpoint.

Biographies

The Lacock Scholars

Founded in 2014, **The Lacock Scholars** is the United Kingdom's premier amateur consort group. Originally formed of young participants on Lacock Courses, and still retaining a close association with these events, the group is dedicated to small-ensemble, a capella singing of Renaissance polyphonic music and plainsong.

The Lacock Scholars has found a unique approach in their series of monthly concerts in London, exploring the relationship between concert performance and liturgical observance in partnership with one of London's hidden architectural gems, St Cuthbert's Church in Earl's Court. The ensemble seeks to create unified, holistic experiences for their audiences, free from applause and other interruptions, in which listeners are free to approach the music and architecture on their own terms. Branching out this year from this base in west London, the group now performs in this unique style throughout the capital and around the country, with highlights including performances at the Brighton Early Music Festival and at The Music Room at Gray's Antiques as part of the new Baroque Voices series.

Following a debut CD, *Music by Tallis, Lassus, Monteverdi, and others* in January 2017, the group plans to release a second recording, *In memoriam*, in the spring of 2018, including Duarte Lobo's *Requiem* for six voices and motets by Josquin, Byrd, Weelkes, and others written as contemporary laments for the great composers of the Renaissance.

Greg Skidmore

Born in Canada, Greg arrived in England as an undergraduate at Royal Holloway College, University of London. After graduating with First Class Honours in Music, his post-graduate Choral Scholarship at Wells Cathedral lead him to Lay Clerkships at Gloucester Cathedral and Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford. He now lives in London and pursues a varied career as a consort, choral, and solo oratorio singer alongside his increasing work as a conductor and workshop leader.

Solo engagements have included working with ballet dancer Carlos Acosta in his *A Classical Farewell* at the Royal Albert Hall; Stravinsky's *Canticum Sacrum*, Fauré's *Requiem*, and Handel's *Messiah* with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in Symphony Hall, Birmingham; Handel's *Messiah* with the Irish Baroque Orchestra; Purcell's *Ode for St Cecilia's Day* and Handel's *Dixit Dominus* with the Orchestra of the Age of the Enlightenment; Purcell's *Fairy Queen* with the Gabrieli Consort at the Spitalfields Festival in London; Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and *St John Passion*, *Mass in B Minor*, *Christmas Oratorio*, and *Magnificat* with Ex Cathedra as part of a long and regular association with

the group; Mendelssohn's *Elijah*; Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*; Monteverdi's 1610 *Vespers* at the Brighton Early Music Festival, and with I Fagiolini and the BBC Singers at the Barbican Centre's Milton Court Concert Hall; and two recent performances of Samuel Barber's magnificent song for baritone and string quartet, *Dover Beach*, at the Southwell Music Festival with Ensemble Perpetuo.

His solo work has taken him to Washington National Cathedral in the United States; the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in Venice; de Singel in Antwerp; Laeiszhalle in Hamburg; Wells, Gloucester, York, and Hereford cathedrals in the UK; and the Queen Elizabeth Hall and St. John's Smith Square in London among many others. His solo recording debut, released in 2011, was as Christus on Ex Cathedra's recording of the Lassus *St Matthew Passion*. A 2016 CD release of Alec Roth's oratorio *A Time to Dance* features Greg performing a role written specifically for him.

Equally comfortable in choral and consort singing, he has appeared with The Tallis Scholars, The Sixteen, The Cardinal's Musick, Tenebrae, The Gabrieli Consort, Alamire, Contrapunctus, The Eric Whitacre Singers, Collegium Vocale Ghent, Cappella Amsterdam, La Grand Chapelle (Madrid), Currende and Psallentes (both based in Belgium), The National Chamber Choir of Ireland, and the Tafelmusik Baroque Chamber Choir (Toronto), among others. A recent highlight was his participation in I Fagiolini's *Betrayal*, a fully staged, devised presentation of the madrigals and sacred music of Carlo Gesualdo.

As conductor of The Lacock Scholars, Greg directs a regular series of concerts of site-specific evenings that weave polyphonic music with plainsong and silence. He has given workshops and masterclasses in the UK, France, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia in association with The Sixteen and I Fagiolini and on his own, specialising in various collections of Renaissance polyphonic repertoire. Last year he joined the ranks of early music specialists associated with the week-long Lacock Courses. He is increasingly engaged in Canada as a guest conductor, clinician, and record producer. He has been published in *Early Music* and his writing has appeared in programmes and CD liner notes for The Tallis Scholars, The Sixteen, The Cardinal's Musick, The Gabrieli Consort, Tenebrae, and Ex Cathedra.

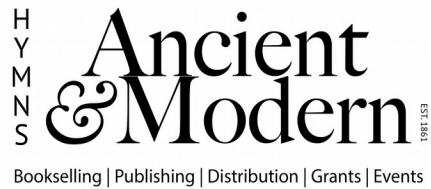
Ben Rowarth

Winner of the NCEM Composers Award (2012) and Leeds International Film Festival Best Documentary Soundtrack (2013), Ben has received numerous commissions and international performances, including Merton College Oxford (2014), York Minster (2015) and The Tower of London (2017). Following commissions for extended orchestral works from the Edinburgh Incidental Orchestra and Durham University Symphony Orchestra, Ben has also composed two live soundtracks for plays receiving exceptional reviews. His extended ensemble work *The Turn* has received multiple repeat performances since its premiere in 2016; its first recording has just been awarded the BBC Music Magazine 'Choice Disc' for March 2018 in the Choral and Song category.

Ben has been commercially recorded by ORA, The Rodolfus Choir and The Fieri Consort. His work has also received regular broadcasts on BBC Radio 3 by performers including The Tallis Scholars. His most recent commission, *The short walk of a madman*, a thirty-minute piece for eight solo voices, was recorded earlier this year by The Fieri Consort. Ben is currently working on commissions from Ensemble XY and The Fulham Camerata, where he holds the position of Composer in Residence.

Ben began his musical life as a chorister at Hexham Abbey where he later went on to sing bass and became organ scholar in 2009. Following undergraduate and postgraduate music degrees at Durham and York Universities, Ben now performs regularly as a baritone soloist, recently playing the role of Sarastro in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Polyphemus in Handel's *Acis and Galatea* and Plutone in Monteverdi's *Orfeo* with ensembles including Britten Sinfonia, The OAE, I Fagiolini and The BBC Singers.

Following his Organ Scholarship at Hexham Abbey Ben went on to become Interim Director of Music at University College, Durham in 2011. Having also spent time conducting University College Orchestra in Durham and guest conducting a number of choirs in the North East and around London, he now manages and conducts his own professional ensemble, Renaissance.



The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music was founded in 2002 with the aim of showcasing contemporary liturgical music in both service and concert. Now in its seventeenth year, the LFCCM has grown to include more than 50 events, dozens of composers, hundreds of performers and thousands of audience members, both live and online.

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