



The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music

Saturday 14 May 2022, 7.30pm
St Pancras Parish Church

“Dazzling Light”: Choral Music for 40 Voices

The Lacock Scholars
Greg Skidmore *direction*

Programme

<i>Johannes Ockeghem</i>	Deo gratias
<i>Alessandro Striggio</i>	Ecce beatam lucem
<i>Gabriel Jackson</i>	Sanctum est verum lumen
<i>Alec Roth</i>	Earthrise i. O oriens ii. Quid est homo? iii. Ecce, O ecce iv. Audite haec, omnes gentes v. O sapientia
<i>David Bednall</i>	Lux orta est iusto
<i>Thomas Tallis</i>	Spem in alium

It is difficult to overstate the impact that Thomas Tallis' 40-part motet *Spem in alium* has had on choral music, and especially choral music in England, in the roughly 450 years since it was first performed. It is, of course, no wonder: the technical feat of writing music for 40 separate voice parts alone is so easily understood as something of note, something unique and exciting, that for choirs that are able to perform it, it represents an obvious – and worthy – opportunity to “make a big splash.” Add to that the fact that *Spem in alium* is also very beautiful and powerful to listen to, leaving audiences mesmerised and awed in equal measure, and it's easy to understand how this piece has attained its iconic status. However, realising the tantalising prospect of performing such a wonderful piece in a concert that is undeniably a big event, presents some unavoidable practical problems.

Chief among these, for chamber choirs and consorts in particular, is finding 40 singers who are comfortable singing a very complicated piece of polyphonic counterpart on their own. Once this unenviable task has been completed it is perhaps no surprise that music directors and administrators the world over might exclaim: “... and all that work for *just one piece*?” Thus is born the 40-part modern commission! The phenomenon of the *Spem in alium* “companion” work is now a relatively well known genre in choral composition – albeit still a daunting challenge for any composer.

Tonight's programme doesn't contain all of the modern 40-part pieces in existence. (Robin Walker's *I have thee by the hand, O Man* is definitely worth a listen, for instance.) Our programme doesn't even include all of the 40-part pieces from the 16th century! There is a relatively well-known story, backed up by documentary evidence, that it was Alessandro Striggio who first wrote a 40-part piece of music. (He may have written more than one, and he definitely wrote a complete mass setting for 40 voices, including a final Agnus Dei which expands to 60 parts.) The mass and motet were likely performed together at the lavish wedding of a Medici prince in 1565.

Striggio visited England in 1567 and one of these 40-part works was performed in London as part of that visit. A nobleman remarked on how wonderful it was and wondered “whether none of our Englishmen could set as good a song.” Tallis rose to the challenge, and so began the competitive relationship between Striggio’s *Ecce beatam lucem* and Tallis’ *Spem in alium* much enjoyed and discussed by many a choral singer over drinks after a concert. A few other large-scale works from the Renaissance also deserve honourable mention: Josquin des Prez’s 24-part canon *Qui habitat* is one, as is Johannes Ockeghem’s *Deo gratias*. This piece was intended as a canon for 36 voices, but the flexible nature of its construction (as essentially four canonic melodies that can be sung simultaneously) means it’s possible to deconstruct it slightly into separate sections, as in tonight’s performance. It is difficult to put these canonic works in the same league as the Striggio and Tallis pieces, however, as the latter are fully through-composed works of counterpoint rather than simple canons.

Of the contemporary “companion” works to *Spem in alium*, both Gabriel Jackson’s *Sanctum est verum lumen* and Alec Roth’s *Earthrise* were commissioned by the Birmingham-based choir Ex Cathedra. The Jackson received its first performance in 2005, marking the 500th anniversary of Tallis’ birth. *Earthrise* was written in 2009 to celebrate both Ex Cathedra’s 40th anniversary and 40 years since the Apollo moon landings. Musically, the two pieces could not be more different. *Sanctum est verum lumen* is heavily influenced by both the canonic practices of Ockeghem and Josquin but also by *Spem in alium* itself, the opening phrase of which is an obvious homage. Jackson uses the same compositional devices as Tallis: block chords, polychoral effects, and through-composed counterpoint while also adding some more modern passages of aleatoric writing and manipulation of dynamics. *Earthrise*, in contrast, is a 25-minute choral cantata written on a grand scale. Its text is drawn primarily from the biblical psalms and evokes images of the grandeur of nature and of the heavens, and the place of humanity within this awe-inspiring context. “Earthrise” is the title of astronaut William Anders’ famous photograph of the planet Earth taken from lunar orbit during the Apollo 8 mission in 1968.

The most recent piece on tonight’s programme is David Bednall’s delightful and energetic *Lux orta est justo* which was written in 2015. It is influenced by both *Spem in alium* and Jackson’s *Sanctum est verum lumen*. (It is interesting to see chains of influence forming within these 40-part “companion” pieces.) Bednall’s work deserves special attention because it is *not* crafted on a massive scale, making the corralling of 40 voices even more of a challenge; instead, Bednall has created a piece of extraordinary joy and lightness that doesn’t become ponderous or lose its way. It is a complete joy to sing.

One final note about the title of tonight’s programme, “Dazzling Light”. The only piece which doesn’t make use of light imagery in its text is actually *Spem in alium*! Starting with *Ecce beatam lucem* (“Behold, the blessed light”) – which includes passages like “The dazzling splendour of the sun is matched by you, the moon, and by the stars shining brightly in their great glory” – this theme of light continues in both the Jackson and Bednall pieces. Jackson’s *Sanctum est verum lumen* sets an antiphon for the Feast of All Saints that choral fans may recognise in its English translation: “Holy is the true light and passing wonderful.” Bednall took his text from Psalm 96 and the famous mediaeval hymn *O splendor paternae gloriae* and it contains some wonderful poetry: “Light of light and source of light, day lightening day.” Alec Roth’s carefully chosen text also references light along with its heavy use of the imagery of the heavens in such phrases as “... brightness of light everlasting and sun of justice: come and illumine those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.”

Programme note by Greg Skidmore

Texts and Translations

Deo gratias.

Ecce beatam lucem,
ecce bonum sempiternum,
Vos turba electa celebrate Jehovam eiusque natum
aequalem Patri deitatis splendorem.
Virtus Alma et maiestas passim cernenda adest.
Quantum decoris illustri in sole
quam venusta es luna,
quam multo clar' honore sidera fulgent.
Quam pulcra quaequ' in orbe!
O quam perennis esca tam sanctas mentes pascit!
praesto gratia et amor, praesta nec novum;
praesto est fons perpes vitae.
Hic Patriarchae cum Prophetis,
hic David, Rex David ille vates,
cantans sonans adhuc aeternum Deum.
O mel et dulce nectar, O fortunatam sedem!
Haec voluptas, haec quies, haec meta, hic scopus
Nos hinc attrahunt recta in paradisum.

Sanctum est verum lumen
et admirabilem ministrans
lucem his qui permanserunt
in agone certaminis,
recipient a Christo splendorem sempiternum
in quo assidue felices laetantur.

Earthrise

i. O oriens, splendor lucis aeternae et sol iustitiae:
veni et illumina sedentes in tenebris
et umbra mortis.

ii. Quid est homo quod memor es eius?
Aut filius hominis quoniam visitas eum?
Constituisti eum super opera manuum tuarum;
omnia subiecisti sub pedibus eius.
Ad silicem extendit manum suam;
subvertit a radicibus montes.
In petris rivus excidit:
et omne pretiosum vidit oculus eius.
Profunda quoque fluviorum scrutatus est;
et abscondita produxit in lucem.
Sapientia vero ubi invenitur?
Et quis est locus intelligentiae?

Thanks be to God.

*Behold the blessed light,
behold eternal goodness,
you throng of the elect, praise Jehova and His Son
who is equal to the Father; praise the splendour of the deity.
Benign power and majesty are seen everywhere.
The dazzling splendour of the sun
is matched by you, the moon,
and by the stars shining brightly in their great glory.
How beautiful is all creation!
O how such eternal nourishment feeds holy minds!
Mercy and love are here, and always have been;
here is the eternal fount of life.
Here the Patriarchs and Prophets,
here David, King David the bard,
singing and playing instruments still praise eternal God.
O honey and sweet nectar, O blessed place!
This delight, this peace, this goal, this mark
draw us from here directly to paradise.*

*Holy is the true light
and passing wonderful,
lending radiance to them that endured
in the heat of the conflict,
from Christ they inherit a home of unfading splendour,
wherein they rejoice with gladness evermore.*

*O you who rise, brightness of eternal light and sun of justice:
come and illumine those who are in darkness
and the shadow of death.*

*What is man that you are mindful of him?
Or the son of man that you visit him?
You have set him in dominion over the works of your hands;
all things you have subjected under his feet.
To the hard rock he stretches out his hand;
he overturns the mountains by their roots.
In the rocks he cuts out channels;
and every precious thing is sought out by his eye.
The deeps of the rivers he also searches;
and hidden things he brings to light.
But where shall wisdom truly be found?
And where is the place of discernment?*

iii. Ecce, O ecce!

Levate in excelsum oculos vestros et videte;
quis creavit haec?
Quis mensus est pugillo aquas?
Et caelos palmo ponderavit?
Quis adpendit tribus digitis molem terrae?
Qui sedet super gyrum terrae;
et habitatores eius sunt quasi locustae.
Qui extendit velut nihilum caelos;
et expandit eos
sicut tabernaculum ad inhabitandum.
Qui dat secretorum scrutatores quasi non sint;
iudices terrae velut inane fecit.
Ecce gentes quasi stilla situlae.
Ecce insulae quasi pulvis exiguus.

iv. Audite haec, omnes gentes;

auribus percipite, omnes qui habitatis orbem,
quique terrigenae, et filii hominum,
in unum, dives et pauper.
Os meum loquetur sapientiam,
et meditatio cordis mei prudentiam.
Dominus sapientia fundavit terram;
stabilivit caelos prudentia.
Sapientia illius eruperunt abyssi,
et nubes rore concrescunt.
Fili mi, ne effluant haec ab oculis tuis;
custodi legem atque consilium,
Et erit vita animae tuae,
et gratia faucibus tuis.
Tunc ambulabis fiducialiter in via tua,
et pes tuus non inpinget.
Beatus homo qui invenit sapientiam,
et qui affluit prudentia.
Melior est adquisitio eius negotiatione argenti;
et auro primo fructus eius.
Pretiosior est cunctis opibus;
et omnia quae desiderantur
huic non valent comparari.
Longitudo dierum in dextera eius;
in sinistra illius divitiae et gloria.
Viae eius viae pulchrae;
et omnes semitae illius pacificae.
Lignum vitae est his qui adprehenderint eam;
et qui tenuerint eam beatus.

v. O sapientia, quae ex ore altissimi prodisti,
attingens a fine usque ad finem,
fortiter suaviter disponensque omnia:
veni ad docendum nos viam prudentiae.

Look, O look!

*Lift up your eyes on high and see;
who created these things?
Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand?
And weighed the heavens with his palm?
Who has balanced on three fingers the mass of the earth?
He that sits above the circle of the earth;
and its inhabitants are like locusts.
He that stretches out the heavens as nothingness;
and spreads them out
like a tent to live in.
He that makes the searchers of secrets as nothing;
the judges of the earth he renders worthless.
Look, the nations are like a drop from a bucket.
Look, the islands are like fine dust.*

*Hear this, all you nations;
pay heed, all you inhabitants of the globe,
all you that are earth-born, and you children of men,
all as one, rich and poor.
My mouth shall speak of wisdom,
and the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding.
The Lord by wisdom founded the earth;
he established the heavens by understanding.
By his wisdom the deeps burst forth,
and the clouds grow thick with moisture.
My child, let not these things escape from your eyes;
guard the law and keep good counsel,
And they will be life to your soul,
and adornment to your neck.
Then you will walk securely in your way,
and your foot will not stumble.
Blessed is the man that finds wisdom,
and who is rich in understanding.
It is better to acquire her than goods of silver,
and better than purest gold is her revenue.
She is more precious than great riches;
and all that could be desired
cannot be compared with her.
The length of days is in her right hand;
in her left hand, riches and glory.
Her ways are ways of beauty;
and all her paths are peaceful.
A tree of life she is to them that lay hold of her;
and those who hold her fast are blessed.*

*O wisdom, which came out of the mouth of the most high,
reaching from one end all the way to the other,
mightily and graciously ordering all things:
come and teach us the way of understanding.*

Lux orta est iusto,
et rectis corde laetitia.
O splendor paternae gloriae,
De luce lucem proferens,
Lux lucis et fons luminis,
Diem dies illuminans. Alleluia.

*Light has arisen for the just man,
and gladness for the upright of heart.
O splendour of the Father's light,
bringing light out of light,
Light of light and source of light,
day lightening day. Alleluia.*

Spem in alium nunquam habui
praeter in te, Deus Israel,
qui irasceris et propitius eris,
et omnia peccata hominum in tribulatione dimittis.
Domine Deus, creator caeli et terrae,
respice humilitatem nostram.

*I have never put my hope
in any other but in you, God of Israel,
who will be angry and yet become again gracious,
and who forgives all the sins of man in suffering.
Lord God, Creator of heaven and earth,
look upon our lowliness.*

Biographies

The Lacock Scholars

Soprano Anna Golitzin Georgie Gulliver Frances Kelly
Fiona Meyringer Izzie Palmer Flora Robertson Hannah Sander Catherine Shaw

Alto Hana Edwards Rosalind Isaacs Ellie McCowan Theo Normanton
Silvia Reseghetti Rachel Singer Madeline Smith Mayuko Tanno

Tenor Josh Adams Alastair Carey Ollie Clarke James Cormack
Robin Datta David Hoare Jeremy James Clive So

Baritone Tom Ashton Leo Benedict T J Callahan Max Cockerill
Kieran Cooper Alex Maynard David McNally Graham Roberts

Bass Jeremy Cowen Kerry Goettlich Toby Matimong
George Nairac Stuart O'Hara Adam Rebick Joachim Sabbat Dan Trott

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 cappella 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 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, The Music Room at Gray's Antiques as part of the new Baroque

Voices series, The Cherubim Youth Music Festival, and performances at Gloucester and Hereford Cathedrals.

The group released a second recording, *In memoriam*, in the autumn 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. It is available to stream on Spotify and can be purchased from the group's website, www.lacockscholars.org.

Greg Skidmore

Born in Canada, Greg Skidmore 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 led 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 burgeoning 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* 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* with The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment; Purcell's *Fairy Queen* with The Gabrieli Consort at The Spitalfields Festival in London; Bach's *St. Matthew* and *St. John* Passions, *Mass in B Minor*, and *Christmas Oratorio*, all 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 Samuel Barber's *Dover Beach*, for baritone and string quartet, at the Southwell Music Festival and with Ensemble Perpetuo in London. His solo work has taken him to Washington National Cathedral in the United States; the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in Venice; deSingel 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. His solo recording debut, released in 2011, was as Christus on Ex Cathedra's recording of the Lassus St. Matthew Passion and a recent Ex Cathedra CD release of Alec Roth's oratorio *A Time to Dance* features Greg in a role written for him.

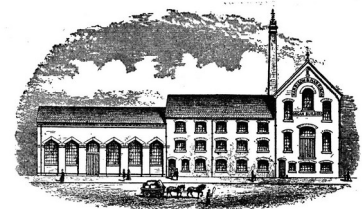
Equally comfortable in choral and consort singing, he has appeared with The Tallis Scholars, The Sixteen, The Cardinall's Musick, I Fagiolini, Tenebrae, The Gabrieli Consort, Alamire, Contrapunctus, The Eric Whitacre Singers, EXAUDI, Collegium Vocale Ghent, Cappella Amsterdam, La Grand Chapelle (Madrid), and the Tafelmusik Baroque Chamber Choir (Toronto), among others. He can be heard on discs released by Decca, Deutsche Grammophon, Harmonia Mundi USA, and others, including Alamire's recent Gramophone Early Music Award winning disc, *The Spy's Choirbook*. In 2015, he featured in I Fagiolini's *Betrayal*, a fully staged, devised presentation of the madrigals and sacred music of Carlo Gesualdo. This year, I Fagiolini tour their recent recording project *Leonardo: Shaping the invisible* extensively in the UK and abroad.

While at Christ Church in Oxford, he began a course of doctoral research in Musicology at the University of Oxford and started his own men's voices consort, I Dedicati. More recently he was

appointed Musical Director of The Lacock Scholars and gives a regular series of concerts with them, creating site-specific evenings that weave polyphonic music with plainsong and silence. Greg recently completed major coaching projects with students at the University of York and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and he has given workshops and masterclasses in the UK, France, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia in association with The Sixteen, I Fagiolini, and on his own. In 2015, he lead his first week-long Lacock Course, and has joined Eamonn Dougan and Justin Doyle as Assistant Director of the Ludlow Summer School. He is increasingly engaged in Canada as a guest conductor, clinician, and record producer, founding The Canadian Renaissance Music Summer School in 2018. 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.



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