

PROGRAM NOTES

ORLANDO GIBBONS (1583 – 1625)

Prelude in G major

This program traces the evolution of both sacred and secular music in England over the course of around four centuries, and begins with one of its most iconic figures: Orlando Gibbons. He was born in Oxford, and became a chorister in his youth at King's College, Cambridge. Like Tallis and Byrd before him, and Locke and Purcell after, he was appointed organist of the Chapel Royal. This highest position of music-making in England at the time unites all five of these Renaissance and Baroque composers featured in this program. Gibbons was also organist at Westminster Abbey, thus it is no surprise that this prelude for organ is as brilliant as it is technically challenging. It was also most likely a renowned piece during Gibbons' lifetime and afterwards, as 16 extant sources are known, a large number for a work of the period.

WILLIAM BYRD (C. 1540 – 1623)

Ave verum corpus

Although Byrd was 40 years younger than Tallis, the two musical giants were close friends. Byrd was the elder's successor as organist at the Chapel Royal, and together the two men set the standard for church music in England for a generation. Eventually, they were jointly granted a monopoly over all song printing in England by Queen Elizabeth I in 1575. However, both men were Catholic and lived through much religious upheaval during their lives. In this highly volatile time, Byrd dangerously refused to conform to Elizabeth's reinstatement of Anglicanism and composed music for Catholic services which were held secretly in private residences. These occasions were mostly conducted in Latin, and were forbidden on penalty of fines, torture or death.

He cunningly avoided punishment by frequently dedicating works to the new queen, and no doubt due to his exemplary skill as a musician. This particular piece comes from a collection of Byrd's music for Catholic liturgies called *Gradualia Book I*, first published in 1605.

ORLANDO GIBBONS

Drop, drop slow tears (Instrumental version)

Gibbons was another 40 years again younger than his colleague William Byrd, though they died only two years apart. This hymn was written in the last few years of Gibbons' life, and is one of his most famous and beloved works. Its moving text is by the English poet Phineas Fletcher. Like Gibbons, he studied at King's College, Cambridge, and left a very sizeable output, including prose, epics, dramas, lyrics, epistles, psalms and hymns. This particular text is thoroughly mournful, expressing the deep grief of seeing Christ upon the cross. As a result, the piece is usually performed during Lent, the forty-day period leading up to Easter, a tradition which the Brandenburg is respecting during these performances. The hymn will first be performed by an ensemble of violas and cellos drawn from the orchestra, and then, following *The silver swan*, will be performed again by the Brandenburg Choir in its original version with Fletcher's text.

ORLANDO GIBBONS

The silver swan

The silver swan is perhaps the most famous work by Gibbons, written for five-part choir. This song presents the ancient belief that, after a lifetime of silence, swans sing a beautiful song just before their death. Although it is now considered nothing more than a legend, it was a commonly-held belief in ancient Greek times, and is referenced by Aristotle,

Plato, Ovid, Chaucer, da Vinci and Shakespeare. The piece was first published in Gibbons' *First Set of Madrigals and Motets of 5 parts* in 1612. This collection was dedicated to his musical patron, Sir Christopher Hatton, who may have also penned the text to the song. It is usually considered to be a madrigal, a form which was particularly popular in England during the Renaissance, and which aimed to express the meaning of each individual line rather than observing a fixed overarching structure. However, the work may be considered an early departure from the style due to its melodic repetition.

*The silver swan, who, living, had no note,
when Death approached, unlocked her silent throat.
Leaning her breast upon the reedy shore,
thus sang her first and last, and sang no more:
"Farewell, all joys! O Death, come close mine eyes!
More Geese than Swans now live, more Fools than Wise."*

ORLANDO GIBBONS

Drop, drop slow tears (Vocal version)

*Drop, drop, slow tears, and bathe those beauteous feet,
which brought from heaven the news and Prince of peace.
Cease not, wet eyes, his mercies to entreat;
to cry for vengeance sin doth never cease.
In your deep floods drown all my faults and fears;
nor let his eye see sin, but through my tears.*

ORLANDO GIBBONS

Great Lord of Lords

This anthem, *Great Lord of Lords*, is for five-part choir and alto soloist, here sung by Max Riebl alongside the Brandenburg Choir. It also features two other short solos that interweave with the principal soloist: a second alto and a bass. At the time of this work's composition in 1617, James I reigned as the first king of both England and

Scotland. His mother, Mary Queen of Scots, had tried to assassinate his predecessor, Queen Elizabeth I, and reinstate Catholicism across Britain. Although she had considerable support in Scotland, her plot to overthrow Elizabeth was ultimately unsuccessful and Mary was beheaded as a result. However, her son James learned his lesson from the conflict and vowed to visit Scotland every three years after taking the English crown in order to maintain support there. In the end, he did not keep his vow, and visited just once. Gibbons, and indeed the entire Chapel Royal, made the perilous sea voyage to Edinburgh to perform for the king during his visit and this piece was first sung at Holyrood Palace as the king arrived.

*Great Lord of Lords, supreme immortal King,
O give us grace to sing thy praise,
which makes earth, air and heaven to ring.*

*O Word of God from ages unbegun, the Father's only Son,
with Him in power, in substance Thou art One.*

*O Holy Ghost, whose care doth all embrace,
Thy watch is over our race,
Thou source of life, Thou spring of peace and grace.*

*One living Trinity, one unseen Light,
the earth is Thine, Thy light beholds alike the bounds of
depth and height. Amen.*

ORLANDO GIBBONS

Hosanna to the Son of David

This anthem by Gibbons takes its text from the story of the triumphant entry of Jesus to Jerusalem, told in both the gospels of Matthew and Mark. It paints a picture of the throngs of jubilant onlookers to the scene, portrayed by the six independent parts that again sing polyphonically – independently but simultaneously. It may have originally been composed for a ceremony associated with the English monarchy, as its mood and subject is fitting

of such a glorious occasion. Indeed, the monarch at the time, King James I, saw his position as head of the English and Scottish church as analogous to Christ's, and as such the anthem may have been performed to herald his arrival at an important service, much as it depicts Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem. The opening phrase uses a joyous and memorable ascending melody, which is repeated by all six voices in turn. A section wholly different in character begins with the text "peace in heaven", which is fittingly conveyed by splitting the choir in two and with smooth, angelic phrases. The work closes with a return to the festive melody of the opening, again tossed around between all the voice parts before a united ending.

*Hosanna to the Son of David.
Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord.
Blessed be the King of Israel.
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest places.
Hosanna in the highest heavens.*

HENRY PURCELL (1659 – 1695)

Overture & Rondeau from *Abdelazer*

Henry Purcell is the towering figure of the Baroque period in England, and perhaps its last world-class composer until the likes of Vaughan Williams and Edward Elgar came to prominence around two hundred years later. However, like Gibbons, Tallis and Byrd before him, he was a gentleman of the Chapel Royal, and their influence can be traced through to Purcell, particularly through his predecessor John Blow. Purcell is probably best remembered for his theatrical music and songs, as well as his incidental compositions – music that accompanies a play or other visual production. These two movements are an example of this, composed in 1695 for a staging of the play *Abdelazer*, sometimes spelled *Abdalazar*, and also known as *The Moor's Revenge*. It comprises nine

instrumental movements, followed by a single song. The first two movements will be performed: the Overture, the opening section of the work; and the Rondeau, which was the inspiration of Benjamin Britten's famed *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, written over 350 years later.

HENRY PURCELL

Cold Song from *King Arthur*

The sixteenth century saw the boom of the masque in England – a form of entertainment featuring music, dance, acting and stage design in combination. By Purcell's time, the evolution of this form into what is now known as opera was underway, although his works in the style are perhaps best labelled as semi-operas. They tended to combine spoken plays with elements of masque such as singing and dancing. *King Arthur* is one such example: while there are many instrumental and vocal movements in the work, the principal characters are speaking roles only. It is only the supernatural, pastoral and intoxicated characters which sing in this semi-opera, and this particular aria is sung by a spirit of the cold. This spirit is usually sung as a bass role, but the part is equally well sung by a male alto, and here is brought new life by countertenor Max Riebl.

*What power art thou, who from below
hast made me rise unwillingly and slow
from beds of everlasting, everlasting snow.
See'st thou not how stiff, how stiff and wondrous old,
far unfit to bear the bitter cold
I can scarcely move or draw my breath.
Let me, let me freeze again to death.*

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL (1685 – 1759)

Concerto Grosso, Op. 6/7: I Largo & II Allegro

George Frideric Handel was born in modern-day Germany, but moved to England at the age of 27

and eventually became a naturalised British citizen. Such was his esteem as an adoptive Briton that he was given a full state funeral and was buried at Westminster Abbey. This collection of twelve *Concerti Grossi*, is one of Handel's most complex, extensive and powerful works, published together in 1741, the year before the premiere of his famous *Messiah*. They are based on the older model of the Italian composer Arcangelo Corelli's *Concerti Grossi*, and were first intended for performance during the intervals of other theatrical works. They take inspiration from a vast array of styles, including opera, sonata, sinfonias, dances and fugues, and as a result are considered highly experimental. This particular concerto, the seventh, is the only in the set which is for full orchestra without soloists. Two movements will be played by the Brandenburg Orchestra: the *Largo*, the concerto's broad and stately opening; and the *Allegro*, an inventive elaboration upon a single note, repeated with ever faster rhythms.

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL

Fammi combattere from *Orlando*, HWV 31

During the decade before his *Twelve Grand Concertos*, Handel wrote an enormous volume of operas, primarily in Italian. One of these was *Orlando*, which was not a popular success at the time of its first performances in 1733 but which is now considered an artistic masterpiece. Like many Baroque works, it fell out of favour after Handel's lifetime, and was not performed again until 1922. This aria, *Fammi combattere*, is sung by the title character, Orlando, who would have at the time been performed by a castrato – a male singer castrated before puberty in order to preserve his highest register. In this aria, Orlando tells the Princess Angelica that he could only ever love her, vowing to fight fierce monsters, knock down walls, and battle magic in order to prove it.

MATTHEW LOCKE (C. 1621 – 1677)

Curtain tune from *The Tempest*

Matthew Locke was yet another organist at the Chapel Royal, and trained under Edward Gibbons, the brother of the more famous Orlando. He also collaborated frequently with Orlando's son Christopher Gibbons; together they produced the sole surviving dramatic work with music from the mid-seventeenth century. Like Purcell's *Abdelazer*, Locke's *The Tempest* is an example of incidental music: in this case based on the play by the immortal Shakespeare. This adaptation was first staged in 1674, and while layers upon layers of rewrites, edits and incomplete sources cloud the work's original form, it was by all accounts hugely popular at the time. It included eleven instrumental movements; this is the first, which depicts the development of a calm sea into a raging storm that marks the opening of *The Tempest*. Its evocation of the storm is accompanied by the first known indication in English language of a crescendo, marked on the score as "lowder by degrees".

THOMAS TALLIS (C. 1505 – 1585)

If ye love me

The second half of the program leads us to its earliest composer and its core: Thomas Tallis. The early life of Thomas Tallis remains shrouded in mystery, and no portraits of the composer produced during his lifetime exist. It was certainly a tumultuous time; music-making of the period was inextricably tied to the monarchy and their desires, and Tallis worked under the reign of four English monarchs during his career. Almost every change in sovereign saw a drastic change in taste, which required deft musical and political

skill to navigate. However, Tallis rose to the challenge, and was shrewd enough to make his way into the choir of Canterbury Cathedral as its star singer, which became the centre of the newly-founded Anglican church following Henry VIII's appointment as Supreme Head of the Church of England in 1534. After the king's death, his nine-year-old son was crowned as Edward VI, and it is during the young boy's reign that this piece was composed. Thomas Cranmer was Archbishop of Canterbury at the time, and he imposed a series of strict policies dictating the rules of composition of choral music. Tallis and his fellow composers were thus charged with creating a new Anglican liturgy in the language of the people, designed to appeal to the common man on the street. It was also now believed that the florid elaborations of the previous Catholic period got in the way of the meaning of the word, so clarity and simplicity were now valued above all else. This song is a classic example of one of the Archbishop's central dictums: "to each syllable a plain and distinct note". However, far from being awkward in observing this principle, this anthem is beautiful and innovative. As was common of anthems in the period, it follows an ABB structure: the first section appearing once and then the second section appearing twice, in that order. As a call for obedience from Jesus' disciples, the text expresses not a romantic love but a Biblical one.

*If ye love me, keep my commandments.
And I will pray the Father,
and he shall give you another comforter,
That he may abide with you forever, e'en the spirit of truth.*

THOMAS TALLIS

Agnus Dei from *Missa puer natus est nobis*

Although Tallis wrote a wide range of music, the bulk of his output is dedicated to the church. This mass, titled *Puer natus est nobis* – A Child is Born to Us – is one such example. It is believed to have been written for Christmas in 1554, when it was

widely thought that Queen Mary was expecting the birth of a child, although this later was proven false. Unusually, the music lacks the typical top voice of a choir, the treble or soprano voice. It is thought that this is because the mass was performed for a service with both Queen Mary and Prince Philip of Spain in attendance by a symbolic joint English and Spanish choir, the latter of which lacked that voice type. However, here the Brandenburg Choir performs a version that does include sopranos. The work is written for seven distinct voice parts, and represents one of the most complex and crowning examples of English Renaissance polyphony – the style in which many voices sing lines independently but simultaneously.

THOMAS TALLIS

Why fumeth in fight from *Tunes for Archbishop Parker's Psalter*

Our chronological journey through Tallis' music continues: after Mary's death, her half-sister Elizabeth took the throne and returned the country to the Anglicanism of their father Henry VIII. She was the fourth monarch under whom Tallis had worked, and during her reign his works reached their zenith. Under her rule, the sale of music from overseas – "forren Realmes" – was forbidden. This led to the Tallis-Byrd monopoly of music from 1575, although their first published collaboration was not a commercial success. Thomas Cranmer was succeeded as Archbishop of Canterbury by Matthew Parker, who was a key figure of Elizabeth's agenda. He is known for producing a psalter containing one hundred and fifty psalms of David that was translated from Latin to English. This book is known as Archbishop Parker's Psalter. This tune is Tallis' setting of the second psalm, known by its first words: *Why fumeth in fight*. The descriptive text is reflected in Tallis' powerful setting, which continues to observe the maxim that one syllable should

correspond to one note. This text is provided below in the original spelling and wording of Archbishop Parker's Psalter.

*Why fumeth in fight: the Gentils spite, in fury raging stout?
Why taketh in hond: the people fond,
vayne thinges to bring about?
The kinges arise, the lordes devise,
in counsayles mett therto:
Agaynst the Lord: with false accord,
against his Christ they go.*

*Let us they say: breake down their ray,
of all their bondes and cordes:
We will renounce: that they pronounce,
their loores as stately lordes.
But God of might: in heaven so bright,
shall laugh them all to scorne.
The Lord on hie: shall them defie,
they shall be once forlorne.*

*With iron rod: as mighty God, all rebels shalt thou bruse:
And breake them all: in pieces small,
as sherdes the potters use.
Be wise therefore: ye kinges the more,
receyve ye wisdomes lore.
Ye judges strong: of right and wrong,
advise you now before.*

*The Lorde in feare: your service beare,
with dread to him rejoyce:
Let rages be: resist not ye, him serve with joyfull voyce.
The Sonne kisse ye: lest wroth he be,
lose not the way of rest:
For when his ire: is set on fire, who trust in hym be blest.*

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872 – 1958)

Fantasia on a theme by Thomas Tallis

This program culminates with a landmark performance of a work by one of England's most renowned composers, Ralph Vaughan Williams. The "theme by Thomas Tallis" of the work's title is the very theme just performed by the Brandenburg Choir, based on the tune of *Why fumeth in fight*. The work was first performed in Gloucester

Cathedral in 1911, and it is said that the piece left an indelible mark on the great composers Gustav Holst and Herbert Howells, who were both in attendance. While the label of "fantasia" sometimes denotes an improvisational composition without strict musical form, Vaughan Williams uses the term to evoke something more like a fantasy from the Elizabethan period of Tallis himself. Such fantasies were instrumental pieces which developed several themes, often with complex variations, in independent sections. This describes the structure of this fantasia quite well; after a brief opening sequence of very quiet chords from the entire orchestra, Tallis' theme begins, starting with low plucked strings. After one statement, it builds into a glorious statement by the entire orchestra, marked *appassionato* – passionately. Eventually, Vaughan Williams introduces a theme of his own making, first played as a solo by Brandenburg principal viola player Monique O'Dea. This leads to a statement of the theme by the Brandenburg concertmaster, Shaun Lee-Chen, which then builds to a string quartet, including principal second violin Ben Dollman and principal cello Jamie Hey. These four players form the backbone of the orchestra as well as the newly-formed Brandenburg Quartet. Aside from the quartet, which often functions as a kind of orchestra of its own, Vaughan Williams divides the orchestra into two: a full-sized first orchestra, and a second orchestra comprising a single desk of musicians from each section. As a result, this constitutes the largest string ensemble ever assembled by the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra. The separation of the sections also serves to emphasise their function: the second orchestra often mirroring and echoing the first. The orchestral setup is also said to mirror the configuration of an organ: the quartet representing the swell division, the first orchestra the great division and the second orchestra the choir division. In this way, the piece brings us full circle to the solo organ of the performance's opening.

COMPOSER LIFE EVENTS

CONTEMPORARY EVENTS

	Tallis				
1505	Born around this time			Bermuda is discovered by Spanish explorers	1505
		Byrd			
1540		Born around this time		A heatwave strikes Europe and many die from lack of drinking water	1540
1547	Charged with composing in English			Henry VIII dies, his son Edward VI takes the throne	1547
1553	Granted a manor by the new queen	May have been a chorister at the Chapel Royal		Edward VI dies, Mary I later takes the throne	1553
1558				Mary I dies and her sister Elizabeth I becomes queen	1558
1575	Jointly produced and published a vast collection of music known as the <i>Cantiones Sacrae</i>			Elizabeth grants Tallis and Byrd a monopoly on printing songs in England	1575
				Gibbons	
1583		Implicated in a plot to kill the queen		Born in Oxford	The world's oldest surviving amusement park is founded in Denmark
1585	Died peacefully in his home in London	Composed an elegy for Tallis' death			Chocolate is introduced to Europe commercially
1603				Elder brother Ellis dies	Elizabeth I dies and James I becomes king
1611		Composed one of the earliest string fantasies		Contributed to first printed collection of keyboard music	Shakespeare's play <i>The Tempest</i> is first performed
	Locke				
1621	Born around this time in Exeter				Colonists in Plymouth, Massachusetts make the first treaty with native Americans
1623		Died in his home in Essex		Became organist at Westminster Abbey	The central source for most of Shakespeare's plays, <i>The First Folio</i> , is published
1625				Died of a brain condition	James I dies and Charles I is crowned
1648	Travelled to the continent to work				The Second English Civil War begins, resulting in the abolition of the monarchy
		Purcell			
1659	Met Purcell's father, Henry Senior	Born as the middle of three sons			The first known cheque is issued
1660	Appointed composer to the king				The monarchy is reinstated with Charles II as king
1677	Died in London	Made a court musician by Charles II			The population of Paris exceeds 500,000, perhaps the world's largest city at the time
				Handel	
1685		Composed for James II's coronation		Born in Halle, modern-day Germany	James II takes the throne
1695		Died young and at the height of his career			Press censorship in England ends, but a fine for swearing is instituted
1712				Settled permanently in England	The capital of Russia moves from Moscow to St Petersburg
1727				Composed <i>Zadok the Priest</i>	George I dies and his son George II is crowned
1733				<i>Orlando</i> premiered	The first Freemasons lodge opens in America
1741				Composed <i>Twelve Grand Concertos</i>	The population of China surpasses 143 million
1759				Died as a blind and wealthy man	The British Museum opens to the public
1910	First performance of Ralph Vaughan Williams' <i>Fantasia on a theme by Thomas Tallis</i>			in Gloucester Cathedral (UK)	1910