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Tallis

Mass 'Puer natus est nobis'
Responsories & Motets

ROBERT QUINNEY
CHOIR OF NEW COLLEGE OXFORD

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Mass 'Puer natus est nobis', Responsories & Motets

Thomas Tallis (c. 1505–1585)

ROBERT QUINNEY director

CHOIR OF NEW COLLEGE OXFORD

Mass 'Puer natus est nobis' 7vv

1. Gloria 9:05
2. Sanctus 4:10
3. Benedictus 3:10
4. Agnus Dei I 3:50
5. Agnus Dei II 3:07

6. **Suscipe quaeso Domine (prima pars) 7vv 4:58**
7. **Suscipe quaeso Domine (secunda pars) 7vv 4:04**
8. **Videte miraculum 6vv 9:36**
9. **Loquebantur variis linguis 7vv 4:18**
10. **Honor, virtus et potestas 5vv 6:03**
11. **Homo quidam fecit coenam 6vv 6:24**
12. **O nata lux 5vv 1:39**
13. **In jejunio et fletu 5vv 4:17**
14. **Salvator mundi I 5vv 2:37**
15. **Salvator mundi II 5vv 2:20**
16. **In manus tuas 5vv 1:54**
17. **In pace 4vv 5:39**
18. **Miserere nostri 7vv 2:08**

Total Running Time 80:38

Tallis

Mass 'Puer natus est nobis', Responsories & Motets

Shortly after his death at the age of 80 or thereabouts, Thomas Tallis was remembered in the partbooks copied by Robert Dow, Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, with the following elegiac couplets:

*Quatuor illustris vixit sub Regibus iste
Tallisius magno dignus honore senex.*

*Sub quibus eximius si musicus esset habendus
Tallisius semper gloria prima fuit.*

The illustrious Tallis, an old man deserving of great honour,
lived under four monarchs.

Under these, if the most outstanding musician had to be reckoned,
Tallis was always the chief glory.

5

If Tallis's fame today rests principally on the 40-part motet *Spem in alium* – a wonder of the Early Modern world, to be sure, but hardly representative of this or any other composer – it is his sheer professional staying power, his dedicated service under four monarchs, that seems to animate his image in the years immediately following his death. Does this suggest a master of beautifully finished but unprovocative music, as conjured in his *New Grove* entry: 'his compositions are supremely crafted, with a knowing sense of where to place a dissonance; in performance the effect is often one of muted richness'?

'Supreme craft' is quite right, if putting it mildly; there is no phrase recorded here that is not a pleasure to sing, nor a piece that feels a measure too long or too short. In *Suscipe quaeso Domine* the dissonance is certainly 'knowing' at the word 'peccavi' (I have sinned); but this is more than competent 'craft'. Rather, Tallis achieves an extraordinary intensity of expression – the kind of colourful response to a text found in madrigals, but with a devotional heat absent in those secular works. (The effect is intensified by the radiant major mode

in which he has chosen to write.) This is not the emotionally neutral music of a composer dedicated to suave innocuousness. Tallis's music, apparently impartial by the changeable lights of the mid-sixteenth century, argues against the modern tendency to equate explicit political statements (or, to be more precise, artefacts that lend themselves to interpretation as such) with artistic greatness.

6 Difficult though it is to ascribe dates to Tallis's compositions, it is plausible to suggest that some of the music presented here originated in the five years of Mary Tudor's reign, 1553–8. After the musico-liturgical austerity of her brother Edward's short but aggressively reforming regime, Mary's re-Catholicisation of England afforded Tallis and his colleagues what one can only imagine was a welcome opportunity to write more expansively. For a composer of Tallis's generation, it meant a return to a book that would have dominated his early years as a musician: the *Antiphonale*, which provided plainchant antiphons and responsories for the Catholic calendar. The study of its complexities might occupy a whole lifetime, as Cardinal Quiñones remarks in his proposal for the simplification of the Latin liturgy, which was published when Tallis was in his late twenties, working either at Dover Priory (where he is recorded in 1530, the year before the Priory's records vanish) or in London (where, in 1536–8, he appears in a part-time capacity among the small team of musicians at St Mary-at-Hill near Billingsgate). The consequence of Tallis's early study of the *Antiphonale*, and of its restoration in 1553, is that much of the music recorded here is composed around a plainchant *cantus firmus*; one which, in most cases, might easily have been sung from the *Antiphonale* itself by those singers bearing the 'Tenor' of the polyphonic texture.

Tallis seems to have contributed several responsories (sung at Matins and/or Vespers) to the restored liturgy, most of which are recorded here. It is, however, also possible that, after 1558, Tallis simply utilised the responsory form for new music, with no intention of it being sung liturgically: the 1575 *Cantiones quae ab argumento sacrae vocantur* published jointly by Byrd and Tallis consists exclusively of Latin-texted pieces (three responsories among them) that can only have been sung in non-liturgical settings; most likely by *cognoscenti* like Robert Dow and his friends, for pleasure and edification, not in chapels but domestic settings.

Most of Tallis's responsories embed the chant in the Tenor voice (here, the exception is *Homo quidam*, where it sits higher in one of the Contratenor parts). His scoring, however, ranges from five to seven voices, with *Loquebantur variis linguis* at the richest extreme of the scale (a reference, perhaps, to the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit) and *Honor, virtus et potestas*, at the slimmer but hardly meagre end. All adopt the same structure – of polyphonic music responding to plainchant intonations and verses – except *In pace*, a so-called 'solo responsory' in which the roles are reversed, with polyphony beginning and plainchant ending each section.

Most extraordinary of Tallis's *cantus firmus* compositions is the Mass 'Puer natus est nobis'. The eponymous plainchant introit for Christmas morning is slowly unfolded in the Tenor voice, according to an arcane process whereby the length of each note is determined by the vowel to which it was sung in the original chant ('a' was held for one, 'u' for five, and this number then multiplied by a particular time unit, e.g. breve, semibreve, minim). The result is a virtuoso display of compositional artifice, all the more remarkable for preserving within tight technical constraints a sense of ebb-and-flow (e.g. the magical relaxation in the Gloria at 'miserere nobis', and subsequent energetic peroration): in more ways than one, it is a unique setting of the Mass Ordinary. It is in full seven-voice texture throughout, unlike any other extant mid-sixteenth-century mass; and the omnipresence of the *cantus firmus* determines a stately harmonic rhythm, enlivened by surface decoration – momentary motivic activity, or sometimes spell-binding canonic imitation. The only other piece that inhabits this sound world is *Miserere nostri*, in which all but one of the seven voices are held in some sort of canonic relationship: this showpiece (paradoxically devoid of audible display – everything here is serene, placid order) was chosen as the closing number in the 1575 *Cantiones*. The remaining *cantus firmus* pieces are not subject to the same ingenious, recondite processes. In pieces such as *Loquebantur* and *Videte miraculum*, the plainchant sits somewhat in the background of the listener's awareness; the focus is the interplay of voices in close-knit, vigorous imitation.

Dating Tallis's post-Reformation Latin music is notoriously difficult, but John Milsom confidently places the great motet *Suscipe quaeso Domine* 'at the very end of Tallis's career'.

It is a work of masterful assurance: suave and stately, yet with moments of tremendous rhetorical immediacy. The text is by the sixth-century archbishop Isidore of Seville, but in Tallis's hands assumes an urgency that seems expressive of the 'Counter Reformation'. Yet it cannot have been heard in a sacred setting after 1558 (the idea that it was composed for some official penitential rite in the early years of Mary's reign has now been discredited – a much more likely candidate for that use is Sheppard's *Confitebor tibi*), and there is no evidence that Tallis moved in the recusant circles that later performed Byrd's masses and *Gradualia* propers. *Suscipe quaeso Domine* is thus an enigmatic monument: animated by the turbulent *Zeitgeist*, yet rising above it. The same might be said of the more modest motets recorded here – *O nata lux*, the two settings of *Salvator mundi*, and the extraordinary *In jejunio et fletu*. Tallis, perhaps more than any of his English or continental contemporaries, seems in our present time to inhabit an imaginative space all his own, in which his music can float free of historical or political associations. The lament composed after his death by Byrd (the text of which is an Anglicised version of a lyric on the death of Josquin) suggests that his colleagues and friends recognised something similar: 'Tallis is dead, and music dies'.

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A note on vocal scoring and performing pitch

As in our previous recordings of sixteenth-century English music, we have taken scholarly opinion of likely performing pitch and vocal scoring into serious consideration. At face value, this produces a relatively low pitch for those pieces where the highest voice (usually called *Medius*, or ‘mean’) has a clef at C1 or C2 (e.g. the Mass ‘Puer natus’, *Suscipe quaeso Domine*, or *Loquebantur*). In these cases the most pressing question is what to do with the boy choristers and altos, both of whom are in a comfortable range on the uppermost voice parts; the altos cannot without considerable upwards transposition sing the voice labelled *Contratenor* (C3 or C4 clef); the customary upward transposition of a minor third (following Wulstan et al) still leaves modern altos at the lower extreme of their range.

Rather than fudge the issue by mixing altos and tenors (as we did in our Sheppard recording), this time we decided either (a) fully to integrate the altos or (b) to exclude them. Thus in the Mass ‘Puer natus’, the two *Medius* parts are shared by altos and choristers – as if, in an exercise of the imagination which goes some way beyond what documentary evidence can support, the *Dessus* singers of Phillip’s Capilla Flamenca shared a line with the trebles of Mary’s Chapel Royal. (The visitors’ top line was, presumably, sung by falsettists, by children, or a mixture of the two – as was the case in the 1520s). In *Suscipe quaeso Domine* the choristers take one, and the altos the other, of the upper two voices. In *Loquebantur* countertenors do not sing; in *Videte miraculum* a few choristers sing *medius* (C2) alongside the altos while most of their colleagues sing *triplex* (G2). In *Salvator mundi I* and *In jejunio et fletu* no altos sing, the choristers taking the upper voice (*superius*, C1) and tenors the second highest (*discantus*, C3); by contrast, in the second setting of *Salvator mundi* there are no choristers, altos singing the upper voice (*superius*, C2). By thus exploring various different combinations of voices with the basic proviso that no one should find themselves singing for any length of time beyond

their comfortable vocal range, we challenge the assumption that modern ‘SATB’ must always sing in that vocal configuration, or should assume an upward transposition of a minor third or more – as upheld, for example, in the only other recording by a collegiate/cathedral-type choir of the Mass ‘Puer natus’ (the Choir of King’s College, Cambridge, 1982).

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References

For a brilliant, multi-faceted account of Tallis’s life and work, see Kerry McCarthy, *Tallis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020). In particular, on the importance of the *Antiphonale* to composers of his generation, pp 75–86; and on contemporaneous memorials to Tallis, pp 198–208.

On the likely vocal make-up of the Capilla Flamenca, see Mary Tiffany Ferer, *Music and Ceremony at the Court of Charles V: the Capilla Flamenca and the art of political promotion* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 92.

Mass 'Puer natus est nobis'

1. Gloria

Gloria in excelsis Deo
et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.
Laudamus te. Benedicimus te.
Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.
Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam.
Domine Deus, rex caelestis, Deus Pater omnipotens,
Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe,
Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris.
Qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.
Qui tollis peccata mundi,
suscipe deprecationem nostram.
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,
miserere nobis.
Quoniam tu solus sanctus. Tu solus Dominus.
Tu solus altissimus, Jesu Christe.
Cum Sancto Spiritu, in gloria Dei Patris.
Amen.

*Glory be to God on high
and on earth peace, good will towards men.
We praise you. We bless you.
We worship you. We glorify you.
We give thanks to you for your great glory.
Lord God, heavenly king, God the Father almighty,
Lord the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father.
You who take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.
You who take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer.
You who sit at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.
For you only are holy. You only are the Lord.
You only are most high, Jesus Christ.
With the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.*

2. Sanctus

Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus
Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua.
Osanna in excelsis.

*Holy, holy, holy
Lord God of Sabaoth.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.*

3. Benedictus

Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
Osanna in excelsis.

*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.*

4-5. Agnus Dei

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.

*Lamb of God, you who take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you who take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.*

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
dona nobis pacem.

6. Suscipe quaeso Domine (prima pars)

Suscipe quaeso Domine,
vocem confitentis.
Scelera mea non defendo; peccavi.
Deus miserere mei; peccavi.
Dele culpas meas gratia tua.

ISIDORE OF SEVILLE (c. 560–636)

7. Suscipe quaeso Domine (secunda pars)

Si enim iniquitates recordaberis,
quis sustineat?
Quis enim justus qui se dicere
audeat sine peccato esse?
Nullus est enim mundus in conspectu tuo.

ISIDORE OF SEVILLE

8. Videte miraculum

Videte miraculum matris Domini:
concepit virgo virilis ignara consortii;
stans onerata nobili onere Maria.
Et matrem se laetam cognoscit
quae se nescit uxorem.
Haec speciosum forma prae filiis
hominum castis concepit visceribus,
et benedicta in aeternum
Deum nobis protulit et hominem.
Gloria Patri et Filio
et Spiritui Sancto.

RESPONSORY AT FIRST VESPERS,

FEAST OF THE PURIFICATION (CANDLEMAS)

*Lamb of God, you who take away the sins of the world,
grant us peace.*

*Listen, I beseech you, O Lord,
to the voice of one who confesses.
My crimes I do not defend; I have sinned.
God, have mercy on me; I have sinned.
Do away my offences by your grace.*

*For if you should recall iniquities,
who could bear it?
For what just man would dare to say
he was without sin?
For no one is clean in your sight.*

*Behold the miracle of the Lord's mother:
the virgin conceived without knowledge of a man:
Mary, standing heavy with her noble burden:
She who knows not herself as wife,
recognises herself as a joyful mother.
One brilliant in beauty, beyond the sons of men,
did she in her chaste womb conceive,
and, for ever blessed, brought forth for us,
both God and man.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.*

9. Loquebantur variis linguis

Loquebantur variis linguis
apostoli, alleluia,
magnalia Dei, alleluia.
Repleti sunt omnes Spiritu Sancto,
et ceperunt loqui
magnalia Dei, alleluia.
Gloria Patri et Filio
et Spiritui Sancto. Alleluia.

SECOND RESPONSORY AT MATINS ON THE THIRD DAY
AFTER PENTECOST

10. Honor, virtus et potestas

Honor, virtus et potestas et imperium
sit Trinitati in unitate, unitati in Trinitate,
in perenni saeculorum tempore.
Trinitati lux perennis,
unitati sit decus perpetim,
in perenni saeculorum tempore.
Gloria Patri et Filio
et Spiritui Sancto:
in perenni saeculorum tempore.

SIXTH RESPONSORY AT MATINS, TRINITY SUNDAY

11. Homo quidam fecit coenam

Homo quidam fecit coenam magnam,
et misit servum suum hora coenae
dicere invitatis ut venirent,
quia parata sunt omnia.
Venite, comedite panem meum,
et bibite vinum quod miscui vobis,
quia parata sunt omnia.
Gloria Patri et Filio
et Spiritui Sancto:
quia parata sunt omnia.

RESPONSORY AT FIRST VESPERS ON THE FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI

*The apostles were speaking
in different tongues, alleluia,
of the mighty works of God, alleluia.
All were filled with the Holy Spirit,
and began to speak
of the mighty works of God, alleluia.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit. Alleluia.*

*Honour, power, might and dominion
be to the Trinity in unity, to the unity in Trinity,
throughout everlasting ages.
To the Trinity be endless light,
to the unity be glory unceasingly,
throughout everlasting ages.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit:
throughout everlasting ages.*

*A certain man prepared a great feast,
and he sent his servant at the time of the feast
to tell the guests to come,
for all things were prepared.
Come, eat my bread,
and drink the wine which I have mixed for you,
for all things were prepared.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit:
for all things were prepared.*

12. O nata lux

O nata lux de lumine
Jesu redemptor saeculi,
dignare clemens supplicum
laudes precesque sumere.
Qui carne quondam contegi
dignatus es pro perditis,
nos membra confer effici
tui beati corporis.

HYMN AT LAUDS ON THE FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

*O light born of light,
Jesus, redeemer of the age,
deign mercifully to hear
suppliants' praises and prayers.
You who once deigned to take on flesh
on behalf of the damned,
grant that we be made limbs
of your blessed body.*

13. In jejunio et fletu

In jejunio et fletu orabant sacerdotes:
parce, Domine, populo tuo,
et ne des haereditatem tuam in perditionem.
Inter vestibulum et altare
plorabant sacerdotes dicentes:
parce populo tuo.

RESPONSORY AT MATINS ON THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

*Fasting and weeping, the priests prayed:
spare your people, O Lord, and do not allow
your inheritance to fall into destruction.
Between the porch and the altar
the priests lamented, saying:
spare your people.*

14

14-15. Salvator mundi

Salvator mundi, salva nos,
qui per crucem et sanguinem
redemisti nos: auxiliare nobis,
te deprecamur, Deus noster.

ANTIPHON AT MATINS ON THE FEAST
OF THE EXALTATION OF THE CROSS

*O Saviour of the world, save us,
you who by your cross and blood,
have redeemed us; help us,
we beseech you, our Lord.*

16. In manus tuas

In manus tuas, Domine,
commendo spiritum meum.
Redemisti me Domine Deus veritatis.

RESPONSORY AT COMPLINE ON PASSION SUNDAY

*Into your hands, O Lord,
I commend my spirit.
You have redeemed me, O Lord, God of truth.*

17. In pace

In pace,
in idipsum
dormiam et requiescam.
Si dederō somnum oculis meis
et palpebris meis dormitationem,
dormiam et requiescam.
Gloria Patri et Filio
et Spiritui Sancto.

RESPONSORY AT SUNDAY COMPLINE FROM THE FIRST SUNDAY
IN LENT UNTIL PASSION SUNDAY

18. Miserere nostri

Miserere nostri Domine.

PSALM 122, V.3 (VULGATE)

*In peace,
in very peace
I shall sleep and take my rest.
If I give sleep to my eyes
and slumber to my eyelids,
I shall sleep and take my rest.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.*

Have mercy on us Lord.

CHOIR OF NEW COLLEGE OXFORD

The Choir of New College Oxford is one of Britain's most well-known choral ensembles. When William of Wykeham founded his 'New' College in 1379, a choral foundation was at its heart, and daily chapel services have been a central part of college life ever since. The choir is made up of sixteen or more boy choristers and fourteen adult clerks, the latter a mixture of professional singers and undergraduate members of the college.

The choir is often to be heard beyond the college walls. Touring is an important part of the choir's profile, with performances in Sweden, the Palace of Versailles, Symphony Hall in Shanghai, the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing, and in New York City.

The Choir of New College Oxford continues to add to its large and distinguished discography, recording for Linn Records music by John Sheppard and William Mundy, and a selection of works written for the choir over the past century.

ROBERT QUINNEY

Robert Quinney is Organist of New College, Oxford. In addition to the daily direction of New College's world-famous choir, his work comprises teaching, lecturing, and examining, as a Tutorial Fellow of the college and an Associate Professor at the University Faculty of Music.

He studied at King's College, Cambridge, where he was Organ Scholar, beginning his performing career as Assistant Master of Music at Westminster Cathedral, before nine years as Sub-Organist of Westminster Abbey and a short period as Director of Music at Peterborough Cathedral.

He maintains a parallel career as a solo organist, giving concerts around the UK and further afield, and is a prolific recording artist. His recordings of organ music by J. S. Bach, Elgar, Dupré, Wagner and Brahms (and several albums with Westminster Abbey Choir, The Sixteen and New College Choir) have been widely acclaimed: *Gramophone* wrote 'Quinney's Bach gets to the heart of the music with refreshing clarity and a communication born of genuine understanding'.

CHOIR OF NEW COLLEGE OXFORD

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Oscar Compton-Burnett
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Recording Producer & Engineer
Philip Hobbs

Post-production
Julia Thomas

Executive Producer
Didier Martin

Label Manager
Timothée van der Stegen

Design
Valérie Lagarde

Artwork
Julien Ysebaert

Cover Image
'Queen Elizabeth I' (detail), William Segar (*fl.* 1585–1633)
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