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NAXOS

MUSIC FOR BRASS SEPTET • 4

**Gabrieli • Lassus
Palestrina • Victoria**

SEPTURA



Gabrieli • Lassus • Palestrina • Victoria
Music for Brass Septet • 4

Tomás Luis de VICTORIA (c. 1548–1611)

Four Motets

(arr. Simon Cox)

1	I. Congratulamini mihi	16:55	5:06
2	II. Tu es Petrus	4:16	4:16
3	III. O sacrum convivium	4:48	4:48
4	IV. Surrexit pastor bonus	2:39	2:39

Giovanni GABRIELI (c. 1554/1557–1612)

Three Canzonas and Three Motets

(arr. Simon Cox)

5	I. Canzon I	16:26	2:55
6	II. Exultavit cor meum	3:52	3:52
7	III. Canzon II	2:35	2:35
8	IV. Sancta Maria, succurre miseris	2:42	2:42
9	V. Canzon IV	2:46	2:46
10	VI. Cantate Domino	1:29	1:29

Giovanni Pierluigi da PALESTRINA (c. 1525–1594)

Missa Papae Marcelli

(arr. Simon Cox)

11	I. Kyrie	15:51	4:38
12	II. Gloria	5:03	5:03
13	III. Sanctus and Benedictus	6:08	6:08

Orlando de LASSUS (1532–1594)

Lagrimae di San Pietro

(arr. Matthew Knight)

14	I. Il magnanimo Pietro	18:45	2:17
15	II. Nessun fedel trovai	2:42	2:42
16	III. Come falda di neve	2:44	2:44
17	IV. Vattene vita, va	2:24	2:24
18	V. O vita troppo rea	2:31	2:31
19	VI. Negando il mio signor	2:19	2:19
20	VII. Vide homo (Motet)	3:43	3:43

Septura

Alan Thomas, Trumpet 1 in B flat • Simon Cox, Trumpet 2 in B flat • Huw Morgan, Trumpet in E flat
 Matthew Gee, Trombone 1 • Matthew Knight, Trombone 2 • Dan West, Bass Trombone • Peter Smith, Tuba
 Simon Cox, Founder and Artistic Director • Matthew Knight, Artistic Director

No series of brass recordings would be complete without reference to the original golden age of brass ensemble music: sixteenth-century Venice, and the music of Giovanni Gabrieli. However, recording this repertoire is a well-worn path for brass groups, and so we decided to use his music just as our starting-point. As well as writing purely instrumental works, Gabrieli frequently used brass to double the vocal lines of the choir. This gave us a justification of sorts to continue on our counterfactual course, and re-imagine for brass his choral music, alongside that of his three most celebrated contemporaries: Victoria, Palestrina, and Lassus. These four titans of the counter-reformation were all inextricably linked: Gabrieli studied with Lassus in Munich; Palestrina succeeded Lassus at the Basilica of St John Lateran in Rome; and Victoria almost certainly studied with Palestrina in Rome. But individually they also represent the culmination of four distinct Renaissance choral traditions: the Venetian, Franco-Flemish, Roman and Spanish.

The fame and fortune of these four composers had much to do with the wide dissemination of their music; the printing of sacred polyphony was maturing from its infancy during their lifetimes. So it was that **Victoria** became by far the most famous composer in sixteenth-century Spain, known as the 'Spanish Palestrina'. His most prolific compositional period came after his move to Rome in 1565, where he may have studied with Palestrina; certainly he was influenced by the Italian, taking over his position at the Pontifical Roman Seminary around 1571 (having returned to Spain in 1587, he visited Rome in 1594 to attend Palestrina's funeral). The four six-part Latin motets that we have recorded date from Victoria's productive early period in Rome, and were all part of his maiden publication, in Venice in 1572.

Of these four composers, Victoria was the only one who actually became a priest (Palestrina considered it after losing his brother, two sons and wife to the plague, but ended up re-marrying a wealthy widow instead).

Perhaps this gives his music the most intimately reverent quality, heard in the long, awe-inspired contrapuntal lines of *Congratulamini mihi* (the Virgin Mary rejoices at having given birth to the son of God) and *O sacrum convivium* (a celebration of the blessed sacrament). *Tu es Petrus* (“You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church”) and *Surrexit pastor bonus* (celebrating the resurrection) are more assertive texts, and Victoria’s energetic settings, with shorter phrases often alternating high and low voices, impart a genuine sense of joy.

Perhaps more than any of the other composers, **Gabrieli’s** music – the culmination of the Venetian school – was hugely influenced by the space for which it was written: St Mark’s Basilica in Venice. Gabrieli was Venetian born and bred, and lived there for his entire life, aside from a period of study with Lassus in Munich. Both Lassus and Gabrieli’s uncle Andrea (his predecessor as Principal Composer at St Mark’s) had a huge influence on his musical style; but the building itself was the root of many of his innovations. The balconies that housed choirs, facing each other, provided the perfect conditions for the development of an antiphonal polychoral style. This unusual layout allowed Gabrieli to experiment with dynamics and instrumentation: he is often (and probably apocryphally) credited with ‘inventing’ the specific notation of both; certainly he used the unique space of St Mark’s to develop a large dynamic range, and specified groupings of instruments – brass and strings, alongside choirs – which may have been impossible elsewhere.

Gabrieli had at his disposal the Doge’s personal *piffari*, a permanent group (from 1568) of wind players – cornetts and sackbuts – plus a couple of violins and violas for variety of colour. Not only did he use this group of virtuosi to double the vocal lines in some choral works, but he also composed canzonas – purely instrumental pieces – that would have taken the place of parts of the Mass in the liturgy. And so we have fabricated a little set of works: three instrumental canzonas, alternating with three choral motets. The first of the motets, the energetic *Exultavit cor meum*, would have been performed with brass doubling the vocal lines; the remaining two, the reflective seven-part *Sancta Maria*, and the more upbeat six-part *Cantate Domino*, are a *cappella* choral pieces. In the instrumental works we have tried to reflect the range of colours that Gabrieli might have

conjured up in St Mark’s: in our version, *Canzon I* (“*La Spiritata*”) is arranged for two trumpets and two trombones; *Canzon II* is a trumpet quartet (with a valve trombone playing the rôle of fourth trumpet); and finally *Canzon IV* features three trumpets and three trombones, with small trombones used to create a more sackbut-like sound, and muted trumpets used on occasion to mimic Gabrieli’s use of string instruments. In all three pieces the trumpets perform ‘diminutions’ – florid ornamentation of their lines – based on a treatise by Girolamo Dalla Casa, the *capo de’ concerti* in St Mark’s.

One work has, in the popular imagination at least, come to define **Palestrina**: his legendary *Missa Papae Marcelli*. Composed in honour of a Pope who reigned for just three weeks, Marcellus II, this piece is celebrated largely on account of the context in which it was written: namely, the Council of Trent. Lasting from 1545 to 1563, the Council was the embodiment of the counter-reformation, establishing the Catholic Church’s response to the rising tide of Protestantism. One of the issues discussed in the final session of the Council was the use of imitative polyphony in sacred music: a significant concern was that the overlapping lines of imitative counterpoint obscured the words of the Mass, and the subsequent unintelligibility had a negative effect on the devotion of the listener. Around the same time, probably in 1562, Palestrina composed the *Missa Papae Marcelli*, which, contrary to his earlier style, was mostly set in a clear, declamatory fashion. A legend developed that the Cardinals, upon hearing this Mass, were convinced that polyphony and intelligibility were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Palestrina was hailed as the saviour of Church music, and this story was sustained through the centuries, culminating in the twentieth century with Pfitzner’s romanticised version in his opera *Palestrina*.

We have recorded three movements from the Mass – the *Kyrie*, *Gloria* and *Sanctus* – and whether or not the legend is true, it is clear from these three that the clarity of the text was foremost in Palestrina’s mind. In the *Kyrie* Palestrina can afford to use lengthy melismatic imitative lines (a hallmark of his earlier style) because the text is so simple; we have to respond with the longest and most *legato* lines that our lungs will permit. The *Gloria*, by contrast, demonstrates the new declamatory style – more homophonic, with short phrases made distinct by

continually changing combinations of voices – requiring our complete arsenal of articulation. Finally, the *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* represent a skilful mixture of both styles with expressive imitative melismas for the longer syllables, and simple declamatory homophony as the text becomes more complex. It may seem counter-intuitive to transcribe for brass a piece in which the text plays such an important rôle. However, whilst textual clarity may have been his prime aim, the various text-setting techniques which Palestrina employed as a result give the music a huge expressive range – of phrase shapes, stresses and articulations. By closely adhering to these we hope to bring the music to life in this new, instrumental context.

After early appointments in Naples and Rome, **Lassus** eventually settled in Munich, in the court of Albrecht V, Duke of Bavaria. He stayed there for the rest of his life, even as his fame – as the principal composer of the Franco-flemish school – grew, and many attempts were made to woo him away. Lassus's health declined in the 1590s, and he died in 1594, just three weeks after completing his final work, the *Lagrime di San Pietro* (Tears of St Peter), dedicated to Pope Clement VIII. A cycle of sacred madrigals, setting non-liturgical texts – Italian poems by Luigi Tansillo – the *Lagrime* relates the grief of St Peter after his denial of Christ. In its symbolism it is a perfect fit for Septura, because the number seven (representing the seven sorrows of the Virgin Mary) abounds: it is set for seven voices; the total number of

pieces (21) is seven times the number of the Holy Trinity; and Lassus uses just seven of the eight church modes, leaving the eighth out completely.

The complete work lasts almost an hour, and so we have just recorded seven of the movements, using all seven of the modes: *Il magnanimo Pietro* describes Peter's shame at his cowardice; in *Nessun fedel trovai* Christ describes the pain of his betrayal; *Come falda di neve* uses the image of a melting snowbank as a metaphor for Peter's tears; and Peter yearns for the punishment of death in *Vattene vita, O vita troppo rea* and *Negando il mio signor*. Composing madrigals – with their impassioned vernacular texts – afforded Lassus the freedom to write much more emotionally-charged music than would have been acceptable in counter-reformation liturgical works, and the settings are deeply personal: perhaps the elderly Lassus identified with Peter in this final, penitent work. The twenty-first and final movement, however, is not in fact a madrigal, but a Latin motet, in which the focus of Christ's rebuke is not Peter, but the sinfulness and ingratitude of all mankind. All of the bitter emotion of the preceding madrigals remains, but now cloaked in the formality of a liturgical setting. We have sought to express this change of tone in sonority: we use small instruments to recreate the raw, emotional content of the Italian vernacular; but for the final motet we switch to larger equipment, hoping to reflect, with a nobler sound, the gnomic nature of Lassus's setting.

Matthew Knight

Septura

Septura brings together London's leading players to redefine brass chamber music through the uniquely expressive sound of the brass septet. By creating a canon of transcriptions, arrangements and new commissions for this brand new classical configuration, Septura aims to re-cast the brass ensemble as a serious artistic medium. Currently Ensemble in Residence at the Royal Academy of Music, London, the group is recording a series of discs for Naxos Records, each focused on a particular period, genre and set of composers, creating a 'counter-factual history' of brass chamber music. Weaving this ever-increasing repertoire into captivating live events, Septura is gaining a reputation for engaging audiences with innovative and imaginative programming, built around strong concepts and themes. Septura's members are the leading players of the new generation of British brass musicians, holding principal positions in the London Symphony, Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, City of Birmingham Symphony, Basel Symphony and Aurora orchestras. Septura is represented worldwide by Percius Artist and Project Management – www.percius.co.uk. This recording was made possible thanks to the generous support of the Rayne Trust.

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Photo: Bethany Clarke



Photo: Bethany Clarke

No brass series would be complete without Giovanni Gabrieli, and his music is the starting point as Septura continue on their counterfactual course, imagining that four titans of the counter-reformation had written for brass. The sacred choral works of these renaissance masters – Victoria, Gabrieli, Palestrina and Lassus – are a perfect fit for the musical and emotional compass of the brass septet, and the result is a stunning survey of the culminations of the Spanish, Venetian, Roman and Franco-Flemish schools.

GABRIELI • LASSUS PALESTRINA • VICTORIA

Music for Brass Septet • 4

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|--------------|---|-------|
| 1–4 | Tomás Luis de VICTORIA (c.1548–1611)
Four Motets (arr. Simon Cox) | 16:55 |
| 5–10 | Giovanni GABRIELI (c.1554/1557–1612)
Three Canzonas and Three Motets (arr. Simon Cox) | 16:26 |
| 11–13 | Giovanni Pierluigi da PALESTRINA (c.1525–1594)
Missa Papae Marcelli (arr. Simon Cox) | 15:51 |
| 14–20 | Orlando de LASSUS (1532–1594)
Lagrima di San Pietro (arr. Matthew Knight) | 18:45 |

A detailed track list can be found on page 2 of the booklet



Septura
Alan Thomas and Simon Cox, Trumpets in B flat
Huw Morgan, Trumpet in E flat • Peter Smith, Tuba
Matthew Gee and Matthew Knight, Trombones
Dan West, Bass Trombone

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