



# Nicolas GOMBERT

Magnificat I

Salve Regina

Credo

Tulerunt Dominum

Oxford Camerata  
Jeremy Summerly

## Nicolas Gombert (c.1495-c.1560)

### Magnificat I • Salve Regina • Credo • Tulerunt Dominum

If you view musical history as a sequence of styles, each one a consequence of its predecessor, then Gombert's music takes the transparent consonances of Josquin's generation and muddies the harmonic waters in preparation for the rich late-sixteenth-century polyphonic style of Palestrina's generation. Gombert and his contemporaries thus become an important if rather unglamorous link between the Low and the High Renaissance. There is nothing wrong with this view unless, however, you venture to believe that the achievements of Gombert's generation are technically the most accomplished, and musically the most exciting, of the Renaissance. Gombert was not a minor character on the musical time-line between Josquin and Palestrina; on the contrary, he was a musical genius whose emotional complexity and inherent self-contradictions allowed him to write music unlike that of any other Renaissance composer.

While it is relatively easy to love Gombert's music, one certainly cannot love Gombert the man since he was a pederast. Gombert violated a young boy while serving in the chapel of the Emperor Charles V as a result of which he was banished to the galleys. After some time in exile on the high seas, however, Gombert's compositional accomplishments led to an Emperor's pardon. The music that led directly to Gombert's rescue from oblivion was a series of eight *Magnificats*, the first of which is presented here. Self-confident and robust, this Dorian-mode canticle leaves no doubt as to the power of Gombert's persuasive personality. As each polyphonic section alternates with the *Magnificat* plainchant, the vocal disposition changes. The four-voice writing of the first two polyphonic verses is reduced to three voices at '*Fecit potentiam*'. Thereafter a voice is added at '*Esurientes*', another at '*Sicut locutus est*', and finally, after a magnificently handled florid cadence, another one at '*Sicut locutus est*'. With six voices in play Gombert is unstoppable, and he knows it. This musically unprejudiced style is in marked contrast to the sensitively experimental style of the motets which

pre-date Gombert's conviction. Works like the resonant six-voiced *Media vita* and the *Epitaphium* to his mentor Josquin show a deeply self-conscious exploration of dark texts by a composer with a unique ear for vocal texture. To a certain extent both of these works are autobiographical. In the *Epitaph* Gombert shows off his low-textured Flemish heritage and his ability to enhance those low textures with painful harmonic twists, most notably to paint the harshness of death at the words '*severa morte*'. In the final section of this *Epitaph*, the pupil's pastiche of his teacher's outmoded style is breathtakingly adept and poignant: at the words '*Josquinus inquit*' (Josquin speaks) Gombert suddenly turns the musical clock back four decades, and in an instant the musical complexity of the mid-century dilemma is replaced by the rose-tinted simplicity of Gombert's youth, where clear imitation, rocking haemias, and modal harmony offer much-needed security. Self-pity and harsh self-analysis are even more evident in *Media vita* where Gombert finds himself emotionally dead, or dormant, at least, while yet in the midst of life. *Media vita* is a Renaissance masterpiece whose emotional darkness is handed down directly through the Ockeghem-Josquin line.

The best-known compositions in this collection are the eight-voiced *Credo* and *Tulerunt Dominum*; indeed these two pieces share much of the same music. *Tulerunt Dominum* was evidently a well-loved piece in Gombert's day since it survives in no fewer than four other versions (as a secular song to the French words *Je prens congé*, as the Latin motets *Sustinuimus pacem* and *Lugebat David Absalon*, and in its earliest version *J'ay mis mon cœur*). *Tulerunt* might these days be described as minimalist because of its insistence on the repetition of small fragments of music, most notably in its setting of the word '*Alleluia*' whenever it appears. Indeed, the closing bars of this motet are some of the most insistently memorable of the period. The setting of the *Credo* takes the musical gem that is *Tulerunt* and uses it to construct a fully-formed Renaissance crown.

The *Credo* is a treatise in how to write for eight voices: Gombert takes a few fragments of musical material and scatters them around his choir with breathtaking virtuosity. No combination of voices is ever the same twice, and Gombert's kaleidoscopic textural display only ends because the text itself runs out. This isolated Mass movement shows a composer who is able to control sounds and colours in a way which one normally only associates with innovative orchestrators such as Berlioz and Debussy. In particular, the emotionally charged '*Et incarnatus est*' section is a model of textural pacing which dwarfs the accomplishments of most composers of any era. At the other end of the spectrum are the four-voiced motets *Super flumina Babylonis* and *Salve Regina* which show the introspective side of Gombert's character. In the former, Psalm 136 tells of the Babylonian Exile ('By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept') and was an obvious narrative choice for Gombert the nostalgic. Gombert revisits the haunting harmonies of his childhood ('*dum recordaremur*') while antique musical instruments sway precariously in the late-medieval breeze ('*suspendimus*

*organa*'). But later on, the acid jeers of the captors ('Sing us one of your songs') and the sardonic repost of the prisoners ('How can we sing in a strange land?') were to have horrific personal resonances for Gombert during his own exile; the sudden major mode ending of *Super flumina Babylonis* is quite exceptionally bitter, even by Gombert's standards. The *Salve Regina* is a more redemptive work and represents one of the finest contrapuntal achievements of any age. Gombert weaves seven plainchant melodies ('*diversi diversa orant*') of the Blessed Virgin Mary into a highly compact piece of polyphony whose simple beauty betrays nothing of the technical facility that underpins it. The effect is of snatches of Marian melodies floating effortlessly into (and out of) one's consciousness. This ability to conceal the intricate workings of his mind was at one and the same time Gombert's musical strength and his personal weakness.

Jeremy Summery

## Oxford Camerata

Oxford Camerata gave its first concert at the Maison Française in Oxford on 22nd May 1984. Since then the choir has given concerts throughout Europe and has made almost thirty CD recordings. The core group comprises twelve singers with or without keyboard accompaniment, but for certain projects the choir has been made up of as few as four singers and as many as twenty. After a performance of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in the Snape Maltings on Good Friday 1986, Sir Peter Pears, who was at the performance, agreed to become the Oxford Camerata's first patron. While the Camerata was initially recognised as a specifically early-music group, since the early 1990s the choir has expanded its repertory to include music from Gregorian chant to the present day. Hand in hand with this went the formation of the Oxford Camerata Instrumental Ensemble in 1992. Like the choir itself, the Instrumental Ensemble is of flexible size and can comprise from four to twenty players working with either modern or period instruments. Oxford Camerata is regarded as one of the finest ensembles of its type in Europe, and in recognition of this the Camerata was awarded a European Cultural Prize by the Fördergemeinschaft der Europäischen Wirtschaft in 1995.

**Sopranos:** Kate Ashby, Alice Gribbin, Abigail Boreham, Lisa Wilson  
**Altos:** Emma Ashby, Deborah Mackay, Alison Coldstream, Anne Jones  
**Tenors:** Bene't Coldstream, Peter Davoren, David Knight, Michael Stevens  
**Basses:** Nicholas Flower, Richard Hooper, James Birchall, David Buckley

## Jeremy Summerly

Jeremy Summerly is Head of Academic Studies at the Royal Academy of Music in London. As well as a conductor and lecturer he is a writer/presenter for BBC Radio and a freelance editor for Faber Music. He graduated from Oxford University with First Class Honours in Music in 1982 and thereafter undertook musicological research at King's College, London, while also working as a Studio Manager for BBC Radio. Between 1990 and 1996 he was conductor of Schola Cantorum of Oxford. He has given concert tours throughout Europe and the United States as well as in Japan, Indonesia, Hong Kong, South Africa, and Botswana. He has conducted Ligeti in front of Ligeti, Kagel in front of Kagel, and Pärt in front of Pärt. He made his conducting début at the BBC Proms in 1999 and at the Berlin Philharmonie in 2005.

### 1 Tulerunt

Tulerunt Dominum meum,  
et nescio ubi posuerunt eum.  
Dicunt ei angeli:  
Mulier, quid ploras?  
Surrexit, sicut dixit,  
praecedet vos in Galilaeam,  
ibi eum videbitis. Alleluia.  
Cum ergo fleret, inclinavit se  
et vidit duos angelos qui dicunt ei:  
Praecedet vos in Galilaeam,  
ibi eum videbitis. Alleluia.

They have taken my Lord,  
and I know not where they have put him.  
The angels said to her:  
Woman, why do you weep?  
He has risen, as he said,  
and he goes before you into Galilee  
where you will see him. Alleluia.  
And as she wept, she stooped  
and saw two angels who said to her:  
He goes before you into Galilee  
where you will see him. Alleluia.

### 2 Magnificat

Magnificat anima mea Dominum.  
Et exsultavit spiritus meus in Deo, salutari meo.  
Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae:  
ecce enim ex hoc  
beatam me dicent omnes generationes.  
Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est:  
et sanctum nomen eius.  
Et misericordia eius a progenie in progenies  
timentibus eum.  
Fecit potentiam in brachio suo:  
dispersit superbos  
mente cordis sui.  
Deposuit potentes de sede,  
et exaltavit humiles.  
Esurientes implevit bonis:

My soul doth magnify the Lord.  
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my saviour.  
For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden:  
for behold, from henceforth  
all generations shall call me blessed.  
For he that is mighty hath magnified me:  
and holy is his name.  
And his mercy is on them that fear him  
throughout all generations.  
He hath showed strength with his arm:  
he hath scattered the proud  
in the imagination of their hearts.  
He hath put down the mighty from their seat,  
and hath exalted the humble.  
He hath filled the hungry with good things:

et divites dimisit inanes.  
Suscepit Israel, puerum suum,  
recordatus misericordiae suae.  
Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros,  
Abraham, et semini eius in saecula.  
Gloria Patri, et Filio,  
et Spiritui Sancto.  
Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper,  
et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

### ③ Credo

Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem,  
factorem caeli et terrae,  
visibilium omnium et invisibilium.  
Et in unum Dominum Iesum Christum,  
Filium Dei unigenitum.  
Et ex Patre natum ante omnia saecula.  
Deum de Deo, Lumen de Lumine,  
Deum verum de Deo vero.  
Genitum non factum, consubstantialem Patri:  
per quem omnia facta sunt.  
Qui propter nos homines,  
et propter nostram salutem descendit de caelis.  
Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto  
ex Maria virgine et homo factus est.  
Crucifixus etiam pro nobis sub Pontio Pilato:  
passus et sepultus est.  
Et resurrexit tertia die,  
secundum scripturas. Et ascendit in caelum:  
sedet ad dexteram Patris.  
Et iterum venturus est cum gloria  
iudicare vivos et mortuos:  
cuius regni non erit finis.  
Et in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum et vivificantem,  
qui ex Patre Filioque procedit.  
Qui cum Patre et Filio simul adoratur,  
et conglorificatur: qui locutus est per prophetas.  
Et unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam,  
Confiteor unum baptisma in remissionem peccatorum.  
Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum.  
Et vitam venturi saeculi.  
Amen.

and the rich he hath sent empty away.  
He remembering his mercy  
hath holpen his servant Israel.  
As he promised to our forefathers,  
Abraham and his seed for ever.  
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit.  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
and of all things visible and invisible.  
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the only begotten Son of God.  
Begotten of his Father before all worlds,  
God of God, Light of Light,  
very God of very God,  
begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father,  
by whom all things were made.  
Who for us men  
and for our salvation came down from heaven.  
And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost  
of the virgin Mary and was made man.  
And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate:  
he suffered and was buried.  
And on the third day he rose again  
according to the scriptures. And ascended into heaven:  
he sitteth on the right hand of the Father.  
And he shall come again with glory  
to judge both the quick and the dead:  
whose kingdom shall have no end.  
And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.  
Who with the Father and the Son is worshipped  
and glorified: who spake by the prophets.  
And I believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic church,  
I acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
And I look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come.  
Amen.

#### **[4] Super flumina Babylonis**

Super flumina Babylonis,  
illic sedimus et flevimus:  
dum recordaremur tui Sion:  
In salicibus in medio ejus,  
suspendimus organa nostra.  
Quia illic interrogaverunt nos,  
qui captivos duxerunt nos, verba cantionum:  
Et qui abduxerunt nos:  
Hymnum cantate nobis de canticis Sion.  
Quomodo cantabimus canticum Domini  
in terra aliena?

#### **[5] Media vita**

Media vita in morte sumus:  
quem quaerimus adiutorem nisi te, Domine?  
Qui pro peccatis nostris iuste irasceris.  
Sancte Deus, sancte fortis.  
Sancte et misericors salvator noster,  
amarae morti ne tradas nos.

*(Nunc dimittis Antiphon, third Sunday in Lent)*

#### **[6]&[7] Salve regina**

*Cantus*

Salve regina, mater misericordiae,  
vita dulcedo et spes nostra salve.  
Ad te clamamus, exsules filii Hevae.  
Ad te suspiramus,  
gementes et flentes in hac lacrimarum valle.  
Eia ergo, advocata nostra,  
illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte.  
Et Iesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui,  
nobis post hoc exsilium ostende.  
O clemens, o pia, o dulcis virgo Maria.

*Altus*

Ave regina caelorum,  
ave domina angelorum:

By the waters of Babylon,  
there we sat and wept:  
as we recalled you Sion:  
On the poplars at your heart  
we hung up our instruments.  
For there they asked of us,  
those who led us captive, words of song:  
and those who led us away said:  
sing to us a hymn from the songs of Sion.  
How shall we sing the Lord's song  
in a strange land?

In the midst of life we are in death:  
of whom may we seek for succour, but of thee, O Lord?  
Who for our sins art justly displeased.  
Holy God, holy and mighty,  
Holy and merciful, our saviour,  
deliver us not to a bitter death.

Hail queen, mother of mercy,  
hail sweetness and our hope, hail.  
To you we cry out, exiled sons of Eve.  
To you we sigh,  
groaning and weeping in this valley of tears.  
Behold then, our advocate,  
turn your merciful eyes to us.  
And after this exile show to us Jesus,  
blessed fruit of your womb.  
O merciful, O holy, O sweet virgin Mary.

Hail queen of the heavens,  
hail mistress of the angels:

salve radix, salve porta.  
Ex qua mundo lux est orta:  
gaude virgo gloriosa,  
super omnes speciosa:  
Vale, o valde decora.  
Et pro nobis semper Christum exora.

Beata mater et innupta virgo  
gloriosa regina mundi,  
intercede pro nobis  
ad Dominum Deum nostrum,  
o dulcis Maria.

#### *Tenor*

Inviolata, integra et casta es Maria:  
quae es effecta fulgida caeli porta.  
O mater alma Christi carissima.  
Suscipe pia laudum praeconia.  
Nostra ut pura pectora sint et corpora:  
nunc flagitant devota corda et ora.  
Tua per precata dulcissima.  
Nobis concedas veniam per saecula.  
O benigna! O regina! O Maria!  
Quae sola inviolata permansisti.

Hortus conclusus es,  
Dei genitrix, fons signatus,  
surge, propera, amica mea.  
O dulcis Maria.

#### *Bassus*

Alma redemptoris mater,  
quae pervia caeli porta manes  
et stella maris, succurre cadenti  
surgere qui curat populo:  
Tu quae genuisti, natura mirante,  
tuum sanctum genitorem:  
virgo prius ac posterius.  
Gabrielis ab ore sumens illud Ave,  
peccatorum miserere.

hail root, hail door.  
From whom light has arisen for the world:  
rejoice, glorious virgin,  
beautiful above all others.  
Hail, O truly beautiful one.  
And continually pray to Christ for us.

Blessed mother and unwed virgin,  
glorious queen of the world,  
intercede on our behalf  
with the Lord our God,  
O sweet Mary.

You are inviolate, whole and chaste, Mary:  
you who are the shining gateway to heaven.  
O nourishing and most beloved mother of Christ.  
Receive the pious offerings of praise.  
That our hearts and bodies may be made pure:  
so devoted hearts and mouths now beseech you.  
Your prayers are most sweet.  
Grant us forgiveness through the ages.  
O kind one! O queen! O Mary!  
Who have alone remained inviolate.

You are an enclosed garden,  
mother of God, chosen source,  
arise, make haste, my friend.  
O sweet Mary.

Gracious mother of the redeemer,  
you who remain the ever-open gate of heaven  
and the star of the sea, succour your people  
who fall but strive to rise again.  
You who gave birth, white nature marvelled,  
to your holy creator,  
a virgin before and after,  
who heard that 'Ave' from the mouth of Gabriel,  
have mercy on sinners.

Ave Maria, gratia plena: Dominus tecum:  
benedicta tu in mulieribus,  
et benedictus fructus ventris tui,  
o dulcis virgo Maria.

### **⑧ Epitaphium**

Musae, Jovis ter maximi proles conara, plangite,  
comas cypresses comprimat,  
Josquinus ille occidit,  
templorum decus,  
et vestrum decus.  
Severa more et improba,  
qua templa  
dulcibus sonis  
privas, et aulas principium.  
Malum tibi quod imprecer  
tollenti bonos,  
parenti malis.  
Apollo sed necem tibi  
minatur, heus, mors pessima,  
musas hortatur addere,  
instructus arcu et spiculis  
(musasque ut addent commonet)  
et lauram comis  
et aurum comis.  
Josquinus [inquit] optimo  
et maximo gratus Jovi  
triumphat inter caelites,  
et dulce carmen concinit  
templorum decus, musarum decus.

#### *Cantus firmus*

Circumdederunt me gemitus mortis;  
dolores inferni circumdederunt me.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee:  
blessed art thou among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.  
O sweet virgin Mary.

Muses, tuneful offspring of thrice-great Jupiter, wail,  
let the cypress hold together its foliage,  
Josquin himself is dead,  
the glory of your temples,  
your own glory.  
Harsh and impudent death,  
through which you deprive  
the temples and courts of princes  
of sweet sounds.  
I invoke evil upon you  
for your destroying of the good  
and your sparing of malingerers.  
But Apollo threatens you with murder,  
alas, death most awful,  
he encourages the muses to join,  
skilful with the bow and with arrows  
(and he advises the muses to join)  
with laurel in his hair,  
with gold in his hair.  
Josquin, pleasing to Jupiter  
the greatest and the best, [speaks]  
and rejoices amongst the heavenly beings,  
and sweetly sings a song which is  
the glory of temples, the glory of the muses.

Around me are the groans of death;  
the miseries of hell are around me.





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Playing Time  
62:19

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Nicolas Gombert was a musical genius whose emotional complexity allowed him to write music unlike that of any other Renaissance composer. A member of the generation between Josquin and Palestrina, he took the polyphonic style to its highest state of perfection. This recording brings together many of his best-known works, including the first of his eight *Magnificats*, the eight-voiced *Credo*, and *Tulerunt Dominum*, some of the most memorable music of the period.

## Nicolas GOMBERT

(c.1495-c.1560)

### Magnificat I • Salve Regina • Credo • Tulerunt Dominum

- |   |                                      |       |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | Tulerunt Dominum meum                | 5:44  |
| 2 | Magnificat primi toni                | 11:38 |
| 3 | Credo in unum Deum                   | 13:21 |
| 4 | Super flumina Babylonis              | 7:15  |
| 5 | Media vita in morte sumus            | 7:11  |
| 6 | Salve regina (plainchant mode 1)     | 3:00  |
| 7 | Salve regina (diversi diversa orant) | 6:34  |
| 8 | Epitaphium (in Josquinum a Prato)    | 7:36  |

### Oxford Camerata • Jeremy Summerly

Recorded in the Chapel of Hertford College, Oxford

(by kind permission of the Principal and Fellows) on 17th and 18th March, 2004.

Producer: David Trendell • Engineer: Justin Lowe • Booklet Notes: Jeremy Summerly

Cover Picture: *God the Father, detail of the central panel of the Ghent Altarpiece, 1432*  
by Hubert Eyck (c.1370-1426) & Jan van Eyck (1390-1441)

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