



CORO

§ The Sixteen Edition

# The Flower of All Virginity

Eton Choirbook Volume IV

The Sixteen

HARRY CHRISTOPHERS

---

KELLYK

---

NESBETT

---

FAYRFAX

---

BROWNE

THE VOICES OF  
CLASSIC *f*M



I remember well, some years ago, sitting in the library at Eton College with Christopher Page and recording a programme for BBC Radio 3 about the Eton Choirbook, by far the most outstanding of a handful of choirbooks to survive the

Reformation. We turned the parchment pages of this vast book, admiring the vividly illuminated capitals, marvelling at some of the, obviously frequently performed, motets, the corners of which were heavily thumbed by fingers of a past century. My abiding thought was how incredibly talented these sixteen choristers must have been to sing this highly complex music, difficult by any standard, while crowding around a lectern, straining to read by candlelight. Today we have modern editions, electricity and aids for failing sight and it still seems difficult!

Our edition represents very much the grass roots of our work and our overwhelming desire to rejoice in the survival of this great music.

Harry  
Christopher

TREBLE  
Fiona Clarke  
Ruth Dean  
Carys Lane  
MEAN  
Libby Crabtree  
Sally Dunkley  
Rebecca Outram\*  
Kim Porter\*  
Caroline Trevor  
Julia White\*  
ALTO  
Stephen Carter  
Andrew Giles  
Michael Lees  
TENOR  
Simon Berridge  
Andrew Carwood  
Robert Johnston  
Neil MacKenzie  
David Roy  
Matthew Vine  
BASS  
Simon Birchall  
Matthew Brook+  
Roger Cleverdon  
Robert Evans  
Michael McCarthy+  
Francis Steele

\* only in Browne O  
Maria Salvatoris  
Mater  
+ only in Kellyk  
Gaude Flore Virginali  
and Browne O Maria  
Salvatoris Mater

ANON: AH MY DEAR  
MEAN  
Ruth Dunkley (verse),  
Libby Crabtree,  
Rebecca Outram  
ALTO  
Michael Lees (verse),  
Andrew Giles,  
Caroline Trevor  
TENOR  
Simon Berridge (verse),  
Neil MacKenzie,  
David Roy

FAYRFAX: MOST  
CLEAR OF COLOUR  
MEAN  
Sally Dunkley  
TENOR  
Simon Berridge  
BASS  
Robert Evans

ANON: AFRAID, ALAS  
MEAN  
Libby Crabtree (verse),  
Sally Dunkley,  
Rebecca Outram  
ALTO  
Andrew Giles (verse),  
Michael Lees,  
Caroline Trevor  
TENOR  
Neil MacKenzie (verse),  
Simon Berridge,  
David Roy  
BASS  
Simon Birchall (verse),  
Roger Cleverdon,  
Robert Evans

Eton College was founded by a man in order to teach other men how best to serve in a male-dominated society; but it was a woman who lay at its conceptual heart. It is characteristic of late medieval devotion to the person of the Virgin Mary that Henry VI chose to dedicate his new institution to her, and name it 'the College Roiall of Our Ladie of Eton beside Windesor'. And it was natural that the great book of polyphonic music copied early in the sixteenth century expressly for the use by the choir of Eton College chapel should contain largely music written in honour of the Blessed Virgin. Today we think of the Eton Choirbook as a collection of music – majestic, extravagant, virtuosic music, which satisfies many listeners as sound alone. In the late Middle Ages the contents of the manuscripts would have been regarded more as appropriate statements of allegiance; not so much loyalty to God, a belief so basic as to need no expression, but rather obedience to the woman chosen by God to bear his Son, the saint who might most potently act as mediator between God and man, and assist the soul in its quest for salvation.

In the same way that painters and sculptors conventionally represented the Virgin as the ideal woman, so medieval poets saw in her the image of feminine perfection. She is the flower

of all virginity, described in the language used equally to address the earthly lover.

According to the original statutes of Eton College, members of the choir were to assemble each evening in the chapel before the image of the Virgin, and sing 'in the best manner of which they have knowledge' an antiphon in her honour. During Lent they were to perform the 'Salve Regina'; the choirbook offered them the choice of no fewer than fifteen different settings of that text. On feast-days during Lent and at some other times of the year they could select 'some other antiphon of the Blessed Virgin', using appropriate words. Before some of its pages were lost, the Eton Choirbook contained more than forty different Marian antiphons, some of them seasonal in tone, some related to specific acts of devotion or petition – prayers for protection against the plague, for example – and some of a more general nature. For everyday use there were pieces of modest dimensions. Other works, sometimes of breathtaking size and complexity, were probably reserved for special occasions. This recording includes two such pieces, John Browne's eight-part *O Maria Salvatoris mater* and Kellyk's seven-part *Gaude flore virginali*. Standing as they do at the head of the Eton Choirbook, they represent the height of splendour. Music such as this can hardly have been undertaken lightly, even by the most proficient of singers.

In these two works, qualities such as superabundance of melody, intricacy of texture, richness of sonority and the interplay of buoyant rhythms serve to express the joy of the text. More intimate word-music relationships are rare. Phrases that refer to 'sorry' or 'sins' receive none of the special attention a later composer might have lavished on them, and instead are subsumed into the setting as a whole. To achieve variety, the composer looked into the form of the poetry rather than to its specific content. In *Gaude flore virginali* the sevenfold repetition of the word 'Gaude' (rejoice) provided Kellyk with an irresistible architectural plan; here changes of texture serve to mark off stanzas and half-stanzas from one another. John Browne might have proceeded in broadly similar fashion in *O Maria Salvatoris mater*, since the poetic form of his text is the same as Kellyk's, lacking only the neat symmetry of the 'Gaude' acclamations. Instead he attempts a more sophisticated reading; sometimes he emphasizes the stanzaic structure of the poem; elsewhere he cuts against it by highlighting important phrases. Ingenuity of design combines with richness of sonority and a marvellous display of vocal fireworks to produce one of the most arresting works in the choirbook.

Browne composed two five-part settings of the 'Salve Regina', one scored for a choir of

restricted vocal range, almost certainly men's voices, and the version performed here, which is for a more brilliant mixed-voice combination. Evidently it was written for use during Holy Week, for the music is structured around a plainchant melody 'Maria ergo unxit', which forms part of the Mandatum service sung on Maundy Thursday. As the choir makes its fervent prayer to the Virgin, the tenors recall the act of Mary Magdalen washing Jesus' feet, drying them with her hair and anointing them with oil. In addition to votive antiphons, the Eton Choirbook pays homage to the Virgin through the words of the Magnificat. There were once 24 settings of this text in the manuscript, but damage to the book has resulted in the loss of more than half of them. One that survived is by Nesbitt, a composer with English connections but possibly of Scottish origins; his five-part Magnificat is also found in the roughly contemporary Carver Choirbook, a collection that has close links with the Scottish Chapel Royal. Where other works in the Eton repertoire stand out for their florid vocal lines and massiveness of effect, this piece is remarkable more for the bold, declamatory quality of its word-setting and for its resourceful use of imitative counterpoint.

© JOHN MILSOM

## Hugh Kellyk *Gaude flore virginali*

*Gaude flore virginali*  
*Honoreque speciali*  
*Transcendens splendiferum*  
*Angolorum principatum*  
*Et sanctorum decoratum*  
*Dignitate numerum.*

*Gaude sponsa cara Dei,*  
*Nam ut clara lux diei*  
*Solis datur lumine,*  
*Sic tu facis orbem vere*  
*Tuae pacis resplendere*  
*Lucis plenitudine.*

*Gaude splendens vas virtutum,*  
*Cuius pendens est ad nutum*  
*Tota caeli curia:*  
*Te benignam et felicem*  
*Jesu dignam genitricem*  
*Veneratur in gloria.*

*Gaude nexu voluntatis*  
*Et amplexu caritatis*  
*Iuncta sic Altissimo,*  
*Ut ad votum consequaris*  
*Quicquid virgo postularis*  
*A Jesu dulcissimo.*

Rejoice, who in the flower of your maidenhood  
And in the special honour due to you  
Surpass all the shining  
Hosts of angels  
And the decorated company of saints  
In worthiness.

Rejoice beloved spouse of God,  
For as the clear light of day  
Shines forth in the sun's rays,  
So truly do you make the earth  
Brilliant with the fullness  
Of the light of your peace.

Rejoice radiant vessel of goodness,  
On whose assent hangs  
All the government of heaven:  
You the kind, the blessed,  
The worthy mother of Jesus  
They venerate in glory.

Rejoice that you are so united in the bond of will  
And the embrace of love  
With the Most High  
That you obtain the promise  
Of whatever virgin prayer you make  
Of your sweetest Jesus.

*Gaude mater miserorum,  
Quia Pater saeculorum  
Dabit te colentibus  
Congruentem hic mercedem  
Et felicem poli sedem  
Regnis in caelestibus.*

*Gaude virgo mater Christi  
Quia sola meruisti,  
O virgo piissima,  
Esse tantae dignitatis  
Quod sis sanctae Trinitatis  
Sessioni proxima.*

*Gaude virgo mater pura  
Certa manens et segura  
Quod haec septem gaudia  
Non cessabunt nec decrescent  
Sed durabunt et florescent  
Per aeterna saecula. Amen.*

Rejoice mother of the poor  
That the father of all ages  
Will grant to all who honour you  
A fitting reward here on earth  
And a blessed place on high  
In the kingdom of heaven.

Rejoice virgin mother of Christ  
That you alone were counted worthy,  
Most dutiful maiden,  
To enjoy the great honour  
Of taking the place  
Next to the holy Trinity.

Rejoice, who as pure virgin and mother  
Remain ever sure and secure,  
That these seven joys  
Will not cease or diminish  
But will endure and flourish  
Through eternal ages. Amen.

Anon

Ah, my dear, ah, my dear son!

‘Ah, my dear, ah, my dear son!’  
Said Mary: ‘Ah my dear;  
Kiss thy mother, Jesu,  
With a laughing cheer.’

This enders night I saw a sight  
All in my sleep:  
Mary, that may, she sang lullay  
And sore did weep.

To keep she sought full fast about  
Her son fro cold:  
Joseph said, ‘Wife, my joy, my life,  
Say what ye would.’  
‘Nothing, my spouse, is in this house  
Unto my pay;  
My Son, a king, that made all thing,  
Lieth in hay.’

‘Ah, my dear, ... laughing cheer.’

‘My mother dear, amend your cheer,  
And now be still:  
Thus for to lie, it is soothly  
My Father’s will.

Derision, great passion,  
Ininitely,  
As it is found, many a wound  
Suffer shall I.

On Calvary that is so high,  
There shall I be,  
Man to restore, nailed full sore  
Upon a tree.’

‘Ah, my dear, ...  
laughing cheer.’

## John Nesbett

# 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:  
Dispexit superbos mente cordis sui.  
Deposuit potentes de sede:  
Et exaltavit humiles.  
Esurientes implevit bonis:  
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.*

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord:  
And my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.  
For he has looked upon the lowliness  
of his handmaid:  
Behold, from henceforth all generations  
will call me blessed.  
For he who is mighty has done great  
things for me:  
And holy is his name.  
And his mercy extends from generation  
to generation:  
Upon those who fear him.  
He has put forth his arm in strength:  
And scattered those who are proud in heart.  
He has cast the mighty from their thrones:  
And has raised up the lowly.  
The hungry he has filled with good things:  
And the rich he has sent away empty.  
He has protected Israel his servant:  
Remembering his mercy.  
As he promised to our forefathers:  
To Abraham and his children 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.

## Robert Fayrfax

# Most clear of colour

Most clear of colour and root of steadfastness  
With virtue cunning her manner is led,  
Which that passeth my mind for to express  
Of her bounty, beauty and womanhood:  
The brightest mirror and flower of goodlihead,  
Which that all men know'th, both more and less;  
These virtues been printed in her doubtless.

## John Browne

# Salve Regina

*Salve Regina, mater misericordiae:  
Vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve.  
Ad te clamamus exsules filii Evae.  
Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes  
In hac lacrimarum valle.  
Eia ergo advocata nostra,  
Illos tuos misericordes oculos  
Ad nos converte,  
Et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui,  
Nobis post hoc exsilium ostende.  
Virgo mater ecclesiae,  
Aeterna porta gloriae,  
Esto nobis refugium  
Apud Patrem et Filium.*

Hail, O queen, mother of mercy;  
Our life, our sweetness and our hope, hail!  
To you we cry out, exiled children of Eve;  
To you we sigh as we mourn and weep  
In this valley of tears.  
O then, our advocate,  
Turn those merciful eyes of yours  
Towards us;  
And after our exile here, show to us the blessed  
Fruit of your womb, Jesus.  
Virgin mother of the church,  
Everlasting gateway to glory,  
Be our refuge  
Before the face of the Father and the Son.

O Clemens!

*Virgo Clemens, virgo pia,  
Virgo dulcis, O Maria,  
Exaudi preces omnium  
Ad te pie clamantium.*

O pia!

*Funde preces tuo nato,  
Crucifixo, vulnerato,  
Et pro nobis flagellato,  
Spinis puncto, felle potato.*

O dulcis Maria, salve!

Anon

## Afraid, alas, and why so suddenly?

Afraid, alas, and why so suddenly?  
Why so dismayed? Why should she heavy be,  
Or otherwise evil apaid? Afraid.

Sith it concluded was in the Trinity  
That the Son of God should make us all free,  
Though death be bewailed by ways of pity,  
Yet when our Lady's Son was slain,  
Our soules comfort came again:  
Therefore though death be never so sore,  
Now, blessed Lady, weep no more: Afraid.

O gentle!

Virgin gentle, virgin holy,  
Virgin sweet, O Mary,  
Hear the prayers of all  
Who dutifully cry to you.

O holy!

Pour out our prayers to your Son,  
Crucified, bruised  
And scourged for our sake,  
Pierced with thorns, given gall to drink.

O Sweet Mary, hail!

Methinketh in my reason thou ought to be glad,  
When Jews with their treason to death thy Son lad:  
They beat him for our guilt, though he sin no had;  
Thy Son was doughty, the fiend was adrad:  
To joy of every worldes wight,  
So now is known thy Sonnes might:

Therefore though death be never so sore,  
Now, blessed Lady, weep no more: Afraid.

Well I remember his woundes were full smart;

The crown at his head, the spear at his heart,  
They beating and bruising, or life did depart;  
All was on red blood without any shirt:  
But blessed be that hour that He suffered  
That sharp shower!

Therefore though death be never so sore,  
Now, blessed Lady, weep no more: Afraid.

John Browne

## O Maria Salvatoris Mater

*O Maria Salvatoris Mater,  
Fragrans flos pudoris,  
Superans nascentia.*

*Parit illa mater fructum  
Qui iam nostrum tulit luctum  
Cunctaque peccamina.*

*Parit Christum virgo manens;  
Quisnam negat? Numquid parens  
Virga Aaron legitur frondes,  
Flores produxisse?  
Deum ita potuisse  
Filium adseritur.*

*Ex hac matre sic intacta  
Gignit eum, quo est facta  
Cunctaque viventia.*

Glorious Lady, of heaven high queen,  
Lay down all thy weeping, let no more be seen!  
Remember thy joys, that joyful aye been!  
Thy dear Son is past his trouble and his teen;  
His death was sweet, it did us good;  
He bought us with His precious blood:

Therefore though death be never so sore,  
Now, blessed Lady, weep no more: Afraid.

O Mary, Mother of the Saviour,  
Fragrant flower of chastity  
Surpassing all the children of men.

This mother brings forth the child  
Who now has borne our sorrow  
And all our sins.

She bears the Christ yet remains a Virgin;  
Who could deny it? Do we not read  
That Aaron's staff was seen  
To have brought forth leaf and bud?  
That God has had the power in the same way  
To bring forth a son we here declare.

From this mother thus untouched  
He begets him by whom she herself was made  
And all that lives.

*Illam ergo recolamus,  
Cuius fructum sic amamus;  
Colant et caelestia.*

*Quisnam vivit hoc in mundo,  
Cum sit captus iniucundo  
Morbo vel tristitia,*

*Quin, si oret istam matrem,  
Intercedat ut ad Patrem  
Caelesti in patria?*

*Exstat mater tum parata  
Nos iuvare; En! Quam grata  
Adest semper Maria.*

*Rogamus et Frideswidam,  
Magdalenam, Catharinam  
Doctam philosophia;*

*Theologia disputans  
Gentes cunctas superans  
Cum sit haec Catharina.*

*His iam sanctis iubilemus,  
Voce, corde decantemus  
Hac nostra melodia.*

Her therefore we celebrate,  
Thus showing our love for her child;  
Indeed the heavens honour her.

Who is there living on this earth  
For whom, when in the unhappy grip  
Of illness or sorrow,

If he but prayed to this his mother,  
She would not intercede as with his Father  
In his heavenly home?

We have a mother ready at those times  
To help us: Lo! How graciously  
Mary ever stands by us.  
Let us make our prayer also to Frideswide,  
To Magdalene, to Catherine  
Learned in philosophy;

Since in theological argument  
She overcomes all the pagans,  
This Catherine.

In these saints now let us rejoice;  
With heart and voice let us go on singing  
In this our melody.

---

Producer: Mark Brown  
Engineer: Antony Howell  
Recorded at St. Bartholomew's Church, Orford

Translations by Jeremy White.  
Series devised by John Milsom.  
Originally released as Collins 13952.

CD mastering: Julian Millard  
Cover artwork: Victoria & Albert Museum (© V&A Images)  
Design: Richard Boxall Design Associates

The Sixteen Productions Ltd., CORO  
© The Sixteen Productions Ltd. 2003  
© The Sixteen Productions Ltd. 2003

For further information about The Sixteen recordings  
on CORO or live performances and tours, call  
+44 (0) 20 7936 3420, or email [coro@thesixteen.org.uk](mailto:coro@thesixteen.org.uk)

[www.thesixteen.com](http://www.thesixteen.com)

