

THE SIXTEEN, HARRY CHRISTOPHERS

After three decades of world-wide performance and recording, The Sixteen is recognised as one of the world's greatest ensembles. Its special reputation for performing early English polyphony, masterpieces of the Renaissance, Baroque and early Classical periods, and a diversity of 20th-century music, all stems from the passions of conductor and founder, Harry Christophers. The Sixteen tours internationally giving regular performances at the major concert halls and festivals. At home in the UK, The Sixteen are 'The Voices of Classic FM' as well as Associate Artists of Bridgewater Hall, Manchester. The group also promotes the Choral Pilgrimage, an annual tour of the UK's finest cathedrals. The Sixteen's period-instrument orchestra has taken part in acclaimed semi-staged performances of Purcell's *Fairy Queen* in Tel Aviv and London, a fully-staged production of Purcell's *King Arthur* in Lisbon's Belem Centre, and new productions of Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse* at Lisbon Opera House and The Coronation of Poppea at English National Opera. Over one hundred recordings reflect The Sixteen's quality in a range of work spanning the music of five hundred years. In 2009 they won the coveted Classic FM Gramophone Artist of the Year Award and the Baroque Vocal Award for Handel's *Coronation Anthems*. The Sixteen also feature in the highly successful BBC television series, *Sacred Music*, presented by Simon Russell Beale. In 2011 the group launched a new training programme for young singers called Genesis Sixteen. Aimed at 18 to 23 year-olds, this is the UK's first fully-funded choral programme for young singers designed specifically to bridge the gap from student to professional practitioner.

www.the-sixteen.com

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For information on the British Library Exhibition **Royal Manuscripts: The Genius of Illumination** visit www.bl.uk/royal

For further information on CORO recordings and the artists featured on this compilation visit www.the-sixteen.com

COR16098

THE SIXTEEN - ETON CHOIRBOOK series

The Rose and The Ostrich Feather · *The Crown of Thorns*
The Pillars of Eternity · *The Flower of all Virginity*
Producer: Mark Brown Engineer: Antony Howell

THE HILLIARD ENSEMBLE - HILLIARD LIVE series

Pérotin and the Ars Antiqua

Producers: Chris Ekers and The Hilliard Ensemble
Engineers: Chris Ekers and Bob Burnell

Antoine Brumel · Guillaume Dufay

Producer: Lindsay Kemp Recording: Susan Thomas
Engineers: Chris Ekers and Dave Hunt

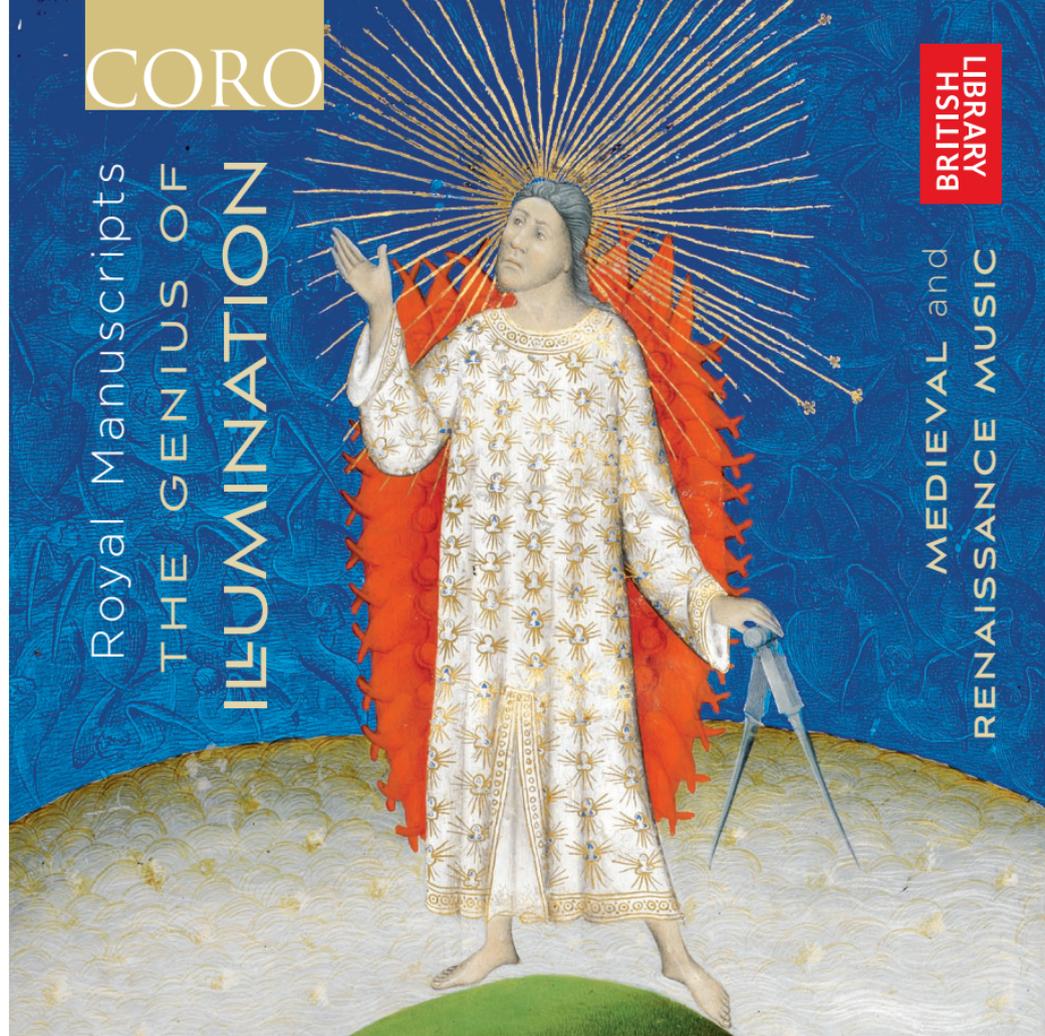
This compilation mastered by Brett Cox

CORO

Royal Manuscripts
THE GENIUS OF
ILLUMINATION

BRITISH
LIBRARY

MEDIEVAL and
RENAISSANCE MUSIC



Royal Manuscripts THE GENIUS OF ILLUMINATION

Medieval and Renaissance music inspired by the British Library Exhibition

I remember well, some years ago, sitting in the library at Eton College 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. I turned the parchment pages of this vast book, admiring the vividly illuminated initials, 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 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!

Alongside the works from the Eton Choirbook, on this disc you will hear fascinating pieces from medieval and Renaissance France, equally preserved in beautifully illuminated collections of manuscripts and performed here by the brilliant Hilliard Ensemble. And finally, one of the crowning glories of music from the Tudor period, Tallis's monumental *Spem in Alium*.

Over the years it has been our overwhelming desire to rejoice in the survival of this great music. It is collections such as those preserved at the British Library that have enabled us to bring back to life the music that illuminated these fascinating periods in our history.



Harry Christophers, Founder and Conductor, The Sixteen.

Royal Manuscripts THE GENIUS OF ILLUMINATION

A British Library Exhibition

Royal Manuscripts: The Genius of Illumination – the British Library's first major exhibition to bring together the Library's Royal collection, a treasure trove of illuminated manuscripts from between the 9th and 16th centuries collected by the kings and queens of England.

Curated by Dr Scot McKendrick, Head of History and Classical Studies, British Library; Professor John Lowden, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, and Dr Kathleen Doyle, Curator of Illuminated Manuscripts, British Library, the exhibition features stunning manuscripts that are among the most outstanding examples of royal decorative and figurative painting from this era surviving in Britain today, their colours often as vibrant as when they were first painted.

However, the manuscripts do much more than declare the artistry of their makers; the luxurious objects unlock the secrets of the private lives and public personae of the royals throughout the Middle Ages and provide the most vivid surviving source for understanding royal identity. As well as providing clear instruction on appropriate regal behaviour they also give a direct insight into royal moral codes and religious belief and shed light on the politics of the day.

"The surviving manuscripts associated with successive kings and queens of England form a remarkable inheritance. Together they offer by far the largest body of evidence for the relationship between two critical parts of British cultural heritage: its monarchy and its medieval art and music."

Dr Scot McKendrick

1] JOHN BROWNE (fl.c.1490) *Salve Regina*

from Eton Choirbook Vol.IV: *The Flower of all Virginity* (COR16018)

The Eton Choirbook is a richly illuminated manuscript collection of English sacred music composed during the late 15th century. It was one of very few collections of Latin liturgical music to survive the Reformation, and it is thanks to its survival that the sacred music of the English 15th century is still with us, conjuring up the atmosphere and spirit of the era for which it was written.

The Choirbook is one of three large choirbooks surviving from early-Tudor England (the others are the Lambeth Choirbook and the Caius Choirbook) and was compiled between approximately 1500 and 1505 for use at Eton College; its present binding dates from the mid 16th century. It originally contained music by 24 different composers; however, many of the pieces are damaged or incomplete. 126 folios remain of the original 224, including the index. Some of the 24 composers are known only because of their inclusion in the Eton Choirbook and on this collection you will hear works by four - Browne, Wylkynson, Cornysh and Davy.

2] ROBERT WYLYNISON (c.1450-1515 or later) *Jesus autem transiens*

from Eton Choirbook Vol.III: *The Pillars of Eternity* (COR16022)

In Robert Wylkynson's *Jesus autem transiens*, the most bizarre work in the Eton Choirbook, the central tenets of Christian belief are rehearsed through the words of the Apostles' Creed: 'I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth'. But this is no ordinary setting of the Creed. The text is divided into 12 segments, preceded by a 13th line, 'Jesus autem transiens' ('Jesus then passing through (their midst)'). Robert Wylkynson was a clerk at Eton in 1496, and master of the choristers there from 1500 until at least 1515. Both *Jesus autem transiens* and his nine-part *Salve Regina* are likely to have received their first performances in Eton College Chapel itself.

3] ANON c.1420 MS *Hail Mary full of grace*

4] RICHARD PYGOTT (fl.1530) *Quid petis, O fili?*

both from *Christus Natus Est: An Early English Christmas* (COR16027)

The medieval carol *Hail Mary full of grace* is from a manuscript attributed to John Alcock, Bishop of Worcester in the mid 15th century: his rebus of a cock is sketched next to a stanza of *Hail Mary full of grace*. Carols were much encouraged and enjoyed at Worcester; one Richard Skryvenar was paid 6s 8d 'rewarded for carralls' which he wrote out in 1518, on Christmas Day itself. Meanwhile, however, the medieval mingling of sacred and profane, Latin and vernacular, burden and verse, had

found an echo in the high art of the Christmas music of the great Renaissance English polyphonists, represented here by Pygott, Master of the Children in Cardinal Wolsey's household chapel by 1516 and later Gentleman of the Chapel Royal.

5] ANON *Lauda: Regina sovrana*

from Hilliard Live 3: *Antoine Brumel* (COR16052)

A lauda is a song of praise, part of a tradition of popular religious singing whose origins date from the 13th century. The monophonic laude which have been preserved are to be found in two collections: the *Laudario of Cortona* (Cortona, Biblioteca Comunale e dell'Accademia Etrusca, Ms 91), containing 46 pieces, and that of Florence (Firenze, Ms. Magliabechiano, BR 18), with 89. While the poetic style of the laude, which are written in Old Tuscan, reflects the influence of troubadour traditions, both French and Italian, the music is essentially simple and was intended to be sung by the people outside the bounds of the church. The genre later became a polyphonic one, the centre of activity in the 15th century moving away from Umbria and Tuscany to Venice. The lauda recorded here comes from the Cortona collection. *Regina sovrana* is a hymn to the Mother of God, full of the glittering imagery familiar from many Latin Marian chants ('stella chiarita – bright star'; 'giardin ornato de fresca verdura – garden adorned with fresh green').

6] WILLIAM CORNYSH (d.1523) *Ave Maria, Mater Dei*

from Eton Choirbook Vol.III: *The Pillars of Eternity* (COR16022)

Protestant reformers in the 16th century had taken pains to discourage Christians from focussing their faith on the Virgin Mary. This contrasts with late medieval thinking, which believed that the pillars of eternity could most effectively be scaled by enlisting her aid. In the Eton Choirbook she is invoked constantly; Eton had, after all, been founded by Henry VI as 'the College Roiall of Our Ladie', with statutes that laid out an elaborate sequence of services to be celebrated daily in her honour. William Cornysh's brief *Ave Maria, Mater Dei* addresses Mary as the mediatrix through whose agency the soul finds its way to its resting-place: 'Mother of God, Queen of heaven, Mistress of the World, Empress of Hell'.

7] ANON *This day day dawes*

from Eton Choirbook Vol.I: *The Rose and The Ostrich Feather* (COR16026)

Just as early Tudor church music is often shot through with references to the magnates who financed it, so part songs by the same composers reflect the biographies, personalities and obsessions of the patrons who supported them. Turges' prayer for the ostrich feather (the emblem of Prince Arthur, elder brother of Henry VIII) preserved in a late 15th-century songbook emanating from courtly circles, is a clear example. Another is the anonymous three-part song *This day day dawes*, copied

adjacently in the same manuscript. Here the allusion to ‘the lily-wighte rose’ is specifically to the emblem of Elizabeth of York, Henry VII’s queen. Yet the text is rich in other resonances: to the white rose a symbol of virginity, the rose as a metaphor for the Virgin – an image that recurs regularly in the Marian antiphons of the Eton Choirbook.

[8] RICHARD DAVY (c.1465-1507) *Stabat Mater*
from Eton Choirbook Vol.II: *The Crown of Thorns* (COR16012)

There are three settings of the *Stabat Mater* in the Eton Choirbook composed by Davy, Browne and -. A text of Franciscan origin, the *Stabat Mater* is one of the most powerful and immediate of extant medieval poems and meditates on the suffering of the Virgin Mary during Christ’s crucifixion. Each of the Eton Choirbook composers responds to the text quite independently, using it largely as an excuse for elaborate musical fantasy (in the manner so typical of English composers of the period), and only loosely underpinning the pathos of the words. On this disc we hear Davy’s exquisite setting which may have been sung first at Magdalen College, Oxford, where Davy was master of the choristers in the 1490s.

[9] ANON (13th Century Aquitaine) *Christus surrexit* soloist: Gordon Jones
from Hilliard Live 1: *Pérotin and the Ars Antiqua* (COR16046)

Christus surrexit is a monophonic sequence from 12th-century Aquitaine, and accompanies the sequence: *Stirps Jesse*. The piece is found in a collection of hymns and sequences now preserved as Egerton 945 manuscript in the British Library in London. Among these monodies are eight monophonic sequences which end with polyphonic ‘Amens’. All are in two parts with the exception of *Stirps Jesse*. This copy of the piece seems to date from around 1300 and originates in the south west of France, perhaps from around Périgueux.

[10] GUILLAUME DUFAY (1397-1474) *Agnus Dei* from *Missa Se le face ay pale*
from Hilliard Live 4: *Guillaume Dufay* (COR16055)

Dufay is better documented than any other major composer before the 16th century. Like so many composers of those years, Dufay came from the north of France - what we call the Franco-Flemish area, dominated by the Dukes of Burgundy, but we can follow his travels around Europe with sometimes astonishing precision; and the geography of his music is important. He was a composer who constantly picked up new ideas, absorbing them into his own style. So his moves and international contacts may be among the reasons why he stands as the key figure in the creation of a broadly accepted European mainstream in musical style. English, Italian, Flemish and French elements all play their part in the grand manner of his last years, a manner that is perhaps first heard in his Mass *Se la face ay pale*.

[11] THOMAS TALLIS (c.1505-1585) *Spem in alium*
from *Spem in alium: Music for Monarchs and Magnates* (CORSACD16016)

According to an early 17th-century anecdote, Tallis’s celebrated 40-voice motet came into being as the result of a challenge. In Queen Elizabeth’s reign, an Italian composition for 30 voices was brought into England. It so impressed an unnamed duke - most likely Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk - that he ‘asked whether none of our Englishmen could set as good a song’. The task fell to Tallis on account of his being ‘very skilful’, and (if the anecdote is to be believed) the result was *Spem in alium*; it was performed in around 1571 ‘in the long gallery at Arundel House’, owned by Henry Fitzalan, 12th Earl of Arundel (who is known from an independent source to have owned a copy of the piece). The piece survives only in 17th-century manuscripts, with the original Latin text replaced by an English one. Nevertheless, Tallis’s intended words can be restored to the music with reasonable confidence.

For TEXTS and TRANSLATIONS visit: www.thesixteen.com/shop and click on COR16098

BIOGRAPHIES

THE HILLIARD ENSEMBLE

For more than three decades now The Hilliard Ensemble has been active in the realms of both early and contemporary music. As well as recording and performing music by composers such as Pérotin, Dufay, Josquin and Bach the ensemble has been involved in the creation of a large number of new works. James MacMillan, Heinz Holliger, Arvo Pärt, Steven Hartke and many other composers have written both large and small-scale pieces for them. The ensemble’s performances frequently include collaborations with other musicians such as the saxophonist Jan Garbarek, violinist Christoph Poppen, violist Kim Kashkashian and orchestras including the New York Philharmonic, the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the Philadelphia Orchestra. John Potter’s contribution was crucial to getting the Hilliard Live project under way. John has since left to take up a post in the Music Department of York University. His place in the group has been filled by Steven Harrold.

www.hilliardensemble.demon.co.uk

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