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.thesixteen.com

Notes: John Milsom, Ivan Moody, Mark Everist, David Fallows
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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.thesixteen.com

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
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.

"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
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 Cuius 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.

Robert Wylkynson
(c.1450-1515 or later)  
Jesus autem transiens
from Eton Choirbook Vol.II: 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 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.

Anon
(c.1420 MS)  
Hail Mary full of grace
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.

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 lauda 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 lauda, 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 chiara – bright star'; 'giardin ornamento de fresca verdura – garden adorned with fresh green').

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'.

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.

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 pathetic 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.

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