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Over four centuries separate these two representatives of English music at its finest. William Cornysh and Benjamin Britten were prolific in both sacred and secular music. Cornysh is actually two people, often confused with one another and quite possibly father and son. Both originated in Westminster of unknown parentage; the Elder died in 1502 and the Younger, of whom much more is known, in 1523. The matter of telling which man wrote which works is impossible to settle, so for the purpose of this album I have decided to link them as one. So whether it be the Elder or the Younger, we are fortunate that they not only excelled at writing complex and adventurous antiphons for the church but also beautiful secular songs for the Tudor court. Of course, for Britten, writing in the 20th century, life was very different; he is a composer who encompassed so many facets of music, excelling in opera, solo song and all manner of vocal and instrumental music.

This album looks at the way these two composers mixed sacred with secular. Whilst Cornysh’s sacred music is elaborate and rhythmically complicated, his secular music is simple yet subtly evocative. Britten makes constant demands on vocal artistry, best displayed in the last work he ever wrote for unaccompanied voices, Sacred and Profane, composed in the winter of 1974-5. Britten chose his texts with great care and devotion; these are medieval lyrics, and he gives us a fascinating mixture of the devotional and the rumbustiously secular. The final song ‘A death’ is a wicked blend of horror and gallows humour far removed from the melancholic canon Ah, Robin by Cornysh.

Britten had a distinct affection for medieval lyrics like those he used in Sacred and Profane and A Hymn to the Virgin. He clearly enjoyed the archaic language, the vowels and expressive consonants in the same way that Cornysh revelled in the insistent rhythm of the passion poem Woefully array’d. The importance of fine poetry to both these composers is abundantly clear, be it the glorious poetry of the Salve Regina, Ah, Robin, WH Auden’s extraordinarily evocative Hymn to Saint Cecilia or Randall Wingler’s earnest political poem Advance Democracy. We are undoubtedly blessed to have this glorious poetry set to music by two of the finest composers of their respective eras; they both call on extraordinary feats of vocal virtuosity, demanding yet ultimately so rewarding.

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Photograph: Marco Borggreve
In the world of the arts, attribution matters. Imagine yourself in a gallery, facing a picture labelled 'Bruegel'. Yes, but which? – the rare and superior Pieter Bruegel the Elder, or his more prolific and derivative son, Pieter Brueghel the Younger? Or imagine a concert announcing works by 'Gabrieli'. Yes, but which? – the well-known Giovanni, maker of bold musical spectacles, or his more versatile but lesser-known uncle Andrea, from whom Giovanni learnt so much? And now, in these recordings, works by 'William Cornysh'. Yes, but which? – because there were indeed two Tudor musicians named William Cornysh, and both seem to have been composers. So who wrote what?

Alas, the truth may never be known, and there is only one firm fact. In a music manuscript copied around 1501 – known as the 'Fayrfax MS', and now in the British Library – three pieces are attributed to 'William Cornyssh Junior'. (They include *Woefully array'd*, recorded here.) By adding the word 'Junior', the scribe tells us that these pieces are *not* by William Cornysh Senior; he therefore implies that the older man was also a composer. Regrettably, other scribes were less meticulous, merely writing the name 'William Cornysh' into their copies. By doing so, they leave us to guess which man they meant.

Biographically, the two Williams Cornysh have two things in common: both were church musicians, and both held prestigious posts in London. In the 1480s, the elder Cornysh was a singer at Westminster Abbey, where he directed the lady chapel choir and instructed the boy choristers. His subsequent career is undocumented, but we do know that he married at least once, died in 1502, and was buried in Westminster. William Cornysh Junior might...
therefore have been his son. By 1493, this younger Cornysh was a singer with the choir of the Chapel Royal, a position he held to his death in 1523. His adult career therefore overlapped with the elder Cornysh by at least a decade. William Cornysh Junior was much more than a singer; he was also involved in dramatic entertainments at court, devising pageants, plays and other staged events; and in 1509 he took charge of the Chapel Royal’s boy choristers, training them not only to sing, but also to take part as child actors in his dramatic productions.

These biographical facts fuel some guesses about who wrote what. Basically, the works ascribed to ‘William Cornysh’ fall into two categories: elaborate Latin-texted pieces for church use, and more intimate English-texted songs, using texts variously sacred or secular. Our current hunch is that it was Cornysh Senior who wrote the Latin pieces, including the two recorded here, Salve Regina and Ave Maria, mater Dei. They were copied into the celebrated Eton Choirbook, a huge and sumptuous manuscript made for use at Eton College soon after 1500, the contents of which stretch back to the 1480s or earlier. There is no mention of ‘Junior’ here, so these pieces could well be by the older man. If so, then he is the author of some of the most spectacular and virtuosic music of his age.

As for Cornysh Junior, we have already met his Woefully array’d, a pathos-filled carol on the subject of Christ’s passion. (The word ‘carol’ in this context refers to the work’s form: a repeating refrain alternates with contrasting verses.) Cornysh Junior is also the stronger candidate for the remaining secular songs, including My love she mourn’th and Ah, Robin, gentle Robin. These soulful settings of enigmatic love-lyrics might once have formed part of courtly entertainments. Certainly they would have been known to King Henry VIII and his first wife, Katherine of Aragon, and indeed they uniquely survive today in a manuscript known as the ‘Henry VIII MS’ – copied around 1520, and again now in the British Library – which contains many songs composed by the young king himself.

One feature connects these works by the two Cornyshes. They all sound quintessentially English, and indeed they do so with intent, since their composers knew perfectly well that their music differed from that of Italy or Germany or France. Note in particular the elaborate melodic lines, so challenging to sing, especially in the Latin-texted pieces. (To foreign ears, they justified use of the Latin verb ‘iubilare’ – music that jubilates.) As for the songs, they stand apart from the European crowd on linguistic grounds, since English at this time was barely spoken outside the British Isles; so Tudor composers in effect had this rich language all to themselves.

Imagine, then, the amazement of a diplomat from Venice who, on stepping into Westminster Abbey around the year 1500, came face to face with the Salve Regina by Cornysh. Its vast soaring lines, its breathtaking roulades and cascades, its muscular exchanges between the men’s voices, its dramatic tuttis, all exceed what might be expected of a solemn prayer to the Virgin Mary. As for Ave Maria, mater Dei, scored for men alone, it may begin more compactly, but it soon drifts into a world of pure fantasy. Small wonder, then, if that diplomat, when writing home to Venice, speaks with awe of the musical feasts to be heard in Tudor churches.

Imagine his curiosity, too, on hearing the English language turned into song
by Cornysh Junior. There is a bluntness about the robust poetry set to music in *Woefully array’d* and *Ah, Robin* that would have seemed deeply foreign to anyone used to the elegance of Italian poetry or the refined tread of French verse. (Cornysh himself may have written these texts, though they vaguely resemble work by contemporaries such as John Skelton and Sir Thomas Wyatt.) Occasionally these songs pick up the lilt of internationally fashionable dance; for instance, *My love she mourn’th* moves with the gait of an alman or a pavan, such as might have been danced in Paris or Rome no less than in London. Again, however, it is the musical roulades and florishes that stamp these songs as being uniquely English. Thus the Cornysh dynasty, while seemingly two in number, were in a sense of one mind: in their works, whether sacred or profane, they express their nationality – and evidently they do so with pride.

John Milsom © 2018

Benjamin Britten

The four Benjamin Britten works on this recording span the entirety of his composing life – from prodigiously accomplished schoolboy to impressively mature 20-something and illness-wearied grand master. They all equally express the extraordinary facility and responsiveness to text that he brought to a large body of choral music over four and a half decades; one that lays good claim to be the most significant and substantial of any composer in the 20th century.

From the start, Britten was always brilliantly, intelligently alert to the potential of texts. Whether it was William Blake or Wilfred Owen, Shakespeare, Donne or Tennyson, his choice of texts ranged widely. ‘Anonymous’ racks up more credits than any other name in the extensive index of Britten’s authorly accomplices, and it was one of these – ‘Anonymous, c.1300’ – that he chose to set for double chorus while laid up in his school sanatorium on 9 July 1930.

Felix Mendelssohn’s octet for strings is probably the most remarkable piece of music to have been written by a 16-year-old, but this exquisite setting by the Suffolk schoolboy is right up there too. The ‘macaronic’ alternation of English and Latin in *A Hymn to the Virgin*’s three stanzas was a natural trigger for Britten splitting his forces into two groups. The larger, foreground choir sings the English lines, and a smaller SATB group acts as an echo (ideally, spatially distant) with each alternating Latin line. It is a simple, even obvious device from a talented apprentice, but the teenage Britten’s assurance with harmonic progression and shaping of the third verse climax gives it a timeless, touching eloquence.

The very first sign that Britten was destined for great things musically came when his mother, with due serendipity, gave birth to him on the feast day of the patron saint of music. *A Hymn to St Cecilia* was perhaps inevitable from someone born on such an auspicious day, and after a false start in 1935 (he couldn’t find the right text at that time), his debt to Cecilia was paid when the BBC Singers premiered a new choral work in November 1942. It turned out to be the last, and perhaps most accomplished collaboration with WH Auden, a figure who had loomed large in Britten’s life, creatively,
intellectually and psychologically, since the mid-1930s.

Auden’s richly layered triptych of linked poems, full of his characteristic verbal bravado, generated an extended three-part motet from the 28-year-old Britten that was no less inspired. There is such clarity of texture and harmonic intent in the outer sections, with the tonal focus around C and E majors in the opening and ‘Blessed Cecilia’ refrain hinting at the opening letters of the patron saint’s name. The five-part choral writing is impressively nimble in the central, imitative scherzo, and resourcefully accommodating of successive solos in the final section – where Britten draws out Auden’s instrumental allusions with cleverly vocalised violin, drum, flute and bugle call.

Auden bids Cecilia to ‘appear and inspire…[to] come down and startle composing mortals with immortal fire’. Her startling, incendiary muse certainly visited Britten here, and in the other choral masterpiece from the same time, A Ceremony of Carols. The first was completed and the second composed afresh on board a Swedish cargo ship on a lengthy and hazardous homeward voyage from New York in early 1942. Given the fate of so many vessels in those transatlantic wartime convoys, we can only be thankful that the Axel Johnson dodged the U-boat torpedoes and made it to England with its precious composer cargo.

Auden had sharpened up Britten’s social and political awareness in the early years of their friendship. One of their larger politically-charged collaborations was Ballad of Heroes, premiered in April 1939, and it included contributions from another left-wing poet, Randall Swingler (1909-67). This was the second time Britten had set text by him, the first being a few months earlier, in November 1938, with Swingler’s portent-laden appeal to resist dictatorship, Advance Democracy. (‘There’s a roar of war in the factories/And idle hands on the street/And Europe held in nightmare/ By the thud of marching feet.’) Commissioned by the London Co-operative Society, Britten’s eight-part texture shares the same range and invention which bore fruit fully in the three choral masterpieces of the early 1940s, Hymn to St Cecilia, A Ceremony of Carols and Rejoice in the Lamb.

If the first work featured here was composed in a school sanatorium, the last, Sacred and Profane, came from a man seriously weakened by major surgery for a heart condition that would eventually kill him. This set of ‘eight medieval lyrics’, composed in the winter of 1974-5, turned out to be Britten’s last work for professional choristers. They were composed for Peter Pears’ five-part Wilbye Consort, but have subsequently become performed by some of the more elite choral forces, such is the harmonic sophistication – angularity even – and complexity of the composer’s evolved late style. Britten reveals in the richness, and strangeness, of the ancient texts he assembled, creating a tapestry of spiritual and earthly life that ranges from a hymn to the Virgin Mary and contemplation of Christ on the cross to evocations of winter and springtime. The early 14th-century ‘Carol’, with its halting, incomplete lines, generated a particularly eloquent setting from Britten, as does the grisly, gallows humour detail of the closing song, ‘A death’. The semi-invalid Britten faces mortality square on, with music that is a searingly original mix of despair, humour and – with the final words ‘of all this world I don’t care one jot’ – ultimate defiance.

Meurig Bowen © 2017
Benjamin BRITTEN  *A Hymn to the Virgin*  
(1930, rev.1934)

Soloists: Patricia Forbes *soprano*  
Christopher Royall *alto*  
Neil MacKenzie *tenor*  
Simon Birchall *bass*

Of one that is so fair and bright

*Velut maris stella,*

Brighter than the day is light,

*Parens et puella:*

I cry to thee, thou see to me,

*Tam pia,*

That I may come to thee.

*Maria!*

All this world was forlorn

*Eva peccatrice,*

Till our Lord was yborn

*De te genetrice.*

With ‘ave’ it went away

Darkest night, and comes the day

*Salutis;*

The well springeth out of thee.

*Virtutis.


Lady, flow’r of ev’rything,

*Rosa sine spina,*

thou bare Jesu, Heaven’s King,

*Gratia divina:*

Of all thou bear’st the prize,

Lady, Queen of paradise

*Electa:*

Maid mild, mother *ex Effecta.*

Text Anon. c.1300

William CORNYSH  *My love she mourn’th*

Soloist: Ben Davies *bass*

My love she mourn’th for me,

My love she mourn’th for me;

Alas, poor heart,

Sen we depart,

Mourn ye no more for me.

In loves dance,

Sith that our chance,

Of absence needs must be,

My love, I say,

Your love do way,

And mourn no more for me.

I shall not fail,

But sure retail

From all other that be,

In well and wo

My heart to go

With her that mourn’th for me.

Thus here an end;

Good Lord, defend

All lovers that true be,

And in especial

From jeopardies all

My love that mourn’th for me.

Benjamin BRITTEN  *Hymn to Saint Cecilia*

Soloists: Julie Cooper, Kirsty Hopkins *soprano*  
Edward McMullan *alto*  
Mark Dobell *tenor*  
Ben Davies *bass*

In a garden shady this holy lady

With rev’rent cadence and subtle psalm,

Like a black swan as death came on

Pour’d forth her song in perfect calm:

And by ocean’s margin this innocent virgin

Constructed an organ to enlarge her prayer,

And notes tremendous from her great engine

Thunder’d out on the Roman air.

And by ocean’s margin this innocent virgin

Constructed an organ to enlarge her prayer,

And notes tremendous from her great engine

Thunder’d out on the Roman air.
And Dread born whole and normal like a beast
Into a world of truths that never change:
Restore our fallen day; O re-arrange.

O dear white children casual as birds,
Playing among the ruined languages,
So small beside their large confusing words,
So gay against the greater silences
Of dreadful things you did: O hang the head,
Impetuous child with the tremendous brain,
O weep, child, weep, O weep away the stain,
Lost innocence who wished your lover dead,
Weep for the lives your wishes never led.

O cry created as the bow of sin
Is drawn across our trembling violin.
O weep, child, weep, O weep away the stain.
O law drumm’d out by hearts against the still
Long winter of our intellectual will.
That what has been may never be again.
O flute that throbs with the thanksgiving breath
Of convalescents on the shores of death.
O bless the freedom that you never chose.
O trumpets that unguarded children blow
About the fortress of their inner foe.
O wear your tribulation like a rose.
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.

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.

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, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.

Then, gracious advocate, turn towards us your merciful eyes.
And show us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus, after this exile.

Virgin mother of the church,
everlasting gate to glory,
be our refuge with the Father and the Son.

O gentle one, gentle virgin,
virgin holy, virgin sweet, O Mary,
hear the prayers of all who make their dutiful cry to you.

O loving one, pour out prayers to your son, crucified, wounded, scourged for our sake, pierced with thorns and given gall to drink. O sweet Mary, hail.

Across the darkened city
The frosty searchlights creep
Alert for the first marauder
To steal upon our sleep.

We see the sudden headlines
Float on the muttering tide,
We hear them warn and threaten
And wonder what they hide.

There are whispers across tables,
Talks in a shutter’d room.
The price on which they bargain
Will be a people’s doom.

There’s a roar of war in the factories,
And idle hands on the street,
And Europe held in nightmare
By the thud of marching feet.

Now sinks the sun of surety,
The shadows growing tall
Of the big bosses plotting
Their biggest coup of all.

Is there no strength to save us?
No power we can trust,
Before our lives and liberties
Are powder’d into dust.

Time to arise Democracy
Time to rise up and cry
That what our fathers fought for
We’ll not allow to die.

Time to resolve divisions,
Time to renew our pride,
Time to decide,
Time to burst our house of glass.

Rise as a single being
In one resolve arrayed:
Life shall be for the people
That’s by the people made.

Randall Swingler (1909-67)
William CORNYSH Ave Maria

Ave Maria, Mater Dei,
Regina caeli, Domina mundi,
Imperatrix infarni:
Misere mei et totius populi Christiani,
Et ne permittas nos mortaliter peccare
Sed tuam sanctissimam voluntatem adimple.
Amen.

Hail Mary, Mother of God,
Queen of heaven, Mistress of the world,
Empress of hell:
have mercy on me and on all Christ's people,
and let us not fall into mortal sin
but let us fulfil your most holy will.
Amen.

William CORNYSH Woefully array'd

Verse I: Emilia Morton soprano, Daniel Collins alto, Mark Dobell tenor, Rob Macdonald bass
Verse II: Alexandra Kidgell soprano, Kim Porter alto, Jeremy Budd tenor, Ben Davies bass
Verse III: Julie Cooper soprano, Ian Aitkenhead alto, Simon Berridge tenor, Eamonn Dougan bass

Woefully array'd,
My blood, man,
For thee ran,
It may not be nayed;
My body blo and wan,
Woefully array'd.

I Behold me, I pray thee
with all thy whole reason
and be not hard-hearted,
and for this encheason,
sith I for thy soul sake
was slain in good season,
beguiled and betrayed
by Judas' false treason,
Unkindly entreated, with sharp cord sore
freted the Jews me threatened.
They mowed, they grinned,
they scorned me,
condemned to death, as thou may'st see;
woefully array'd.

Thus naked am I nailed,
O man, for thy sake; I love thee,
then love me, Why sleepest thou? Awake, awake,
remember my tender heart-root for thee brake;
with pains my veins constrained to crake;
thus tugged to and fro,
thus wrapped all in woe,
whereas never man was so entreated,
thus in most cruel wise
was like a lamb offer'd in sacrifice;
woefully array'd.

Of sharp thorn I have worn
a crown on my head.
So pained, so strained,
so rueful, so red.
Thus bobbed, thus robbed,
thus for thy love dead;
unfeigned, not deigned,
my blood for to shed.
My feet and handes sore
the sturdy nailes bore;
what might I suffer more
than I have done, O man, for thee?
Come when thou list,
welcome to me!
Woefully array'd.

William CORNYSH Ah, Robin, gentle Robin

Mark Dobell, Jeremy Budd tenor Ben Davies bass

Ah, Robin, gentle Robin,
Tell me how thy leman doth,
And thou shalt know of mine.
Ah, Robin ...

My lady is unkind, iwis,
Alac why is she so?
She lov'eth another better than me,
And yet she will say no.
Ah, Robin ...

I cannot think such doubleness,
For I find women true;
In faith my lady lov'eth me well;
She will change for no new.
Ah, Robin ...

Verse I: Emilia Morton soprano, Daniel Collins alto, Mark Dobell tenor, Rob Macdonald bass
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Benjamin BRITTEN

I. St Godric’s Hymn
Sainte Marye Virgine,
Mother of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,
Receive, defend and help thy Godric
(And,) having received (him,) Bring (him) on high with thee in God’s Kingdom.

St Mary, Christ’s bower,
Virgin among maidens, flower of motherhood, Blot out my sin, reign in my heart (and) Bring me to bliss with that selfsame God.

Foweles in the frith,
The fisses in the flod, And I mon waxe wod: Much sorrow I walke with For beste of bon and blod.

Birds in the wood, The fish in the river, And I must go mad; Much sorrow I live with For the best creatures alive.

Notes swete of nightegales, Uch fowl song singeth. The threstelcok him threteth oo. Away is huere winter wo When woderofe springeth. This fowles singeth ferly fele, And witeth on huere wynne wele, That all the wode ringeth.

The rose raithel hire rode, The leves on the lighte wode Waxed all with wille. The mone mandeth hire ble, Thelilye is lossom to se, The fennel and the fille. Wowes this wilde drakes, Miles murgeth huere makes, Ase strem that striketh stille. Mody meneth, so doth mo; Ichot ich am on of tho For love that likes ille.

The mone mandeth hire light, So doth the semly sonne bright, When briddes singeth breme. Deawes donketh the dounes, Deores with huere derne rounes Domes for to deme.

Notes swete of nightegales, Each bird sings a song. The thrush wrangles all the time. Gone is their winter woe When the woodruff springs. These birds sing, wonderfully merry, And warble in their abounding joy, So that all the wood rings.

The rose puts on her rosy face, The leaves in the bright wood All grow with pleasure. The moon sends out her radiance, The lily is lovely to see, The fennel and the wild thyme. These wild drakes make love. Animals cheer their mates, Like a stream that flows softly. The passionate man complains, as do more: I know that I am one of those That is unhappy for love.

The moon sends out her light, So does the fair, bright sun, When birds sing gloriously. Dews wet the downs, Animals with their secret cries For telling their tales.

II. I mon waxe wod

Lenten is come with love to toune, With blosmen and with briddes roune, That all this blisse bringeth.

Dayeseyes in this dales, Spring has come with love among us, With flowers and with the song of birds, That brings all this happiness. Daisies in these valleys,
Maiden in the mor lay,
Sevenight fulle,
Maiden in the mor lay;
Sevenightes fulle and a day.
Welle was hire mete.
What was hire mete?
The primerole and the –
Welle was hire mete.
What was hire mete?
The primerole and the violet.

IV. The long night
Mirie it is, while summer ilast,
With fugheles song.
Oc ne necheth windes blast,
And weder strong.
Ey! ey! what this night is long!
And ich, with wel michel wrong,
Soregh and murne and fast.
Pleasant it is while summer lasts,
With the birds’ song,
But now the blast of the wind draws nigh,
And severe weather.
Alas ! how long this night is,
And I, with very great wrong,
Sorrow and mourn and fast.

V. Yif ic of luve can
Whanne ic se on Rode
Jesu, my lemman,
And besiden him stonden
Marye and Johan,
And his rig iswongen,
And his side istungen,

Worms make love under ground,
Women grow exceedingly proud,
So well it will suit them.
If I don’t have what I want of one,
All this happiness I will abandon,
And quickly in the woods be a fugitive.

For the love of man;
Well ou ic to wepen,
And sinnes for to leten,
Yif ic of luve can,
Yif ic of luve can,
Yif ic of luve can.

VI. Carol
Maiden in the mor lay,
In the mor lay;
Sevenight fulle,
Sevenight fulle,
Maiden in the mor lay;
In the mor lay,
Sevenights fulle and a day.
Welle was hire mete.
What was hire mete?
The primerole and the –
The primerole and the –
Welle was hire mete.
What was hire mete?
The primerole and the violet.

A maiden lay on the moor,
Lay on the moor;
A full week,
A full week,
A maiden lay on the moor;
Lay on the moor
A full week and a day.

Good was her food.
What was her food?
The primrose and the –
The primrose and the –
Good was her food.
What was her food?
The primrose and the violet.
Wanne mine eyhnen misten,
And mine heren sissen,
And my nose coldet,
And my tunge foldet,
And my rude slaket,
And mine lippes blaken,
And my muth grennet,
And my spotel rennet,
And mine her riset,
And mine herte griset,
And mine honden bivien,
And mine fet stivien –
All to late! al to late!
Wanne the bere is ate gate.

Thanne I schel flutte
From bedde to flore,
From flore to here,
From here to bere,
From bere to putte,
And te putt fordut.
Thanne lyd mine hus uppe mine nose.

Of al this world ne give I it a pese!

15 VII. Ye that pasen by
Ye that pasen by the weyve,
Abidet a little stounde.
Beholdet, all my felawes,
Yef any me lik is founde.
To the Tre with nailes thre
Wol fast I hange bounde;
With a speere all thorna my side
To mine herte is mad a wounde.

Welle was hire dring.
What was hire dring?
The chelde water of the –
The chelde water of the –
Welle was hire dring.
What was hire dring?
The chelde water of the well-spring.

Good was her bower.
What was her bower?
The red rose and the –
The red rose and the –
Good was her bower.
What was her bower?
The red rose and the lily flower.

15 VIII. A death
Wanne mine eynnen misten,
And mine heren sissen,
And my nose coldet,
And my tunge foldet,
And my rude slaket,
And mine lippes blaken,
And my muth gremmet,
And my spotel rennet,
And mine hert griset,
And mine honden bivien,
And mine fet stivien –
Al to late! al to late!
Wanne the bere is ate gate.

Thanne I schel flutte
From bedde to flore,
From flore to here,
From here to bere,
From bere to putte,
And te putt fordut.
Thanne lyd mine hus uppe mine nose.

Of al this world ne give I it a pese!

When my eyes get misty,
And my ears are full of hissing,
And my nose gets cold,
And my tongue folds,
And my face goes slack,
And my lips blacken,
And my mouth grins,
And my spittle runs,
And my hair rises,
And my heart trembles,
And my hands shake,
And my feet stiffen –
All too late! all too late!
When the bier is at the gate.

Then I shall pass,
From bed to floor,
From floor to shroud,
From shroud to bier,
From bier to grave,
And the grave will be closed up.
Then rests my house upon my nose.
For the whole world I care not one jot.
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<th>Track 1</th>
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Harry Christophers stands among today’s great champions of choral music. In partnership with The Sixteen, the ensemble he founded almost 40 years ago, he has set benchmark standards for the performance of everything from late medieval polyphony to important new works by contemporary composers. His international influence is supported by more than 150 recordings and has been enhanced by his work as Artistic Director of Boston’s Handel and Haydn Society and as guest conductor worldwide.

The Sixteen’s soundworld, rich in tonal variety and expressive nuance, reflects Christophers’ determination to create a vibrant choral instrument from the blend of adult professional singers. Under his leadership The Sixteen has established its annual Choral Pilgrimage to cathedrals, churches and other UK venues, created the Sacred Music series for BBC television, and developed an acclaimed period-instrument orchestra. Highlights of their recent work include an Artist Residency at Wigmore Hall, a large-scale tour of Monteverdi’s Vespers of 1610, and the world premiere of James MacMillan’s Stabat mater; their future projects, meanwhile, comprise a new series devoted to Purcell and an ongoing survey of Handel’s dramatic oratorios.

Harry has served as Artistic Director of the Handel and Haydn Society since 2008. He was also appointed as Principal Guest Conductor of the City of Granada Orchestra in 2008 and has worked as guest conductor with, among others, the London Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic, the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra and the Deutsches Kammerphilharmonie. Christophers’ extensive commitment to opera has embraced productions for English National Opera and Lisbon Opera and work with the Granada, Buxton and Grange Park festivals.

He was appointed a CBE in the Queen’s 2012 Birthday Honours for his services to music. He is an Honorary Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, as well as the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, and has Honorary Doctorates in Music from the Universities of Leicester and Canterbury Christ Church.

The Sixteen gave its first concert in 1979 under the direction of Founder and Conductor Harry Christophers CBE. Their pioneering work since has made a profound impact on the performance of choral music and attracted a large new audience, not least as ‘The Voices of Classic FM’ and through BBC television’s Sacred Music series.
The voices and period-instrument players of The Sixteen are at home in over five centuries of music, a breadth reflected in their annual Choral Pilgrimage to Britain's great cathedrals and sacred spaces, regular appearances at the world’s leading concert halls, and award-winning recordings for The Sixteen’s CORO and other labels.

Recent highlights include the world premiere of James MacMillan’s Stabat mater, commissioned for The Sixteen by the Genesis Foundation, an ambitious ongoing series of Handel oratorios, and a debut tour of China.

Track 1 taken from COR16006, recorded 1991
Blest Cecilia

Track 3 taken from COR16134, recorded 2015
Poetry in Music

Track 4 taken from COR16126, recorded 1991
The Rose and Ostrich Feather

Tracks 5 and 9 – taken from COR16038, recorded 1993
Fen and Meadow

Track 6 taken from COR16122, recorded 1992
The Pillars of Eternity

Tracks 2, 7 and 8
recorded at: St Augustine’s Church, Kilburn, London, 23 November 2017
Recording Producer: Mike Hatch (Floating Earth)
Recording Engineer: Mark Brown

Also available as a CD quality download at www.thesixteen.com

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

Cover image: Detail from The Garden of Earthly Delights 1490-1500 (oil on panel), Hieronymus Bosch, (c.1450-1516) / Prado, Madrid, Spain / Bridgeman Images
Design: Andrew Giles: discoyd@aegidius.org.uk