

Byrd at the Tower: Three Masses

ft. Odyssean Ensemble

Wednesday 12th July 2023 |

Church of St Peter ad Vincula, Tower of London

William Byrd *Masses for Three, Four and Five Voices*

Reading: Makes No Sense

Mass for Three Voices:

Kyrie

Gloria

Credo

Reading: Protest

Sanctus-Benedictus

Agnus Dei

Readings: Morning, Newsflash, News of War &

Untitled

Mass for Four Voices:

Kyrie

Gloria

Credo

Reading: And Violet Times of Lawlessness

Sanctus-Benedictus

Agnus Dei

Readings: Load Poems Like Guns & Farewell

Mass for Five Voices:

Kyrie

Gloria

Credo

Readings: My Garden & Tonight's Poem

Sanctus-Benedictus

Agnus Dei

Odyssean Ensemble

Dr Colm Carey Director

Emma Fielding narrator

William Byrd and his Three Masses

This Chapel draws together the parallel lives of William Byrd: in public the esteemed Gentleman of the Chapel Royal, singing, playing and composing for the Protestant Court of Elizabeth I; in private the devout Catholic. This building, which he may have visited in a professional capacity, is the resting place of many fellow Catholics, who opposed Henry's break from Rome. It is also worth remembering that some of Byrd's friends were imprisoned at the Tower before being led to a grisly death. One can only envision what passed through his mind if he did indeed visit the Tower.

The Reformation in England, and the introduction of a new Book of Common Prayer created by Henry VIII's trusted Archbishop Cranmer, fundamentally changed the ecclesiastical landscape of the country. Accompanying the seismic liturgical changes was a radical shift in the musical approach and requirements of the new Protestant establishment. Cranmer wrote to Henry VIII at the time of the Reformation and stated that 'the song should be made thereunto would not be full of notes, but, as near as may be, for every syllable a note, so that it may be sung distinctly and devoutly'. In one fell swoop the highly sophisticated, ornate and well-developed style of the English school was effectively banned. Thomas Tallis, Byrd's teacher and mentor, went from writing large-scale psalm motets to vignettes such as 'If ye love me'. It is testament to his

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Richard Syred and Brian Parsons

skill as a composer that he could change style overnight and still produce wonderful music, but the stylistic limitations imposed on his compositional genius must have caused him private frustration.

Those who remained loyal to the Pope had to practise their Catholic faith behind closed doors. Byrd flitted between the court and the country houses of the Catholic aristocracy, some of whom were his patrons. Mass would be said, or sung, in rooms hastily converted into chapels, performed by priests who sometimes lived in 'priest holes', hidden from the authorities. These were the circumstances in which Byrd wrote his three masses. They would have been sung by whoever happened to be in the house – lords, ladies, chamber maids and man-servants, and sadly this music would never have been performed or heard in the great Cathedrals around the country. It wasn't until the late 19th century that these works of genius began to appear in the music lists of catholic churches. Thankfully they are now a core part of the repertory of choirs at ecclesiastical institutions far and wide.

Byrd's masses differ from those of the great continental composers (such as Lassus and Palestrina), which were invariably based on popular melodies of the day, thematically linking the different movements. One of the reasons Byrd's masses are so exceptional is that he writes 'free' music, taking the text as his inspiration and allowing musical ideas to flow from his pen as an emotional response to the words. The character of this music is quite different from pieces he composed for the Protestant liturgy at the Chapel Royal. While always distinctive and brilliantly composed, they do not perhaps have the same emotional intensity as his

Latin texted works. One can't help feeling that the Latin mass is where Byrd's heart truly is.

Each of Byrd's masses has an individual personality – the Mass for Four Voices is the most intimate, the Agnus Dei especially moving; the Mass for Three Voices is the most concise, though Byrd is ever inventive despite the sparsity of only three parts to play with; the Mass for Five Voices is the most opulent and heralds his monumental set of Gradualia which would be composed some years later.

What Byrd would think of his music being performed in this Chapel we can only imagine. Hopefully he would be gratified that four hundred years after his death we can celebrate in this Chapel Royal, with ecumenical aplomb, his parallel lives! The intimacy of this place is undoubtedly apposite for music which emanates from the deepest recesses of this extraordinary man and musician.

- Dr Colm Carey, Master of Music of the Chapels Royal, HM Tower of London

Sadly, persecution by, and of, religious groups continues to this day. Our inability to learn from history is saddening and frustrating.

Tonight, we have chosen to shine a light on the women of Afghanistan, whose ability to live freely looks to have been curtailed by the ruling Taliban, the Sunni Islamist nationalist and pro-Pashtun movement that ruled most of Afghanistan from 1996 until October 2001, and came to power again in August 2021.

In January of this year, the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) published an assessment of the situation in Afghanistan which concluded that women and girls are at risk of persecution under the Taliban and, therefore, are eligible for refugee status in Europe. We will hear poetry written by Afghan women: some of whom have left their homeland, some of whom remain, and some who are no longer with us.

In putting together tonight's selection, we are so grateful for the help and support of Dr Zuzanna Olszewska, Associate Professor In the Social Anthropology of the Middle East, University of Oxford.

- Sarah Gee

Chief Executive, Spitalfields Music

Odyssean Ensemble

The Odyssean Ensemble is a world class vocal ensemble exploring music as a journey, directed by Colm Carey. It is made up of some of the best consort singers and musicians in the UK, brought together to explore music in a vibrant way, through innovative programmes and bold performances. Known for its vibrant and characterful interpretations, the ensemble has given concerts to critical acclaim. Individually the singers perform around the globe as soloists and with many of the leading groups in the UK such as The Tallis Scholars, the Monteverdi Choir, Tenebrae and The Sixteen.

Dr Colm Carey

Born in Dublin, Colm studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London and the Conservatoire de Musique de

Genève. Winning top performing awards with distinction at both institutions, his numerous appearances, both live and recorded, in the UK and Ireland formed strong foundations for his subsequent solo performances in Europe, Australia, Canada and the USA.

As a recording artist, Colm has produced a number of solo and chamber CDs, and he was the featured organist on Paul McCartney's classical album, *Ecce Cor Meum*, which premièred at the Albert Hall in London (available on DVD) and the Carnegie Hall in New York. His interpretation of Bach's *The Art of Fugue* has been admired for its originality and scholarship.

Since 2003 Colm has been Belfast City Organist. As well as giving recitals on the Mulholland Grand Organ in the Ulster Hall, he has performed many concerti - including Poulenc, Parker, Handel, Haydn, Rheinberger, Jongen, Leighton and Guilmant - with the Ulster Orchestra. In 2005 he presented four programmes on the history of the organ for BBC radio. Under his stewardship the Ulster Hall runs an outreach programme to introduce the organ to new audiences and through further collaboration the international PIPEWORKS Festival held the final of its competition in the Ulster Hall in June 2014.

In addition to his role as Belfast City Organist and his freelance work, Colm is Master of Music of the Chapels Royal, HM Tower of London. Under his direction the choir provides music for the weekly services in the Chapels as well as for special events in the two historic Chapels Royal. He has toured with the choir to South Africa, Italy and Ireland, and as well as releasing a CD

of music inspired by the Psalms of David the choir has broadcast on several occasions, most notably to the all the countries in the Commonwealth on Christmas Day 2011.

Emma Fielding

Emma Fielding is an English actress. Her theatre credits include: Heartbreak House (Chichester Festival); The King's Speech, (Wyndham's/UK tour); Rock 'n' Roll (Duke of York's), Decade (Headlong); Playing With Fire, Look Back in Anger, Arcadia (National); Macbeth, Heartbreak House, 1953, School for Wives (Almeida); Cymbeline, Measure for Measure, The School for Scandal, Twelfth Night, A Midsummer Night's Dream (RSC); Private Lives (Albery/Broadway); Jane Eyre (Sheffield Crucible).

Her television credits include: Death in Paradise, The Suspicions of Mr Whicher, Kidnap & Ransom, The Cranford Chronicles, Fallen Angel, Ghost Squad, The Government Inspector, Beneath the Skin, Waking the Dead, My Uncle Silas, Green Eyed Monster, Inspector Lynley, Other Peoples' Children, Big Bad World, Wings of Angels, Mrs Bradley Mysteries, A Respectable Trade, Dance to the Music of Time, Drovers' Gold, Kavanagh QC,

The Maitlands, Tell Tale Hearts, Dread Poets' Society, Poirot, The Gist.

Her film credits include: Fast Girls, 28K, The Great Ghost Rescue, Discovery of Heaven, Shooters, Pandaemonium.

Emma has been awarded the following for her work: The Dame Peggy Ashcroft Award for Best Actress (Twelfth Night, Broken Heart); The London Critics' Circle Theatre Awards for Most Promising Newcomer (School for Wives, Arcadia); Ian Charleson Award (School for Wives); Carleton Hobbs Radio Award.

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