



Sunday 20 March, 7.30pm
St Martin's Church

RENAISSANCE MUSIC ON A GRAND SCALE

BREMF Consort of Voices

Deborah Roberts *director*

Members of The English Cornett & Sackbut Ensemble

Emily White, Tom Lees, Peter Thornton, Phil Dale and Adrian France *sackbuts*

The music

Antoine Brumel c.1460–1512/13	Missa Et ecce terrae motus: Kyrie and Gloria
Robert Carver c.1490–1547?	Mass 'Dum sacrum mysterium': Creed
Cipriano de Rore 1515 or 1516–1565	Descendi in hortum meum
Giaches de Wert 1535–1596	Vox in Rama (instrumental)
Rore	Miserere nostri (men's voices)
Rore	Ave Regina caelorum
Interval	
William Cornysh 1465–1523	Magnificat
Brumel	Missa Et ecce terrae motus: Sanctus
John Taverner c.1490–1545	Te Deum (instrumental with chant)
Carver	Mass 'Dum sacrum mysterium: Agnus Dei

Imagining early music on a grand scale normally conjures up thoughts of Venice and the great multi-choir works of the Gabrielis filling the many domes of St Mark's church. This concert, however, focuses on the far less familiar music from a whole generation earlier, and from the north rather than the south of Europe. However, we are combining sackbuts with the voices rather than performing *a cappella*, as using instruments was a widespread practice throughout Europe.

Antoine Brumel was born near Chartres, France and is known as an early exponent of the Franco-Flemish school of composition which dominated most of Europe during the first half of the 16th century and found its most famous figure in Josquin des Prez. Like many of his contemporaries Brumel travelled widely, working not only in some of the greatest cathedrals in France, but also in Ferrara, Italy, where he was employed by the Este family. One of the most striking features of his style is the use of complex cross-rhythms and rhythmic proportions, with short motifs repeated in an almost obsessive manner. His *Missa Et ecce terrae motus* (the 'Earthquake' Mass) is in 12 parts, three each of soprano, contratenor, tenor and bass, though the lower two of the contratenor parts are in the same range as the tenor. This is not music in several separate choirs, however, and the various voice parts are combined in a dazzling variety of ways.

Moving further to the north we come to Robert Carver, Scotland's finest renaissance composer, who spent much of his life as a canon at Scone Abbey. Most of his surviving music is contained in a manuscript known as the Carver Choirbook and written in a style that in some ways resembles that of the Eton Choirbook, being ornate and divided into differently scored sections. Yet there is also something extraordinarily original about the deep sonorities he explores, often with slow-moving harmonies and a more complex rhythm punctuated with written out ornaments. As well as music scored in a smaller scale two great works survive in multiple parts, his 19-voice *O bone Jesu* and the 10-voice *Mass 'Dum sacrum mysterium'*.

William Cornysh, represented largely in the Eton Choirbook, worked at the court of Henry VIII and even accompanied him to the summit meeting near Calais known as the Field of the Cloth of Gold. His *Magnificat*, which alternates verses with plainsong, is a real *tour de force* of vocal agility for smaller combinations of voices contrasted with harmonic richness with the sections for full voices. John Taverner was Carver's exact contemporary, though it is doubtful they ever met. We are performing his vocal *Te Deum* arranged for five sackbuts with the choir providing the plainsong verses.

Returning to mainland Europe and the Franco-Flemish school, we come to Cipriano de Rore, probably the most admired composer after Josquin. His living in the age of publishing helped preserve a large amount of music, much of it madrigals and works for small ensembles. The madrigalian sensitivity to word setting also pervades his sacred music adding drama, very clear in his *Miserere nostri*, but also delicately and lovingly present in the larger scale *Ave Regina caelorum*, which shows many influences from Josquin.

Giaches de Wert was born in Flanders but spent most of his life in Italy working for the Este family in Ferrara. He was predominantly a madrigal composer, and even his sacred works are full of madrigalian idioms. *Vox in Rama* tells of the massacre of the Innocents and depicts Rachel weeping for her children, who have all been killed. It might seem strange to perform such a piece instrumentally, but the deep colour of the sackbuts sets the scene perfectly and it is also a poignant comment on events happening in many parts of the world right now.

Deborah Roberts

The texts

We have not included the texts for the Mass settings or Magnificat as these are more familiar.

Descendi in hortum meum

I went down into my garden to see the fruits of the valley,
and to see whether the vine flourished and the pomegranates budded.
Return, return, O Shulamite, that we might look upon thee.

Miserere nostri

Have mercy upon us, O God of all, and behold us,
and shew us the light of thy mercies,
and send thy fear upon the nations, that have not sought after thee:
that they may know that there is no God beside thee,
and that they may shew forth thy wonders.
Lift up thy hand over the heathens,
that they may see thy power.
For as thou hast been sanctified in us in their sight,
so thou shalt be magnified among them in our presence,
that they may know thee, as we also have known thee,
that there is no God beside thee, O Lord.

Ave Regina caelorum

Hail, Queen of heaven,
Mother of angels.
O Mary, virgin flower,
like the rose and the lily.
Hail Mary, sweet and kind,
hail, full of grace;
pray to your Son
for the salvation of the faithful.

The performers

Since its founding in 2010 as a student/top amateur ensemble open to some of the most challenging music from the whole of the Renaissance, **BREMF Consort of Voices** has certainly risen to the challenge! The group can vary in size as it takes on music in up to 40 parts but it can also supply its own soloists, as it did in 2015 for its Festival concert featuring the Vespers of nun composer Chiara Margarita Cozzolani, broadcast on BBC Radio 3. As well as annual appearances at BREMF and performing in other local festivals and venues, the choir promotes a regular series of concerts in St Paul's Church, West Street.

Sopranos:

Pam Mason, Helen Dewhurst, Rebecca Rees, Hannah Loach, Yvonne Eddy

Mezzo-sopranos and altos:

Zofia Reeves, Natasha Stone, Liz Webb, Bibi Lees, Maria McGuinness, Maria Birch, Silvia Reseghetti, Janet Gascoine, Gill Kay

Tenors:

Peter Larcombe, Nicolas Chisholm, Dan Johnson, Nick Boston, Graeme Smith, David Waterhouse

Baritones and basses:

Tony Jay, Simon Madge, James Elias, Maurice Shipsey, John Gillies

Deborah Roberts was born in Europe and graduated from Nottingham University with an MA in editing and interpreting renaissance and baroque music. She has remained fascinated by the discovery of new repertoire and performance styles ever since. As a long-term former member of The Tallis Scholars, Deborah performed with them in over 1,200 concerts in many weird and wonderful places around the world and in countless recordings of rare and beautiful renaissance music. She also sang with many other early music ensembles as a soloist and consort singer.

She took up choral direction 20 years ago, and enjoys running courses in sacred polyphony and early opera. In 2002 she co-founded Brighton Early Music Festival with Clare Norburn and remains its artistic director.

The English Cornett & Sackbut Ensemble is a virtuoso period instrument group, often collaborating with leading vocal ensembles such as I Fagiolini, Alamire, Resurgam, The Marian Consort and Westminster Cathedral Choir at major festivals including York Early Music Festival, BREMF and the BBC Proms. Internationally, they have performed throughout Europe and in Canada, Israel and Russia. They have featured on several award-winning recordings including two Gramophone award-winning CDs: Alamire – *The Spy's Choirbook* and I Fagiolini – *Striggio Mass in 40 parts* (Diapason d'Or).

In 2018 the Ensemble celebrated its 25th anniversary year with a new solo CD, *Music for Windy Instruments: sounds from the court of James I* (Resonus). The Ensemble also commissioned a major work from composer Andrew Keeling, and gave a recital on BBC Radio 3 as part of the NCEM/Radio 3 Young Composer Award. 2022 engagements include Martin Randall Travel, Resurgam, and Monteverdi's Vespers with the Taverner Consort.

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