



Saturday 18 February, 6pm

St Martin's Church

BYRD AND WEELKES 400

BREMF Consort of Voices

Deborah Roberts *director*

The music

Thomas Weelkes 1576–1623

All people clap your hands

William Byrd 1539/40–1623

Mass for five voices: Kyrie and Gloria

Weelkes

When David heard

Byrd

Mass for five voices: Creed

Weelkes

Alleluia I heard a voice

Byrd

Mass for five voices: Sanctus and Benedictus

Byrd

Ave verum corpus

Byrd

Mass for five voices: Agnus Dei

Byrd

Tribue Domine

Weelkes

O Lord grant the King a long life

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2023 is certainly a rich year for renaissance composers' anniversaries! For both Byrd and Weelkes it marks 400 years since they died, but in our next concert on 1 April we will also celebrate William Cornysh, who died in 1523.

William Byrd was a good generation older than Thomas Weelkes, but having lived a more sober life he lived to be over 80 – even surpassing the age of his friend and teacher Thomas Tallis. His style of composition is also clearly of an earlier period, and his lifelong adherence to the Catholic church led to his writing most of his sacred music in Latin. He composed three Latin masses, in three, four and five voices respectively, which represent the earliest English Latin masses to be composed in the Continental style, including a polyphonic Kyrie rather than the plainchant Kyrie tropes of the pre Reformation English Sarum rite. The five-voice mass includes two tenor parts, and for all its highly varied scoring and changing textures it is fairly compact. This would have suited it well for the illegal performances of the Catholic mass held in secrecy by Catholic families in Elizabethan Britain. Time could have been of the essence! However, his setting of the text within the Creed: 'et unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam' (I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church) made no attempt to hide his Catholic conviction. You won't be able to miss it!

Byrd did indeed write some wonderful music for the Anglican church, as well as devotional music in English, but we will complement his mass with other Latin works. His *Ave verum corpus* is one of the best-known pieces of English polyphony, and rightly so, while his more substantial *Tribue Domine* is an intriguing three-section piece praising the concept of the Holy Trinity. The idea of three in one is present throughout the piece, with nested triple time rhythms frequently occurring within duple metres and always following the natural word stresses. Byrd also gives free rein to his love of complex, decorative rhythms and almost fugal counterpoint.

Thomas Weelkes, 'noted and famed for a comon drunckard and notorious swearer & blasphemer', spent much of his shorter life in Chichester. He wrote mostly vocal music: madrigals, anthems and services for the Anglican church, many of which explored the fashionable new Italian style with expressive word painting and chromaticism. True to the rules of the English church his setting of English words followed the dictates of 'for every syllable a note' and are often less contrapuntally complex. *When David heard that Absalom was slain* is one of the most expressive pieces from the period and could almost be a madrigal, while the sprightly *Alleluia I heard a voice* written 'for trebles' is one of several Anglican, English language pieces, that harks back to the pre-Reformation division of boys' voices in the standard choir into trebles and means.

We end this one-hour concert with a piece written during the reign of James I to celebrate the anniversary of his accession to the crown. May it be a good luck message to King Charles!

Deborah Roberts

The translations

Ave verum corpus

Hail, true Body,
born of the Virgin Mary,
having truly suffered,
sacrificed on the cross for mankind,
from whose pierced side
water and blood flowed:
Be for us a sweet foretaste
in the trial of death!
O sweet Jesus, O holy Jesus,
O Jesus, son of Mary,
have mercy on me. Amen.

Tribue Domine

Grant, O Lord, that while I am placed in this feeble body my heart shall praise Thee, my tongue shall praise thee, and all my bones shall say: Lord, who is like unto Thee? Thou art God Almighty, Who as three persons in one divine substance we worship and adore: Father unbegotten, only-begotten Son of the Father, Holy Spirit proceeding from both and remaining in both, Holy and undivided Trinity, one God Almighty.

I entreat, pray and request Thee, increase my faith, increase my hope, increase my charity: make us through Thy grace forever steadfast in faith and effective in works, that through true faith and works worthy of our faith we may come through, by Thy mercy, to eternal life.

Glory be to the Father, who created us: glory be to the Son, who saved us, glory be to the Holy Spirit, who sanctified us: glory be to the highest and undivided Trinity, whose works are inseparable, whose reign remains without end. Praise and hymn become Thee, to Thee are due all honour, blessing and glory, to Thee be thanksgiving, honour, power and might, our God, world without end. Amen.

The performers

BREMF Consort of Voices (BCV) is an ensemble of solo and consort singers formed from semi-professional, student and experienced amateur singers. Dedicated to giving dramatic and exciting performances of music from the Renaissance and early Baroque, the ensemble gives several concerts each year at BREMF. It has taken part in music ranging from 15th-century a cappella polyphony to the spectacular 1589 Florentine Intermedi with renaissance orchestra, great Venetian works with The English Cornett & Sackbut Ensemble and Purcell with Emma Kirkby and the International Baroque Players.

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.