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Summer at Snape 2025

Thursday 21 August 7.30pm
Snape Maltings Concert Hall

Duration: 90', including an interval of 20'
with English surtitles

Stile Antico: Golden Renaissance

Stile Antico

William Byrd (c.1540–1623) Exsurge Domine · text: Psalm 44 *4'*

John Taverner (c.1490–1545) Audivi vocem de caelo · Matins responsory for All Saints *4'*
Francisco Guerrero (1528–1599) A un niño llorando · Anon. *3'*
Michael Praetorius (1571–1621) Ein Kind geborn zu Bethlehem · Attrib. Johann Spangenburg *4'*

Thomas Tallis (c.1505–1585) In manuas tuas · Psalm 31 *2'*
Thomas Tomkins (1572–1656) O praise the Lord · Psalm 117 *4'*

Orlando Gibbons (1583–1625) Hosanna to the Son of David · Matthew 21 *3'*
John Sheppard (c.1515– 1558) I give you a new commandment · John 13 *3'*
Tomás Luis de Victoria (1548–1611) Recessit pastor noster · Responsory for Tenebrae *3'*

Gregorio Allegri (1582–1652) Miserere (1630s) concert version · Psalm 51 *7'*

INTERVAL

Cristóbal de Morales (c.1500–1553) Jubilate Deo · Text written for the Truce of Nice, 1538 *5'*

Gibbons O clap your hands · Psalm 47 *6'*
Byrd Retire my Soule · William Byrd *5'*

Giaches de Wert (1535–1596) Gaudete in Domino · Philippians 4 *2'*
Jacobus Clemens non Papa (c.1510/15–1555/6) Ego flos campi · Song of Songs 2, 4 *5'*
Josquin des Prez (c.1450/55–1521) Salve Regina · Marian Antiphon *6'*

Huw Watkins (b.1976) The Phoenix and the Turtle · William Shakespeare *6'*

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ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Golden Renaissance

Tonight's concert brings together many of our favourite works, and provides a fascinating window onto the different styles of sacred choral music that flourished around Renaissance Europe.

We begin with music by **William Byrd**, who was perhaps England's greatest Renaissance composer. Byrd chose a dangerous course amid the religious turmoil of the Reformation: even as he served in Queen Elizabeth I's Protestant Chapel Royal, he became the musical mouthpiece of the underground Catholic community, publishing a series of bitter Latin motets whose texts unmistakably respond to the plight of his fellow Catholics. One such work is *Exsurge, Domine* ('Arise, O Lord'): here the frustrated Psalmist demands that God rouse himself to help his persecuted people. Byrd's music positively bristles with righteous indignation.

The next three works are all appropriate to the Christmas season. The first is by the pre-Reformation English composer, **John Taverner;** it alternates passages of plainchant and choral polyphony, and was almost certainly intended for performance by upper voices – perhaps in response to the 'wise virgins' mentioned in the text. We follow it with a *villancico* (a Spanish-language, folk-like carol) by **Francisco Guerrero**, describing the visit of the Magi to the stable in an irrepressible dance metre. A similar spirit is found in **Michael Praetorius**' vivacious *Ein Kind geborn* ('A child is born'), whose texture builds progressively from the two voices heard at the opening to six parts in the climactic verses.

Thomas Tallis was William Byrd's close friend and colleague, even standing as godfather to Byrd's son, also named Thomas. The two collaborated on the first-ever book of music to be printed in England, the *Cantiones Sacrae* of 1575. Tallis' *In manus tuas* ('Into your hands') appears in that volume; a setting of words appropriate for the late-night service of Compline, it is a perfect example of the older composer's exquisitely balanced style. A particular highlight is the piquant dissonance at cadence points – once condemned by a horrified Victorian editor as 'an intolerably harsh effect'. By contrast, *O praise the Lord* by **Thomas Tomkins**, written for twelve solo voices, is a riot of chaotic energy.

The remaining pieces in the first half of our programme are appropriate to Holy Week. **Orlando Gibbons'** lively *Hosanna to the Son of David* captures the exuberance of the crowd that welcomed Christ into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. **John Sheppard**'s *I give you a new commandment* for lower voices sets words from the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday; written in the early stages of the Reformation, its austerity reflects the wishes of Thomas Cranmer that music should 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'. The climax of the Holy Week liturgy is the set of Tenebrae services for which the Spanish composer **Tomás Luis da Victoria** wrote his famous Tenebrae Responsories in 1585. *Recessit pastor noster* ('Our shepherd has departed') is a key moment in the sequence, simultaneously lamenting the death of Christ and anticipating his eventual triumph.

Gregorio Allegri's famous *Miserere mei* ('Have mercy on me'), written in or around 1638, was also intended for use at Tenebrae. Few works have been the subject of so much myth-making; tradition relates that it was so jealously guarded that unauthorized copyists risked excommunication, that its famous ornaments were never notated, but solemnly passed from singer to singer, and that it was finally smuggled out of the Sistine Chapel in the head of the young Mozart. Though most of this is demonstrably untrue, it is clear that the work we have now is far from what Allegri wrote – and in particular, that the famous passage containing the soprano high Cs is a bizarre conflation of different editions and transpositions. The work, then, is inauthentic, but it is precisely its inauthenticity which has become its most enduring feature: this odd hybrid has a hypnotic beauty all of its own. A setting of the penitential Psalm 51, it is based on the distinctive plainchant *tonus peregrinus* whose recitation tone 'wanders' between pitches. Two separate choirs, one of five voices and one of four, harmonise and elaborate the chant, alternating with verses of unadorned plainchant. When at last the two choirs sing simultaneously in the final verse of the psalm, the effect is truly monumental, even in the slightly abbreviated concert version of the work that we perform today.

Our second half begins with a festive motet by **Cristóbal de Morales**. Unlike many pieces of Renaissance music, we can be sure of the occasion for which *Jubilate Deo* was written: the celebration of a (short-lived) peace treaty between Charles V of Spain and Francis I of France in 1538. The motet was commissioned by Morales' employer, Pope Paul III, and it is he who is credited in the text with brokering the peace. Morales includes a *cantus firmus* in the tenor line, consisting of repetitions of the word 'Gaudeamus' ('rejoice'), firstly in slow notes, and then, towards the end of the piece, at double tempo.

Orlando Gibbons' irrepressible setting of Psalm 47, *O clap your hands together*, has a strange history: two accounts relate that it was written for his friend William Heyther to present in order to supplicate for his DMus at Oxford in 1622. It seems unlikely that this was intended as genuine subterfuge; rather, Gibbons's anthem probably served to fulfil a formality, since Heyther's was an honorary degree. We pair it with a beautiful late work by **William Byrd**, *Retire my Soule*, whose autumnal text seems highly appropriate for a composer by then in his seventies.

Flemish musicians were some of the most renowned and sought-after composers of the Renaissance, and often found employment abroad. **Giaches de Wert** and Josquin des Prez both spent much of their careers working in Italy; de Wert was in charge of music at the court in Ferrara, where a young Claudio Monteverdi was among his employees. His brief *Gaudete in Domino* unfolds as a single burst of energy. **Josquin** was the first international superstar composer, working chiefly in Milan and Rome. His five-part *Salve*

Regina was particularly admired by his contemporaries for its technical accomplishment: one of the inner parts is entirely pre-composed, consisting exclusively of *ostinato* repetitions of the word 'Salve' ('Hail') at pre-determined intervals, whilst the highest part is a close paraphrase of a plainchant. Despite these twin constraints – akin to composing with one hand tied behind his back – Josquin manages to create a motet full of variety and colour, by turns muscularly rhythmic and tenderly reflective.

Between these two works we sing a particular group favourite: *Ego flos campi* ('I am the flower of the field') by **Clemens non Papa**. It was probably written for a community of nuns at 's-Hertogenbosch; their motto 'sicut lilium inter spinas' ('as the lily among thorns') is heard clearly, twice over, at the centre of the motet. The music is characterised by crystalline, slow-moving harmony, never straying far from the warmth of the tonic chord; the effect is akin to admiring a jewel from every possible angle.

We finish with something completely different: a work commissioned for Stile Antico in 2014 by **Huw Watkins**. *The Phoenix and the Turtle* sets words by Shakespeare, and describes the funeral rites of a phoenix and turtle dove, symbols of perfection and devoted love. The poem is clearly intended as an allegory of some sort, and it has been suggested that the two birds might represent two Catholic martyrs, Anne and Roger Line. If that is correct, then the 'bird of loudest lay' mentioned in the first stanza might well represent William Byrd. Watkins cloaks Shakespeare's dense words in music of propulsive drive and lyrical beauty.

Stile Antico

Soprano

Helen Ashby

Kate Ashby

Rebecca Hickey

Alto

Cara Curran

Emma Ashby

Rosie Parker

Tenor

Andrew Griffiths

Benedict Hymas

Jonathan Hanley

Bass

Gareth Thomas

James Arthur

Nathan Harrison