

# The Tallis Scholars

Wednesday, December 10, 8 pm, 2003  
First Congregational Church

Peter Phillips, conductor

Deborah Roberts, Tessa Bonner, Janet Coxwell, and Sally Dunkley, soprano  
Patrick Craig and Caroline Trevor, alto  
Andrew Carwood and Nicholas Todd, tenor  
Donald Greig and Francis Steele, bass

## PROGRAM

Philippus de Monte    Laudate Dominum

Monte    Peccantem me quotidie

Monte    Missa Sine Nomine

## INTERMISSION

Gregorio Allegri    Miserere

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina    Stabat Mater

Palestrina    Alma Redemptoris mater

Palestrina    Magnificat

Palestrina    Nunc Dimittis

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Philippus de Monte (Malines, 1521 – Prague, 1603) has often been described as the greatest contemporary of Lassus, which makes the present neglect of his work somewhat curious, even if Lassus can also hardly be said to be well-served by current concert and recording activity (insofar as only a very small proportion of his output is continually recycled). Like Lassus, whom he knew personally, Monte was well-traveled, a fine linguist, and highly esteemed in his own lifetime. He wrote 38 Masses, some 250 motets, 144 madrigali spirituali, 45 chansons, and more than 1,000 madrigals, and has been described as the “last internationally renowned representative of Netherlandish polyphony.”

Peccantem me quotidie is one of Monte’s numerous motets (they number something over 250).

While at first glance presenting a positively Palestrinian serenity, the work, in fact, clearly shows a careful integration of a balanced “classicism” with a more madrigalian, text-driven approach, as one

may clearly hear in the homophonic chordal writing at “manus Domini tetigit me.” Also noteworthy is the musical climax achieved through the rhetorical repetition of the question “Quare persequimini me sicut Deus, et carnibus meis saturamini?”, the topmost voice climbing to the highest note of the piece. The celebratory *Laudate Dominum*, for double choir, shows these text-orientated devices in full flower, declamatory writing and dotted rhythms abounding. Monte is particularly taken by the trumpets and strings, to judge by the way the striking running motif is used for both “sono tubae” and “chordis.”

Monte left 38 Masses, including a *Missa pro Defunctis*. Most of them are parody Masses, based both on sacred and secular models. While the model for the eight-voice *Missa Sine Nomine*, preserved in the National Library of Vienna, remains unknown, its elegant formal balance, avoiding even the few exuberances of the motets, is typical of the composer. (That said, Monte’s modern preference for contrast does still make itself apparent, as one may hear in the quite rapid alternations of polyphony and more homophonic writing that pepper the *Credo*.) Though it is scored for eight voices, it is not a work for double-choir; rather, like Palestrina, Monte here prefers a genuinely polyphonic approach that nevertheless leaves room for alternations of smaller groups (as, indeed, one may hear right at the beginning of the *Kyrie*). The *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei* are particularly fine, having that controlled power that is the hallmark of much of Monte’s best music.

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Gregorio Allegri’s famous *Miserere* barely needs any introduction. In essence a simple faux-bourdon setting of Psalm 50, its dazzling embellishments have been the subject of recent musicological scrutiny with the aim of finding a definitive version. There is none, of course. What we hear tonight is one of many possibilities offered to us by musical history, and it remains a strikingly beautiful composition.

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Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, still often held up as the arch-composer of the Counter-Reformation, the tool of the new ideology whose center was the city of Rome, was in fact a composer of great complexity and many facets. His technical fluency and brilliance, so clearly evident to us in such renowned works as the *Missa Papae Marcelli*, have—at least until relatively recently—obscured the more intense, meditative spirituality of the sets of *Lamentations*, the effervescence of the Italian-texted madrigals, and the highly personal responses to texts from the *Song of Songs*.

Palestrina is not traditionally viewed as fitting into the polychoral tradition, but, as is the case with Victoria, this is yet another aspect of his output, as a glance at the number of works in his oeuvre for eight and 12 voices will show. If, in addition, one stops to think about the management of choral groups in such Mass settings as *Papae Marcelli* or *Ecce ego Johannes*, it will readily become apparent that writing for more than one choir is a logical extension of such procedures. The best-known eight-part work in Palestrina’s output is certainly the *Stabat Mater*, whose plangent calm, leading us from the Virgin’s suffering at the foot of the Cross to the doors of Paradise, is achieved through the deft use of double-choir writing, still quintessentially Palestrinian in its elegant equilibrium.

The impressive eight-part *Nunc Dimittis* is one of six settings by Palestrina (the others are for four, five, six, and 12 voices); the *Magnificat* (in the first tone) is the only example for eight voices among the composer’s many settings of this text, and the only one to set both even and odd verses of the canticle rather than using the traditional *alternatim* procedure.

—Ivan Moody

The Tallis Scholars were founded in 1973 by director Peter Phillips. Through their recordings and concert performances, they have established themselves as leading exponents of Renaissance sacred music, and their exploration of the depth and variety of this repertoire has reached a worldwide audience. Peter Phillips has worked with the ensemble to create, through good tuning and blend, the purity and clarity of sound he feels best serve the Renaissance repertoire, allowing every detail of the musical lines to be heard. It is the resulting beauty of this sound for which the Tallis Scholars have become renowned.

The Tallis Scholars perform in both sacred and secular venues, giving around 70 concerts each year. In April 1994, the group enjoyed the honor of performing in the Sistine Chapel to mark the final stage of the complete restoration of the Michelangelo frescoes. In New York, on December 5, 1998, the group gave its 1000th concert. That same year saw them in Italy (in Ferrara, at the invitation of Claudio Abbado) and in London for a unique 25th Anniversary concert in London's National Gallery, premiering a John Tavener work written for the group and narrated by Sting.

A further performance was given with Sir Paul McCartney in New York.

Recent performances have taken the ensemble to Germany, Spain, Italy, The Netherlands (Concertgebouw), France (La Chaise Dieu), the United States, Japan, China, Australia, Singapore, and many UK venues, including Symphony Hall, Bridgewater Hall, Wigmore Hall, London's South Bank Centre, and the Royal Albert Hall for the BBC Proms. Recent highlights include concerts at the Salzburg Festival, Bath Festival, Milan Cathedral Festival, at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow, and at the BBC Proms in London. The group continues to commission new works and recently gave world premieres of two pieces written for 40 voices: *I have thee by the hand*, *O Man* by Robin Walker and *When the wet wind sings* by Errollyn Wallen. Future plans include tours of the United States, Japan, and Australia, as well as regular appearances in the UK and Europe.

Much of The Tallis Scholars' reputation for their pioneering work has come from their association with Gimell Records, set up by Peter Phillips and Steve Smith in 1981 solely to record them. In February 1994, Phillips and The Tallis Scholars performed on the 400th anniversary of the death of Palestrina in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, where Palestrina had trained as a choirboy and later worked as maestro di cappella. The concerts were recorded by Gimell and are available on CD. They will also shortly be available on DVD and video.

Recordings by The Tallis Scholars have won many international awards. In 1987, their recording of Josquin's *Missa La sol fa re mi* and *Missa Pange lingua* received Gramophone magazine's Record of the Year award, the only recording of early music ever to win this coveted honor. In 1989, the French magazine *Diapason* gave two of its coveted *Diapason d'Or de l'Année* awards for recordings of a Mass and motets by Lassus and of Josquin's two Masses based on the chanson "L'Homme armé." The Tallis Scholars' recording of Palestrina's *Missa Assumpta est Maria* and *Missa Sicut liliium* was awarded Gramophone's Early Music Award in 1991, and the group received the 1994 Early Music Award for its recording of works by Cipriano de Rore and Josquin des Prés (this recording was also voted by listeners of Classic FM to be the year's "People's Choice" in a joint Classic FM/Gramophone competition). These accolades are continuing evidence of the exceptionally high standard maintained by The Tallis Scholars, and of their dedication to one of the great repertoires in Western classical music.

Peter Phillips (conductor) has made an impressive if unusual reputation for himself in dedicating his life's work to the research and performance of Renaissance polyphony. Having won a scholarship to Oxford in 1972, Phillips studied Renaissance music with David Wulstan and Denis Arnold, and gained experience in conducting small vocal ensembles, already experimenting with the rarer parts of the repertoire. Since then, he has directed The Tallis Scholars in more than 1,300 concerts and made over 50 discs, encouraging interest in polyphony all over the world. As a result of his work—through concerts, recordings, magazine awards, publishing editions of the music, and writing articles—Renaissance music has come to be accepted for the first time as part of the mainstream repertoire.

Apart from The Tallis Scholars, he continues to work with other specialist ensembles.

In 2003, he made his first appearances with the Collegium Vocale of Ghent, the BBC Singers, and Officium of Lisbon, while continuing his work with the Tudor Choir of Seattle. He gives numerous master classes and choral workshops every year around the world: next year will see him again in the United States, Siberia, and throughout Europe.

In addition to conducting, Peter Phillips is well-known as a writer. For many years he has contributed a regular music column (as well as one on cricket) to *The Spectator*. In 1995, he became the owner and publisher of *The Musical Times*, the oldest continuously published music journal in the world. His first book, *English Sacred Music 1549–1649*, was published by Gimell in

1991, while his second, *What We Really Do*, a hilarious account of what touring is like, alongside more sober remarks about the make-up and performance of polyphony, has just been published. Peter Phillips has made numerous television and radio broadcasts. Besides those featuring The Tallis Scholars, he has appeared several times on the BBC, as well as on European, Canadian, and North American radio. In 2002, he made a special television documentary for the BBC about the life and times of William Byrd. Peter Phillips is the director of The Tallis Scholars Summer Schools—choral courses that are dedicated to exploring the heritage of Renaissance choral music, and to developing a performance style appropriate to it as pioneered by The Tallis Scholars. For more information about these courses, and for information on how to buy a copy of *What We Really Do*, please visit the website [www.tsss.net](http://www.tsss.net).

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