

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 12 October 2024
7.30pm

Solomon's Knot

Emma Walshe soprano
Zoë Brookshaw soprano
Kate Symonds-Joy alto
James Hall alto
Thomas Herford tenor
David de Winter tenor
Gwilym Bowen tenor
Thomas Kelly tenor

Jonathan Sells artistic director, bass
Alex Ashworth bass
Magdalena Loth-Hill violin I, leader
George Clifford violin II
Joanne Miller viola
Nichola Blakey viola
Gavin Kibble bass violin
Jan Zahourek violine

Toby Carr chitarrone
Inga Maria Klaucke bassoon
Gawain Glenton cornet
Conor Hastings cornet
Emily White sackbut
Peter Thornton sackbut
Adam Crighton sackbut
William Whitehead organ

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

Vespro della Beata Vergine SV206 (c.1610)



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'To perform it is to court disaster. To write about it is to alienate some of one's best friends. Even to avoid joining in the controversy is to find oneself accused of (i) cowardice, or (ii) snobbishness, or (iii) sitting on the fence, or (iv) all three...'

What single piece of music could possibly prompt the kind of divisive rage and passion described here by musicologist Denis Arnold? The answer is Monteverdi's *Vespers* – a 'musicological Lorelei' that has confounded scholars and provoked performers for over 400 years. We know the *Vespers* was first printed in Venice in 1610 – a facsimile of that score is readily available. But despite an unusually direct paper-trail, the work remains mysterious, a source of questions to which any performance must supply an answer. When was it composed? For what purpose and occasion? Was it ever performed and, if so, where and in what form? Finally – and most significantly – is it, in fact, a unified work at all?

To start the process of untangling these is to travel not to Venice – the city that was home to Monteverdi's triumphant final decades, whose image is emblazoned on so many recordings – but to Mantua's Gonzaga Court. The ambitious young musician who had described himself as 'fortunate' to enter the Duke's service in 1591 was scarcely recognisable as the man creating '...an a cappella Mass for six voices...together with psalms for Vespers of the Madonna' in 1608.

Aged just 43, Monteverdi was a broken man. The death of his wife in 1607 had left him alone, 'seriously ill' from overwork and the Mantuan climate, struggling to feed, clothe and educate his two young sons. Pleas for dismissal were ignored, and Monteverdi was forced to continue in the Duke's demanding service. It seems an unlikely time for the composition of a large-scale sacred work. Some argue that it was created for the magnificent festivities surrounding the marriage of the Duke's son to Margherita of Savoy in May 1608. Others have argued for the *Vespers* as a musical portfolio to advertise the composer's skill to the visiting Pope Paul V (the work's dedicatee) in hopes of a Vatican job. That both theories persist speaks to the ambiguity of a work that seems designed to serve many functions – at once a compendium and a single liturgical work, an advertisement and a functional collection of sacred music.

Vespers – the daily Catholic evening service – follows a set form. Five psalms (each preceded by an antiphon), a hymn and a *Magnificat* are the key elements, sung to anything from plainchant to the most elaborate of polyphony on feast days.

Monteverdi sets each of these (twice, in the case of the *Magnificat*), but also includes additional elements. Four motets, or 'sacred concertos', are perhaps intended to replace the traditional antiphons between each psalm, with an instrumental sonata supplying the final preface.

One interesting detail of the *Vespers* is its emphasis – on the title-page, no less – on the work's historical elements. The psalms and *Magnificat* settings may have been composed separately over time, but all are united by their structure. Each takes plainchant as its basis, treating it as a *cantus firmus* – a slow-moving central melody – around which Monteverdi weaves intricate strands of counterpoint in both instruments and voices. The effect is strikingly varied from piece to piece, but retains the same spirit of collision: music at the threshold of ancient and modern, tradition and innovation. This is a composer who wishes to be admired for his invention, but also his respect and understanding of musical history. Add to this the sheer potential opulence of the settings – scored for up to 10 vocal parts, with cornettos and sackbuts as well as organ and strings – and you have a showcase well suited not only to the splendour of the Vatican, but perhaps even more so to the gilded galleries of St Mark's Basilica in Venice.

Like that building, whose vast scale eclipses all at first glance, the details of Monteverdi's *Vespers* can easily get lost in sheer sonic scale. But once ears adjust, there's much to notice. Has the supplication 'O Lord, make haste to help me' ever sounded more arresting than it does here in music adapted from the opening toccata of Monteverdi's opera *L'Orfeo*, fizzing instrumental ritornelli breaking up the solid blocks of chant, cornetto and violin soaring high above?

The next musical peak arrives in the motet *Nigra sum*. The sensual *Song of Solomon* text is set for solo voice and accompaniment, exploiting all the expressive freedom of the new operatic style. In contrast, psalm-setting *Nisi Dominus* is thickly scored for two five-voice choirs who pass verses back and forth, imitation intensifying towards an emotional and rhythmic climax.

The *Sonata sopra 'Sancta Maria'* puts instrumental virtuosity in the spotlight, weaving a shifting texture over continuo in a set of variations on three motifs. In and out of this drift soprano voices singing the short phrases of a plainchant litany to the Virgin.

Finally, the *Magnificat*: a fusion of old and new more audacious and extended than any we've heard so far. A plainchant *cantus firmus* runs through each of the movements, its slow-moving notes a harmonic core for a kaleidoscope of mood and invention that takes us from the penitential gloom of the lower-voiced 'Et misericordia', through a shadowy vision of the Holy Spirit in the echoing 'et Spiritui Sancto' to arrive at the blazing final dance of an Amen – music truly, as Monteverdi himself described it, '...suited to the chapels or chamber of princes'.

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Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

Vespro della Beata Vergine SV206 (c.1610)

Deus in adiutorium meum intende

Deus in adiutorium meum intende.	O God, make speed to save me.
Domine, ad adiuvandum me festina.	O Lord, make haste to help me.
Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.	Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen. Alleluia.	As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Alleluia.

Dixit Dominus

Dixit Dominus Domino meo: Sede a dextris meis.	The Lord said unto my Lord: sit thou at my right hand.
Donec ponam inimicos tuos, Scabellum pedum tuorum.	Until I make thine enemies thy footstool.
Virgam virtutis tuae emittet Dominus ex Sion: Dominare in medio inimicorum tuorum.	The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Sion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.
Tecum principium in die virtutis tuae, In splendoribus sanctorum: Ex utero ante luciferum genui te.	Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness: from the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy youth.
Iuravit Dominus, et non paenitebit eum: Tu es sacerdos in aeternum Secundum ordinem Melchisedech.	The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent: thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.
Dominus a dextris tuis, Confregit in die irae suae reges.	The Lord at thy right hand, shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath.

Iudicabit in nationibus, Implebit ruinas: Conquassabit capita in terra multorum.	He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with ruins: he shall wound the heads over many countries.
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De torrente in via bibet: Propterea exaltabit caput.	He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head.
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Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto. Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, Et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.	Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.
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Nigra sum

Nigra sum, sed formosa, filiae Ierusalem. Ideo dilexit me rex et introduxit me in cubiculum suum Et dixit mihi: Surge, amica mea, et veni. Iam hiems transiit, imber abiit, et recessit. Flores apparuerunt in terra nostra. Tempus putationis advenit.	I am black but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem. Therefore the king loved me and brought me to his chambers, and he said to me: Arise, my love, and come away. For the winter is passed, the rains are over and gone, and flowers have appeared in our land. The time of pruning is nigh.
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Laudate pueri

Laudate pueri Dominum: Laudate nomen Domini. Sit nomen Domini benedictum, Ex hoc nunc, et usque in saeculum.	Praise the Lord, ye servants: O praise the name of the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord: from this time forth for evermore.
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Song continues overleaf. Please turn the page as quietly as possible.

A solis ortu usque ad
occasum,
Laudabile
nomen
Domini.

The Lord's name is
praised: from the rising
up of the sun unto the
going down of the
same.

Excelsus super omnes
gentes Dominus
Et super caelos
gloria eius.

The Lord is high above all
heathen
and his glory above the
heavens.

Quis sicut Dominus, Deus
noster,
Qui in altis habitat, et humilia
Respicit
in caelo et in
terra?

Who is like unto the Lord
our God,
that has his dwelling so
high: and yet humbles
himself to behold the
things in heaven and
earth?

Suscitans a
terra inopem,
Et de stercore erigens
pauperem:

He takes up the destitute
out of the dust:
and lifts the poor out of
the mire:

Ut collocet eum cum
principibus,
Cum principibus
populi sui.

That he may set him with
princes,
even with the princes of
his people.

Qui habitare facit sterilem
in domo,
Matrem filiorum
laetantem.

He maketh the barren
woman to keep house,
and to be a joyful mother
of children.

Gloria Patri et Filio
et Spiritui
Sancto.

Glory be to the Father
and to the Son and to
the Holy Spirit.

Sicut erat in principio,
et nunc, et
semper,
Et in saecula saeculorum.
Amen.

As it was in the
beginning, is now, and
ever shall be,
world without end.
Amen.

Pulchra es

Pulchra es, amica mea,
suavis et decora
Filia Ierusalem.
Pulchra es, amica mea,
suavis et decora
Sicut Ierusalem,
Terribilis ut castrorum acies
ordinata.
Averte oculos tuos a me,
quia ipsi me avolare
fecerunt.

Thou art fair, my love,
beautiful and comely
daughter of Jerusalem.
Thou art fair, my love,
beautiful and comely
as Jerusalem,
terrible as an army set in
array.
Turn thine eyes from me,
for they have made me
flee away.

Laetatus sum

Laetatus sum in his quae
dicta sunt mihi:
In domum Domini
bimus.

I was glad when they said
unto me:
'We will go into the house
of the Lord.'

Stantes erant pedes nostri
In atriis tuis, Ierusalem.

Our feet shall stand
in thy gates, O Jerusalem.

Ierusalem, quae aedificatur
ut civitas:
Cuius participatio eius in
idipsum.

Ierusalem is built
as a city:
that is at unity
in itself.

Illuc enim ascenderunt
tribus, tribus
Domini:
Testimonium Israel ad
confitendum nomini
Domini.

For thither the tribes go
up, the tribes of the
Lord:
to testify to Israel, to give
thanks to the Lord's
name.

Quia illic sederunt sedes in
iudicio,
Sedes super
domum David.

For there is the seat of
judgement:
even the seat of the
house of David.

Rogate quae ad pacem sunt
Ierusalem:
Et abundantia
diligentibus te.

O pray for the peace of
Jerusalem:
they shall prosper that
love thee.

Fiat pax in virtute tua:
Et abundantia in
turribus tuis.

Peace be within thy walls:
and plenteousness within
thy palaces.

Propter fratres meos et
proximos meos,
Loquebar pacem de te:

For my brethren and
companions' sakes,
I will wish thee peace.

Propter domum Domini
Dei nostri,
Quaesivi bona
tibi.

Because of the house of
the Lord our God
I will seek to do thee
good.

Gloria Patri et Filio
et Spiritui
Sancto.
Sicut erat in principio,
et nunc, et
semper,
Et in saecula saeculorum.
Amen.

Glory be to the Father
and to the Son and to
the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the
beginning, is now, and
ever shall be,
world without end.
Amen.

Duo Seraphim

Duo Seraphim clamabant alter ad alterum:	The two Seraphim cried to one another:
Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth.	Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth.
Plena est omnis terra gloria eius.	The whole earth is full of his glory.
Tres sunt, qui testimonium dant in caelo:	There are three that bear record in heaven:
Pater, Verbum et Spiritus Sanctus.	the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit.
Et hi tres unum sunt.	And these three are one.

Nisi Dominus

Nisi Dominus aedificaverit domum,	Unless the Lord builds a house,
In vanum laboraverunt qui aedificant eam.	in vain do those who labour build it.
Nisi Dominus custodierit civitatem,	Unless the Lord guards a city,
Frustra vigilat qui custodit eam.	futilely does he who watches guard it.
Vanum est vobis ante lucem surgere:	It is pointless for you to get up early:
Surgite postquam sederitis,	you get up before you have gone to bed,
Qui manducatis panem doloris.	you who eat the bread of misery.
Cum dederit dilectis suis somnum:	For he has granted to those he loves rest:
Ecce haereditas Domini, filii:	behold an inheritance from the Lord - sons:
Merces, fructus ventris.	a reward, the fruit of the womb.
Sicut sagittae in manu potentis:	Like arrows in the hand of a powerful man:
Ita filii excussorum.	such are sons born in your youth.
Beatus vir qui implevit desiderium suum ex ipsis:	Blessed is the man who has filled his desire with these;
Non confundetur cum loquetur inimicis suis in porta.	he will not be confounded when he speaks with his enemies at the gate.
Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.	Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

Sicut erat in principio,
et nunc, et
semper,
Et in saecula saeculorum.
Amen.

As it was in the
beginning, is now, and
ever shall be,
world without end.
Amen.

Audi caelum

Audi caelum verba mea	Hear, O heaven, hear my words
Plena desiderio et perfusa gaudio (...audio)	full of desire and suffused with joy (...I hear)
Dic, quaeso, mihi: Quae est ista quae consurgens	Tell me: Who is she who rises bright
Ut aurora rutilat, ut benedicam? (...dicam)	as the dawn, that I may bless her? (...I will say)
Dic nam ista pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol,	Say, for she is beautiful as the moon, special as the sun,
Replet laetitia terras, caelos, maria (...Maria)	she fills the earth, the heavens and the seas with joy (...Mary)
Maria virgo illa dulcis praedicta	The sweet virgin Mary, foretold by the prophet
De propheta Ezechiel, porta orientalis? (...talis)	Ezekiel, the portal of the East? (...such is she)
Illa sacra et felix porta per quam mors	This holy and happy portal through which death
Fuit expulsa introduxit autem vita? (...ita)	was driven out and life brought to us? (...thus it is)
Quae semper tutum est medium	Who is ever the perfect and sure link
Inter homines et Deum Pro culpae remedium? (...medium)	between God and man, remedy for sin? (...she is that link)
Omnes hanc ergo sequamur qua cum gratia	Let us all therefore follow her by whose grace
Mereamur vitam aeternam consequamur (...sequamur)	we may deserve eternal life (...let us follow)
Praestet nobis Deus, Pater hoc et Filius	God the Father grant us this, and the Son
Et Mater cuius nomen invocamus dulce	and the Mother on whose name we call
Miseris solamen. (...Amen)	as sweet solace to the sorrowful. (...Amen)
Benedicta es, Virgo Maria, in saeculorum saecula.	Blessed are you, O Virgin Mary, world without end.

Please do not turn the page until the song and its accompaniment have ended.

Lauda Jerusalem

Lauda Ierusalem Dominum: lauda Deum tuum Sion.	Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem: praise thy God, O Sion.
Quoniam confortavit seras portarum tuarum:	Because he hath strengthened the bolts of thy gates,
Benedixit filiis tuis in te.	he hath blessed thy children within thee.
Qui posuit fines tuos pacem: Et adipe frumenti satiat te.	Who hath placed peace in thy borders: and filleth thee with the fat of corn.
Qui emittit eloquium suum terrae: Velociter currit sermo eius.	Who sendeth forth his speech to the earth: his word runneth swiftly.
Qui dat nivem sicut lanam: Nebulam sicut cinerem spargit.	Who giveth snow like wool: scattereth mists like ashes.
Mittit crystallum suam sicut buccellas: Ante faciem frigoris eius quis sustinebit?	He sendeth his crystal like morsels: who shall stand before the face of his cold?
Emittet verbum suum, et liquefaciet ea: Flabit spiritus eius, et fluent aquae.	He shall send out his word, and shall melt them: his wind shall blow, and the waters shall run.
Qui annuntiat verbum suum Iacob: Iustitias et iudicia sua Israel.	Who declareth his word to Jacob: his justices and his judgments to Israel.
Non fecit taliter omni nationi: Et iudicia sua non manifestavit eis.	He hath not done in like manner to every nation: and his judgments he hath not made manifest to them.
Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto. Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, Et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.	Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Interval

Sonata sopra 'Sancta Maria'

Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis. Holy Mary, pray for us.

Ave maris stella

Ave maris stella, Dei Mater alma, Atque semper virgo, felix caeli porta.	Hail, star of the sea, merciful Mother of God, ever a virgin, happy door of heaven.
Sumens illud Ave Gabrielis ore, Funda nos in pace, mutans Evae nomen.	Taking this 'Ave' from the mouth of Gabriel, bring us to peace, reversing the name 'Eva'.
Solve vincla reis, profer lumen caecis, Mala nostra pelle, bona cuncta posce.	Unbind the shackles of the accused, bring light to the blind, take away our misfortunes and bring us every good.
Monstra te esse matrem: sumat per te precem, Qui pro nobis natus, tulit esse tuus.	Show yourself as mother; may he who was yours, born for us, receive our prayer through you.
Virgo singularis, inter omnes mitis, Nos culpis solutos, mites fac et castos.	Unique virgin, gentler than all, make us gentle and chaste, free from the bonds of sin.
Vitam praesta puram, iter para tutum, Ut videntes Iesum, semper collaetemur.	Bring us a pure life, prepare the true way, so that, seeing Jesus, we may rejoice for ever.
Sit laus Deo Patri, summo Christo decus, Spiritus Sancto, tribus honor unus. Amen.	Let there be praise to God the father, honour to Christ on high, to the Holy Spirit, to all three one honour. Amen.
Magnificat	
Magnificat anima mea Dominum: Et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo.	My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. And my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour.

Quia respexit humilitatem Ancillae suae: Ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent Omnes generationes.	For he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his handmaiden: behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est: Et sanctum nomen eius.	For he that is mighty has done wondrous things for me: and holy is his name.
Et misericordia eius A progenie in progenies timentibus eum.	And his mercy is upon them that fear him throughout all generations.
Fecit potentiam in brachio suo: Dispersit superbos mente cordis sui.	He has shown the power of his arm: he has scattered the proud in their conceit.
Deposuit potentes de sede, Et exaltavit humiles.	He has put down the mighty from their seat, and has exalted the humble and meek.
Esurientes implevit bonis: Et divites dimisit inanes.	He has filled the hungry with good things: and the rich he has sent empty away.
Suscepit Israel puerum suum, Recordatus misericordiae suae.	He has sustained his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy.
Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros, Abraham et semini eius in saecula.	As he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his sons for ever.
Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto. Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, Et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.	Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.