

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 20 October 2024
7.30pm

Renaissance Reflections

Siglo de Oro

Patrick Allies artistic director
Hannah Ely soprano
Fiona Fraser soprano
Rachel Haworth soprano
Elspeth Piggott soprano

Rebekah NieBer-Jones alto
Katherine Nicholson alto
Paul Bentley-Angell tenor
Chris Fitzgerald-Lombard tenor
Jack Harberd tenor

James Robinson tenor
Piers Connor Kennedy bass
David Le Prevost bass
Ben Rowarth bass
Gareth Thomas bass

William Daman (c.1540-1591)

Lord Jesus, Think on Me (pub. 1579) *arranged
by Patrick Allies*

John Sheppard (c.1515-1558)
Ben Rowarth (b.1992)

Libera nos I
Libera nos (2015)
Commissioned by Siglo de Oro

Thomas Tallis (c.1505-1585)
Derri Joseph Lewis (b.1997)

O nata lux (pub. 1575)
O nata lux (2024) *UK première*
Commissioned by Siglo de Oro

Kerensa Briggs (b.1991)

Media vita (2015)
Commissioned by Siglo de Oro

John Sheppard

Media vita (c.1550s)

Interval

Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

Salve Regina from *4 Anthems to the Blessed
Virgin Mary Op. 9* (1915)

John Sheppard
Owain Park (b.1993)

The Lord's Prayer
The Lord's Prayer (2015)
Commissioned by Siglo de Oro

Roderick Williams (b.1965)
John Browne

Ave verum corpus Re-imagined (2015)
Salve regina I

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Tonight marks the beginning of Siglo de Oro's three-concert residency at Wigmore Hall during the 2024/25 Season, and by coincidence, it is also timed almost exactly 10 years since the group's first professional concert. To celebrate these milestones, this performance will include a number of 16th-century works with which Siglo de Oro has gained a close affinity over a decade of music making, as well as celebrating the ensemble's relationships with living composers.

At the heart of the programme are four pieces commissioned by Siglo de Oro. Three date back almost a decade, when the group commemorated 500 years since the birth of the eminent Tudor musician **John Sheppard** by asking a clutch of up-and-coming composers to write new works inspired by his legacy.

Central to Sheppard's musical accomplishments is his Latin church music, which is marked by grand scoring, opulent textures and stirring vocal writing. Perhaps his greatest achievement is *Media vita*, a large-scale motet in six parts. The texts are appropriate to Compline in the Sarum rite but are also often used in funeral services, which has led to suggestions that this was a memorial piece. The opening words 'in the midst of life we are in death' are set by Sheppard in an austere manner, before the music expands gradually into a complex and passionate texture. The sections of the piece have a responsorial structure, with repeated material throughout, giving it an obsessive character.

Kerensa Briggs's richly scored *Media vita* is far more modest in scale, consisting of only a dozen or so phrases. Briggs uses her own exquisite, dissonant harmonies to bring the poignant words to life.

Sheppard was one of the generation of musicians who had to relearn his craft when the Reformation took hold in England. He was required to mould his contrapuntal skill to the English language, something he demonstrated with great prowess in his spacious and transparent setting of *The Lord's Prayer*. **Owain Park's** response builds on Sheppard's glowing textures, plumbing emotional depths when the words reference sin and temptation, before driving towards an exuberant conclusion at 'always so be it'.

Sheppard's *Libera nos* is likely to have been composed during his time as *informator choristarum* at Magdalen College, Oxford, where the statutes required this simple prayer to be recited twice a day. For this piece, Sheppard uses the highly unusual technique of a bass cantus firmus, whereby slow-moving notes in the lowest part underpin everything else. This line is decorated with six higher voices, weaving a polyphonic web above. The two soprano parts clearly transmit the crucial phrase 'O beata Trinitas' three times at the work's climax. **Ben Rowarth's** response is grand and cinematic. While honouring elements of Sheppard's imitative style and penchant for harmonic clashes, Rowarth's piece takes its own mysterious path. Scored for 12 voices in three choirs, Rowarth's *Libera nos* offers

fresh musical responses to each line of text, while mirroring the sense of awe and reverence in Sheppard's writing.

The other Siglo de Oro commission on the programme is very new, written for the group this year by emerging composer **Derri Joseph Lewis**, using **Thomas Tallis's** music as its starting point. In *O nata lux*, Tallis sets an ancient hymn intended for the Feast of the Transfiguration using mysterious, shimmering harmonies. Derri Lewis's newly-composed piece of the same name opens with a wordless section before the text gradually appears in repeated glittering chords. Lewis writes in his introduction to the score that he wanted to explore the idea of 'light born of light' in the sense of 'small joys that spark bright feelings'.

One of the best-loved 'Renaissance reflections' composed in recent years is **Roderick Williams's** *Ave verum corpus Re-imagined*. Here, William Byrd's famous communion motet is deconstructed and reassembled, with its distinctive chords and melodies overlaid on one another, giving it an otherworldly quality. The piece draws on the composer's memories from his days as a chorister at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, where Byrd's music would regularly reverberate around the building. Williams alights on Byrd's use of false relations, where both the major and minor third are heard in quick succession, or even simultaneously. The composer dedicated his piece to the late David Trendell (1964-2014), whose music making inspired the creation of Siglo de Oro as a student ensemble and who offered great support and encouragement to the group in its early years.

The programme includes two settings of the *Salve Regina*, a prayer in honour of the Virgin Mary that was one of the most used – and most set to music – in medieval Europe. We will hear **Herbert Howells's** version first, composed in 1915 for the choir of Westminster Cathedral which was dedicated at the time to reviving polyphonic singing within the liturgy. Imbued with a sense of Renaissance inheritance, Howells's music revels in building up passionate textures to declaim the climaxes of the text. Richard R Terry, Director of Music at the Cathedral during this era, described Howells's *Salve Regina* and the three other Marian antiphons that accompanied it as 'quite the finest by any modern Englishman'. **John Browne**, Howells's English predecessor who lived 400 years earlier, uses many of the same musical tools in his *Salve Regina*. However, Browne's setting, preserved in the remarkable late 15th-century *Eton Choirbook*, is conceived on an even grander scale. Browne revels in long passages for only three voices, where each word can last for 15 or 20 seconds. The listener can lose themselves in these mystical episodes, before being jolted back by the return of the full ensemble in passages such as the one that brings the antiphon to its rousing conclusion.

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William Daman (c.1540-1591)

Lord Jesus, think on me (pub. 1579)

arranged by Patrick Allies

Lord Jesus, think on me,
and purge away my sin;
from earthborn passions set me free,
and make me pure within.

Lord Jesus, think on me
with many a care opprest;
let me thy loving servant be,
and taste thy promised rest.

Lord Jesus, think on me,
nor let me go astray;
through darkness and perplexity
point thou the heavenly way.

Lord Jesus, think on me,
that, when the flood is past,
I may the eternal brightness see,
and share thy joy at last.

John Sheppard (c.1515-1558)

Libera nos I

Liturgical text

Libera nos,	Free us,
Salva nos,	save us,
Justifica nos,	defend us,
O beata Trinitas.	O blessed Trinity.

Ben Rowarth (b.1992)

Libera nos (2015)

Liturgical text

Libera nos,	Free us,
Salva nos,	save us,
Justifica nos,	defend us,
O beata Trinitas.	O blessed Trinity.

Thomas Tallis (c.1505-1585)

O nata lux (pub. 1575)

Anonymous

O nata lux de lumine Jesu redemptor aeculi, Dignare clemens supplicum Laudes precesque sumere.	O light born of light, Jesus, redeemer of the world, with loving-kindness deign to receive suppliant praise and prayer.
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Qui carne quondam contegi Dignatus es pro perditis, Nos membra confer effici Tui beati corporis.	Thou who once deigned to be clothed in flesh for the sake of the lost, grant us to be members of thy blessed body.
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Derri Joseph Lewis (b.1997)

O nata lux (2024) UK première

Anonymous

O nata lux de lumine	O light born of light
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Kerensa Briggs (b.1991)

Media vita (2015)

Anonymous

Media vita in morte sumus Quem quaerimus adjutorem nisi te, Domine? Qui pro peccatis nostris juste irascaris Sancte Deus, Sancte fortis, Sancte et misericors Salvator, Amarae morti ne tradas nos.	In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek for succour, but of thee, O Lord, who for our sins justly art moved? Yet, O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.
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Please do not turn the page until the song and its accompaniment have ended.

John Sheppard

Media vita (c.1550s)

Liturgical text, Anonymous

Nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine, secundum verbum tuum in pace: Quia viderunt oculi mei salutare tuum. Quod parasti ante faciem omnium populorum: Lumen ad revelationem gentium, et gloriam plebis tuae Israel. Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto: Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.	Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation. Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people. To be a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of thy people Israel. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost: as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.
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Media vita in morte sumus Quem quaerimus adjutorem nisi te, Domine? Qui pro peccatis nostris juste irascaris	In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek for succour, but of thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased?
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Sancte Deus, Sancte fortis, Sancte et misericors Salvator, Amarae morti ne tradas nos.	Yet, O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.
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Ne projicias nos in tempore senectutis cum defecerit virtus nostra ne derelinquas nos Domine.	Cast us not away in our old age when our strength faileth, neither forsake us, O Lord, O God most holy.
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Noli claudere aures tuas ad preces nostras.	Shut not thy merciful ears to our prayer, O Lord most mighty.
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Qui cognoscis occulta cordis parce peccatis nostris.	Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts; pardon our sins.
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Sancte et misericors Salvator, amarae morti ne tradas nos.	O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.
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Interval

Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

Salve Regina from 4 Anthems to the Blessed Virgin Mary

Op. 9 (1915)

Anonymous

Salve Regina, Mater misericordiae Vita, dulcedo et spes nostra, salve Ad te clamamus, exsules filii Evae Ad te suspiramus gementes et flentes In hac lacrimarum valle. Eia ergo, advocata nostra illos tuos Misericordes oculos ad nos converte Et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui Nobis post hoc exsilium ostende O clemens, o pia, o dulcis Virgo Maria	Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of mercy, hail our life, our sweetness and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve, to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this, our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.
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John Sheppard

The Lord's Prayer

Liturgical text

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy
name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, in earth as it is
in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our
trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass
against us, and let us not be led into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power; to thee be all
honour and glory for evermore.
Always so be it.

Owain Park (b.1993)

The Lord's Prayer (2015)

Liturgical text

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them.
And let us not be led into temptation; but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom and the power, to thee be all honour and glory for evermore.
Always so be it.

Roderick Williams (b.1965)

Ave verum corpus Re-imagined (2015)

Anonymous

Ave verum corpus natum De Maria Virgine: Vere passum, immolatum In cruce pro homine: Cuius latus perforatum Fluxit aqua et sanguine: Esto nobis praegustatum, In mortis examine. O Jesu dulcis, O Jesu pie, O Jesu Fili Mariae. Miserere mei. Amen.	Hail the true body, born of the Virgin Mary: You who truly suffered and were sacrificed on the cross for the sake of man. From whose pierced flank flowed water and blood: be a foretaste for us in the trial of death. O sweet, O merciful, O Jesus, Son of Mary. Have mercy on me. Amen.
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John Browne

Salve regina I

Anonymous

Salve Regina, Mater misericordiae Vita, dulcedo et spes nostra, salve Ad te clamamus, exsules filii Hevae, Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes In hac lacrimarum valle.	Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of mercy, hail our life, our sweetness and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve, to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.
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Eia ergo, advocata nostra, illos tuos Misericordes oculos ad nos converte Et Iesum benedictum fructum ventris tui Nobis post hoc exsilium ostende:	Turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this, our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus:
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Virgo mater ecclesiae, Aeterna porta gloriae, Esto nobis refugium Apud Patrem et Filium, O clemens!	Virgin mother of the church, eternal gate of glory, be for us a refuge before the Father and the Son, O clement!
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Virgo clemens, virgo pia, Virgo dulcis, O Maria, Exaudi preces omnium Ad te pie clamantium, O pia!	Clement, holy virgin, sweet virgin, O Mary, hear the prayers of all who piously cry to you, O holy!
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Funde preces tuo nato, Crucifixo, vulnerato, Et pro nobis flagellato, Spinis puncto, felle potato.	Pour out your prayers to your Son, crucified, wounded, and scourged for us, by thorns pierced, with gall for drink.
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O dulcis Maria, salve.	O sweet Mary, hail!
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