

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 21 March 2024
7.30pm

A Divine Hope - A musical journey from inferno to paradise

Stile Antico

Helen Ashby soprano
Kate Ashby soprano
Rebecca Hickey soprano
Emma Ashby alto
Rosemary Clifford alto

Cara Curran alto
Andrew Griffiths tenor
Jonathan Hanley tenor
Benedict Hymas tenor
James Arthur bass

Nathan Harrison bass
Gareth Thomas bass

Nicolas Gombert (c.1495-1560)

Media vita (pub. 1539)

Dante Alighieri (c.1265-1321)

HELL

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (c.1525-1594)

Extract from *Inferno I* from *The Divine Comedy* (c.1308-1321)

Luzzasco Luzzaschi (1545-1607)

Peccantem me quotidie (pub. 1572)

Dante Alighieri

Quivi sospiri (pub. 1576)

Francisco Guerrero (1528-1599)

Extract from *Inferno XXXIV* from *The Divine Comedy*

Vexilla regis (pub. 1584)

PURGATORY

Dante Alighieri

Extract from *Purgatorio VIII* from *The Divine Comedy*

Tomás Luis de Victoria (1548-1611)

Te lucis ante terminum (pub.1584)

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina

Salve regina a5

Dante Alighieri

Extract from *Purgatorio IX* from *The Divine Comedy*

Claudio Merulo (1533-1604)

Salvum fac populum tuum

Interval

Cristóbal de Morales (c.1500-1553)

Agnus Dei from *Missa 'Mille regretz'*,

Dante Alighieri

Extract from *Inferno II* from *The Divine Comedy*

Orlande de Lassus (c.1530-1594)

Beati pauperes spiritu

Cristóbal de Morales

Asperges me, Domine

Dante Alighieri

Extract from *Purgatorio XXXI* from *The Divine Comedy*

HEAVEN

Anon

Venite a laudare

Claudio Merulo (1533-1604)

Vergine Madre figlia del tuo figlio

Dante Alighieri

Extract from *Paradiso XXIII* from *The Divine Comedy*

Vicente Lusitano (c.1520-1561)

Regina caeli

Tomás Luis de Victoria

Magnificat sexti toni a12



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Dante Alighieri's *Commedia* ('The Divine Comedy') is widely considered one of the greatest works of literature ever written. It helped to establish vernacular Italian as a literary language at a time when most serious writing was in Latin, and to ensure that Dante's native Tuscan dialect would become its pre-eminent form. Its remarkable imagery has shaped Western understanding of the afterlife for more than seven centuries, and inspired an immense body of scholarship, philosophy, art, and music. Our programme traces Dante's epic journey in a sequence of Renaissance motets which reflect the music heard within the *Commedia*, and madrigals which set Dante's words directly.

Born in Florence in c.1265, Dante was a prominent figure in civic life, and became embroiled in disputes about the extent of Papal authority in the city's affairs. He travelled to Rome as a delegate, but in his absence a change of government in Florence saw him declared an absconder, and he was eventually sentenced to perpetual exile, dying in Ravenna in 1321. It was during his exile that Dante began to write the *Commedia*, which contains many references to both his friends and enemies in Florence. The work is divided into three sections: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, each consisting of 33 cantos. The poet is guided through the first two realms by the shade of the Roman poet Virgil; in the third, it is his muse Beatrice who leads him through the spheres of Heaven. Throughout Dante's pilgrimage, music abounds – most particularly in *Purgatorio*, where hymns and psalms appear as a structure for the soul's ascent of Mount Purgatory. Only in Hell is there no music, but only cacophonous sound, reflecting the disorder of the souls found imprisoned there.

Inferno starts on Maundy Thursday, when Dante finds himself lost in an obscure wood representing sin, and so begins his great journey. His immortal opening line, 'Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita', references the Christian text *Media vita in morte sumus* ('In the midst of life, we are in death'), particularly apt during Lent and Holy Week. We sing these words in an appropriately gloomy setting by the early 16th-century Franco-Flemish composer **Gombert**, employed as a singer at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Then we descend with Dante and Virgil into the hopelessness of Hell to the strains of **Palestrina's** penitential motet *Peccantem me quotidie*, written in the Phrygian mode, often associated with intensity and darkness.

Luzzaschi's breathtaking madrigal *Quivi sospiri pianti ed alti guai* sets text taken directly from the *Commedia*, describing the sighing and wailing of those that the poet encounters in Hell. Luzzaschi, employed by the d'Este family in Ferrara in the second half of the 16th Century, conjures a harmonic language every bit as tortured as the poor souls which Dante describes. At the climax of *Inferno*, Dante glimpses the icebound figure of Satan, the 'Emperor of Hell', who is introduced by Virgil with the

Latin words 'Vexilla regis prodeunt inferni'. This is a deliberate corruption of the famous Holy Week hymn *Vexilla regis*, which we sing in a setting by Francisco **Guerrero**, alternating robust plainchant with expansive polyphony built over a cantus firmus.

We now move into Purgatory, where the exhausted Dante, deprived of sleep for three nights, finally rests after hearing the Compline hymn *Te lucis ante terminum*, sung here in a gentle setting by **Victoria**. It is here too that the poet hears the Marian antiphon *Salve Regina*, which alludes aptly to 'mourning and weeping in this vale of tears'; Palestrina's fervent five-voiced setting is particularly fine. As Dante passes through the gates to begin his ascent of Mount Purgatory, the *Te Deum* is sung: we perform its final verses, *Salvum fac populum tuum*, rendered in grand style for 12 voices by **Merulo**, one of Monteverdi's predecessors at St Mark's Basilica in Venice.

Each of the terraces of Mount Purgatory corresponds to one of the seven deadly sins. Passing through the Terrace of the Wrathful, Dante hears the *Agnus Dei*. We choose here to pay homage to Beatrice, the object of Dante's courtly love, by singing a setting from **Morales's** *Missa 'Mille regretz'*, based on Josquin's celebrated lovesick chanson, 'a thousand regrets at leaving you'. When Dante hears the Beatitudes being sung – one for each of the seven terraces – we are surely intended to recall Beatrice's name; we perform these words in a setting by **Lassus**, *Beati pauperes spiritu*. At the conclusion of *Purgatorio*, Dante is reunited with Beatrice. At her urging he bathes in the River Lethe, receiving final absolution for his sin to the accompaniment of the *Asperges me*, clothed here in sonorous five-part polyphony by Morales.

As we arrive at the gates of Heaven, we are greeted by the sounds of *Venite a laudare*, a 13th-century Florentine hymn to the Virgin which Dante himself could well have known. The music which Dante hears in Paradise is almost exclusively in praise of Mary. Merulo's madrigal *Vergine madre, figlia del tuo figlio* paraphrases the opening line of Dante's last canto – a prayer offered to the Virgin by Dante's final guide St Bernard of Clairvaux, as the poet encounters God in a mystical vision of circles of light. Mary is often called Queen of Heaven; we reflect this with a five-part setting of *Regina caeli* by **Vicente Lusitano**, the Portuguese musician now believed to have been Europe's first published Black composer. Here too Dante witnesses a reenactment of the Annunciation, and so it is fitting that we celebrate the end of his pilgrimage with a setting of Mary's response to the Angel Gabriel. Victoria's *Magnificat sexti toni* is an opulent, triple-choir setting of the canticle, concluding our own journey in a rich tapestry of choral colour.

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Nicolas Gombert (c.1495-1560)

Media vita (pub. 1539)
Liturgical text

In the midst of life

Media vita in morte sumus:	In the midst of life we are in death:
Quem quaerimus adiutorem, nisi te, Domine?	whom shall we seek as a help if not Thee, O Lord?
Qui pro peccatis nostris iuste irascaris.	Who for our sins rightly grows wrathful.
Sancte Deus, Sancte fortis,	Holy God, Holy Almighty One
Sancte et misericors Salvator noster,	and merciful saviour,
Amarae morti ne tradas nos.	do not hand us over to a bitter death.

HELL

Dante Alighieri (c.1265-1321)

Extract from *Inferno I* from *The Divine Comedy* (c.1308-1321)

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina

(c.1525-1594)

**Peccantem me
quotidie** (pub. 1572)
Liturgical text

I who sin every day

Peccantem me quotidie et non paenitentem, timor mortis conturbat me.	I who sin every day and am not penitent, the fear of death troubles me:
Quia in inferno nulla est redemptio. Miserere mei, Deus, et salva me.	for in hell there is no redemption. Have mercy upon me, O God, and save me.

Luzzasco Luzzaschi (1545-1607)

Quivi sospiri (pub. 1576)
Dante Alighieri

Their sighs

Quivi sospiri pianti et alti guai, Risonavan per l'aer senza stelle,	Their sighs, lamentations and loud wailings resounded through the starless air,
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Perche io al cominciar ne lagrimai, Diverse lingue horribili favelle, Parole di dolore accenti d'ira, Voci alte et fioche et suon di man con elle.	so that at first it made me weep; strange utterances, horrible pronouncements, words of pain, tones of anger, voices shrill and faint, and beating hands.
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Dante Alighieri

Extract from *Inferno XXXIV* from *The Divine Comedy* (c.1308-1321)

Francisco Guerrero (1528-1599)

Vexilla regis (pub. 1584)
Venantius Fortunatus

The banners of the King

Vexilla Regis prodeunt: Fulget Crucis mysterium Quo carne carnis conditor Suspensus est patibulo.	The banners of the King advance: the mystery of the Cross shines forth; He, the creator of all flesh, flesh himself, was hanged.
Quo vulneratus insuper Mucrone diro lanceae Ut nos lavaret crimine, Manavit unda sanguine.	He, whose side was wounded by the cruel point of the spear, that he might wash away our sins, gave forth water and blood.
Impleta sunt quae concinit David fideli carmine, Dicendo nationibus: Regnavit a ligno Deus.	That which the prophet- king of old hath in mysterious verse foretold, is now accomplished, whilst we see God ruling the nations from a Tree.

Arbor decora et fulgida, Ornata Regis purpura, Electa digno stipite Tam sancta membra tangere.	O lovely and refulgent Tree, adorned with purpled majesty; culled from a worthy stock, to bear those limbs which sanctified were.
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Song continues overleaf. Please turn the page as quietly as possible.

Beata cuius brachiis Saecli pependit pretium, Statera facta corporis, Praedamque tulit tartari.	The blessed tree, upon whose branches hung the ransom of the world, was made the balance for his body, and bore away the spoils of hell.
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O Crux, ave, spes unica, Hoc passionis tempore Auge piis iustitiam, Reisque dona veniam.	Hail, O Cross, our only hope; in this Passiontide increase justice to the pious, grant forgiveness to sinners.
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Te summa, Deus, Trinitas, Collaudet omnis spiritus: Quos per Crucis mysterium Salvas, rege per saecula. Amen.	God, most high Trinity, may every soul praise you: forever reign over those you save through the mystery of the Cross. Amen.
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PURGATORY

Dante Alighieri

Extract from *Purgatorio VIII* from *The Divine Comedy*

Tomás Luis de Victoria (1548-1611)

Te lucis ante terminum (pub. c.1670) <i>Liturgical text</i>	To thee before the close of day
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Te lucis ante terminum, Rerum Creator, poscimus, Ut solita clementia, Sis praesul et custodia.	To thee before the close of day, Creator of the world, we pray that, with thy wanted favour, thou wouldst be our guard and keeper now.
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Procul recedant somnia, Et noctium phantasmata: Hostemque nostrum comprime, Ne polluantur corpora.	From all ill dreams defend our sight, from fears and terrors of the night; withhold from us our ghostly foe, that spot of sin we may not know.
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Praesta, Pater piissime, Patrique compar unice, Cum Spiritu Paraclito, Regnans per omne saeculum. Amen.	O Father, that we ask be done, through Jesus Christ, thine only Son, who, with the Holy Ghost and thee, doth live and reign eternally. Amen.
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Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina

Salve regina a5 (pub. 1584) <i>Liturgical text</i>	Hail, Holy Queen
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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. Eia ergo, Advocata nostra, Illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte Et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui, Nobis, post hoc exilium, ostende, O clemens, O pia, O dulcis Virgo Maria.	Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of mercy, 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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Dante Alighieri

Extract from *Purgatorio IX* from *The Divine Comedy*

Claudio Merulo (1533-1604)

Salvum fac populum tuum (pub. 1594) <i>Liturgical text</i>	Save thy people
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Salvum fac populum tuum, Domine, et benedic hereditati tuae.	O Lord, save thy people, and bless thine heritage.
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Et rege eos, et extolle illos
usque in aeternum.
Per singulos dies
benedicimus te: et
laudamus nomen tuum in
saeculum, et in saeculum
saeculi.

Govern them, and lift
them up for ever.
Day by day we magnify
thee: and we worship
thy Name,
ever world without
end.

Interval

Cristóbal de Morales (c.1500-1553)

Missa 'Mille regretz' (c.1538)

Liturgical text

Agnus Dei (c.1538)

Lamb of God

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata
mundi, dona
nobis pacem.

Lamb of God, who takes
away the sins of the
world, grant us peace.

Dante Alighieri

Extract from Inferno II from *The Divine
Comedy*

Orlande de Lassus (c.1530-1594)

Beati pauperes spiritu

(pub. 1572)

Liturgical text

Blessed are the poor in spirit

Beati pauperes spiritu
quoniam ipsorum est
regnum caelorum

Blessed are the poor in
spirit: for theirs is the
kingdom of heaven.

Beati mites quoniam ipsi
possidebunt terram

Blessed are they that
mourn: for they shall be
comforted.

Beati qui lugent
quoniam ipsi consolabuntur

Blessed are the meek: for
they shall inherit the
earth.

Beati qui esuriunt et sitiunt
iustitiam quoniam ipsi
saturabuntur

Blessed are they which
do hunger and thirst
after righteousness: for
they shall be filled.

Beati misericordes quia ipsi
misericordiam
consequentur

Blessed are the merciful:
for they shall obtain
mercy.

Beati mundo corde quoniam
ipsi Deum videbunt

Blessed are the pure in
heart: for they shall see
God.

Cristóbal de Morales

Asperges me, Domine

(pub. 1545)

Liturgical text

Purge me, Lord

Asperges me Domine
yssopo et mundabor:
lavabis me et
super nivem
dealbabor.

Purge me, Lord, with
hyssop, and I shall be
clean: wash me, and I
shall be whiter than
snow.

Miserere mei Deus,
secundum magnam
misericordiam tuam.

Have mercy upon me, O
God, according to thy
loving kindness.

Gloria Patri, et Filio,
et Spiritui
Sancto.

Glory be to the Father,
and to the Son, and to
the Holy Ghost.

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.

Dante Alighieri

Extract from Purgatorio XXXI from *The
Divine Comedy*

HEAVEN

Anon

Venite a laudare (13th

Century)

Liturgical text

Come to praise

Venite a laudare per amore
cantare l'amorosa vergene
Maria.

Come to praise with love
and song the beloved
virgin Mary.

Maria gloriosa biata, sempre
si' molto laudata; preghiam
ke ne si'
avocata al tuo filioli,
virgo pia.

Mary, glorious, blessed,
always so greatly
praised; we pray you
may be our advocate to
your son, kindly Virgin.

Song continues overleaf. Please turn the page as quietly as possible.

Pietosa regina sovrana,
conforta la mente ch'è
vana; grande
medicina ke sana,
aiutane per tua cortisia.

Merciful sovereign queen,
comfort the mind
without purpose; great
medicine that heals, by
your mercy, help us.

Cortese ke fai grandi doni,
l'amor tuo mai non ci
abandoni: pregànte che tu
ne perdoni
tutta la nostra
villania.

Gracious one, giver of
great gifts, your love
shall never abandon us:
we pray that you will
forgive all our
wickedness.

Vigorosa potente biata, per
te e questa laude
cantata, tu se'la
nostra avvocata, la
piu fedel
ke mai
sia.

Full of life and strength,
blessed lady, for you
this song of praise is
sung; you are our
advocate, the most
faithful there could ever
be.

Claudio Merulo

**Vergine Madre figlia
del tuo figlio** (pub. 1604)
*Anonymous, after Dante
Alighieri*

**Virgin mother,
daughter of your
son**

Vergine madre, figlia del tuo
figlio,
Reparatrice de l'umana
gente,
Eletta ne l'eterno alto
consiglio
Fra quant'esser dovean
eternamente.
Tu sola hai posto fine al
lungo esiglio
Al qual già ne dannò 'l primo
parente.
Tu, se dir lice, Dea,
tu chiara
luce
Ne mostrasti la via ch'al ciel
conduce.

Virgin mother, daughter
of your son,
Reparatrix of the human
race,
chosen in the eternal high
council
among those eternally
destined.
You alone have put an
end to the long exile
given to the parent and
original.
You, if we may say it,
Goddess, you are the
clear light
that showed us the path
that leads to heaven.

Dante Alighieri (c.1265-1321)

**Extract from Paradiso XXIII from *The
Divine Comedy***

Vicente Lusitano (c.1520-1561)

Regina caeli (pub. 1551) **Queen of Heaven**
Liturgical text

Regina caeli laetare,
Alleluia.
Quia quem meruisti portare,
Alleluia.
Resurrexit sicut dixit,
Alleluia.
Ora pro nobis Deum.
Alleluia.

Queen of Heaven, rejoice,
alleluia.
For He whom you were
worthy to bear, alleluia.
He has risen, as He said,
alleluia.
Pray for us to God,
alleluia.

Tomás Luis de Victoria

Magnificat sexti toni a12 (pub. 1600)

Liturgical text

Magnificat anima mea
Dominum
Et exultavit spiritus meus in
Deo salutari
meo.
Quia respexit humilitatem
ancillae
suae:
Ecce enim ex hoc
beatam me
dicent omnes
generationes.
Quia fecit mihi magna qui
potens est, et sanctum
nomen eius.
Et misericordia eius
a progenie in
progenies timentibus
eum.
Fecit potentiam in brachio
suo, dispersit superbos
mente cordis sui.

My soul doth magnify the
Lord
and my spirit hath
rejoiced in God my
saviour.
For he hath regarded the
lowliness of his
handmaiden:
for behold, from
henceforth all
generations shall call
me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath
magnified me, and holy
is his Name.
And his mercy is on them
that fear him
throughout all
generations.
He hath showed strength
with his arm, he hath
scattered the proud in
the imagination of their
hearts.
He hath put down the
mighty from their seat
and hath exalted the
humble and meek.
He hath filled the hungry
with good things and
the rich he hath sent
empty away.
He remembering his
mercy hath holpen his
servant Israel
as he promised to our
forefathers, Abraham
and his seed, forever.
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.

Translation of 'Te lucis ante terminum' by John Mason Neale.