

WIGMORE HALL 125

Wednesday 22 October 2025
7.30pm

Palestrina: Teacher and Warrior at St James's, Spanish Place

The Sixteen

Harry Christophers conductor
Amy Carson soprano
Lucy Cronin soprano
Katy Hill soprano
Charlotte Mobbs soprano
Ruth Provost soprano
Emma Walshe soprano

Daniel Collins alto
Stephanie Franklin alto
Edward McMullan alto
Kim Porter alto
William Balkwill tenor
Oscar Golden-Lee tenor

Steven Harrold tenor
George Pooley tenor
Robert Davies bass
Eamonn Dougan bass
Tim Jones bass
Rob Macdonald bass

Anon

15th-century tune *L'homme armé*

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (c.1525-1594) From *Missa L'homme armé*
Gloria • Kyrie

Tribulationes civitatum audivimus

Surge, amica mea, speciosa mea
Dilectus meus mihi
Surgam et circuibo civitatem

Hic est beatissimus Evangelista

Parce mihi, Domine

Credo from *Missa Ut re mi fa sol la*

Pulchra es, amica mea
Quae est ista, quae progreditur
Descendi in hortum meum

Agnus Dei I from *Missa Ut re mi fa sol la*

The Sixteen respectfully requests that audience members reserve their applause until after each group of pieces, as indicated, rather than after each piece.



Help us raise £125,000
for 125 years of music

To find out more visit wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate



Join & Support
Donations

Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management. In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions. Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141. Wigmore Hall is equipped with a loop to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.



Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • wigmore-hall.org.uk • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG
Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan

The Sixteen's final concert of Palestrina, part of their celebration of the Italian Renaissance composer's 500th anniversary at St James's, Spanish Place, frames him as 'Warrior and Teacher'. Certainly, Palestrina was, and remains, one of music's master teachers. Like many of his contemporaries, Palestrina combined his role as a composer with that of music director, tutoring young singers in the art of choral music, whether in his hometown of Palestrina, or in Rome. But Palestrina has had an indelible influence on generations after him, including Wagner who praised his 'sublimity, richness and indescribable depth of expression', and Beethoven, who is said to have temporarily put aside work on the *Missa solemnis* to steep himself in Palestrina's art. Perhaps most surprisingly is Debussy's reaction to hearing Palestrina in the Paris church of St Gervais: 'Now, *that's* music!'. Today, Palestrina forms the basis of any serious music student's studies, and many have spent all-nighters trying, in vain, to imitate his style.

'Warrior', however, might seem an unusual soubriquet for a choral composer. But the purity and beauty of Palestrina's music were the principal weapons in his battle to prove that music could communicate liturgy clearly and effectively. It was, in effect, a bold response to the Protestant Reformation which aimed to bring the Word of God directly into the hands of worshippers and to sweep aside Catholic obfuscation and elitism. With his motets and masses, Palestrina fought hard to support the Counter-Reformation, assuage the Council of Trent and ultimately save Catholic church music. Warrior indeed. Whether *L'homme armé* ('The Armed Man') was intended to be symbolic of this struggle is anyone's guess, but the medieval plainchant's defiant text leaves little to the imagination: 'The armed man should be feared. Everywhere it has been proclaimed / That each man shall arm himself / With a coat of iron mail.' As you'll hear at the start of this concert, the chant itself is jaunty: rhythmically and melodically askew. And yet, perhaps more than any of the dozens of composers who set the melody, Palestrina works magic with it in his five-part mass (the *Agnus Dei* adds one more part), using fragments of the tune as springboards into pure flowing rivers of imitative counterpoint.

Tribulationes civitatum audivimus was published in Rome in 1584, two years after the *Missa L'homme armé*. Palestrina's second marriage to Virginia Dormoli in 1581 gave him financial security and enabled him to publish three volumes of motets in partnership with two highly-regarded Venetian printers. *Tribulationes civitatum* is a plea for mercy, describing a sense of fear and despair as a result of suffering and sin, and Palestrina's music is suitably expressive, with soaring top lines and one or two surprising harmonic jolts.

Palestrina's engagement with the *Song of Solomon* resulted in a unique set of motets, six of which feature in this programme. *Surge, amica mea, speciosa mea,*

Dilectus meus mihi and *Surgam et circuibo civitatem* follow *Tribulationes civitatum*, while *Pulchra es, amica mea, Quae est ista, quae progreditur* and *Descendi in hortum meum* feature towards the end of the concert, bookended by two movements from the *Missa Ut re mi fa sol la*.

Moving away from the typical gravity of his sacred works, Palestrina's *Songs* settings delve into the sensuous and symbolic world of the Old Testament's love poetry. Palestrina himself described the verses as representing 'the divine love of Christ and his spouse, the soul', a connection that allowed him to explore themes of longing and devotion through a human lens.

Intriguingly, the 1584 publication of the Fourth Book of Motets – their first appearance in print – avoids explicit reference to their racy themes. Written during the papacy of Gregory XIII, these motets showcase Palestrina's expressive range, employing, as he noted, 'a style of music a little more lively' than his usual sacred fare. There's a good deal of speculation surrounding their original function. Some suggest they may have graced more intimate settings within the Vatican, possibly even entertaining the Pope at private meals. Whatever their purpose, these works offer a fascinating glimpse into Palestrina's capacity to imbue deeply felt, human emotions into music ostensibly intended for spiritual contemplation, resulting in exquisitely crafted, secular-leaning sacred songs.

Although not wholly proven to be by Palestrina, *Hic est beatissimus Evangelista* ('Here is the most blessed Evangelist') is nevertheless a beautiful six-part motet. The Evangelist in question here is John, the author of the Gospel of St John, while the motet's words are taken from the sermons of the 4th- and 5th-century theologian St Augustine. In his five-part *Parce mihi, Domine* Palestrina sets verses from the *Book of Job*, and makes wide use of imitative writing, creating astonishing light and shade through momentary pauses in the bass.

The *Missa Ut re mi fa sol la*, from which we hear the *Credo* and *Agnus Dei I*, was published in 1570, a year before he returned to Rome's Cappella Giulia, or Julian Chapel. If ever there was a work that showed Palestrina as a teacher, it's this one. Otherwise known as the 'Hexachord Mass', the work is built around the hexachord, or the first six notes of a C major scale. The second sopranos are tasked with intoning the rising and falling scales which are ingeniously disguised within thick contrapuntal textures. Whereas in the *Credo* the hexachord is integrated rhythmically within the surrounding counterpoint, in the *Agnus Dei* it behaves much more as a *cantus firmus*, or plainchant melody. Palestrina brilliantly demonstrates that an idea that appears so mundane on paper, can be utterly radiant in practice. Listen, Palestrina appears to be saying, and learn.

© Oliver Condy 2025

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.

The Sixteen respectfully requests that audience members reserve their applause until after each group of pieces, as indicated by a solid line, rather than after each piece.

Anon

15th-century tune *L’homme armé*

L'homme armé doibt on doubter.	The armed man should be feared.
On a fait partout crier	Everywhere it has been proclaimed
Que chascun se viegne armer	That each man shall arm himself
D'un haubregon de fer.	With a coat of iron mail.
L'homme armé doibt on doubter.	The armed man should be feared.

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (c.1525-1594)

From *Missa L’homme armé*

Gloria

Gloria in excelsis Deo.	Glory be to God on high,
Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.	and on earth peace, good will towards men.
Laudamus te. Benedicimus te.	We praise thee, we bless thee,
Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.	we worship thee, we glorify thee,
Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam.	we give thanks to thee for thy great glory,
Domine Deus, Rex caelestis, Deus Pater omnipotens.	O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty.
Domine Fili unigenite, Iesu Christe.	O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ;
Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris.	O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.	that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.
Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram.	Thou that takest away the sins of the world, receive our prayer.
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere nobis.	Thou that sittest at the right hand of God the Father, have mercy upon us.
Quoniam tu solus Sanctus. Tu solus Dominus.	For thou only art holy; thou only art the Lord;
Tu solus Altissimus, Iesu Christe.	thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost,
Cum Sancto Spiritu, in gloria Dei Patris.	art most high in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.	Amen.

Kyrie

Kyrie eleison.	Lord, have mercy.
Christe eleison.	Christ, have mercy.
Kyrie eleison.	Lord, have mercy.

Tribulationes civitatum audivimus We have heard the tribulations

<i>Biblical text</i>	
Tribulationes civitatum audivimus quas passae sunt, et deficimus.	We have heard the tribulations which the cities have suffered, and we have wasted away.
Timor et hebetudo mentis cecidit super nos et super liberos nostros. Domine miserere.	Fear and dullness of mind have fallen upon us and our children. O Lord, have mercy.
Peccavimus cum patribus nostris, iniuste egimus, iniquitatem fecimus. Domine miserere.	We have sinned like our fathers, we have acted unfairly and done wrong. O Lord, have mercy.

Surge, amica mea, speciosa mea (pub. 1584) Arise, my love, my fair one

<i>Liturgical text</i>	
Surge, amica mea, speciosa mea, et veni.	Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.
Columba mea, in foraminibus petrae, in caverna maceriae, Ostende mihi faciem tuam, Sonet vox tua in auribus meis: Vox enim tua dulcis, et facies tua decora.	O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.

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

Dilectus meus mihi

Biblical text

Dilectus meus mihi, et ego illi,
Qui pascitur inter lilia
Donec adspiret dies et inclinentur umbrae.
Revertere, similis esto dilecte mi capreae,
Hinnuloque cervorum super montes Bether.
In lectulo meo per noctes quaesivi,
Quem diligit anima mea;
Quaesivi illum et non inveni.

My beloved to me

My beloved to me, and I to him
who feedeth among the lilies,
Till the day break, and the shadows retire.
Return: be like, my beloved, to a roe,
or to a young hart upon the mountains of Bether.
In my bed by night I sought him
whom my soul loveth:
I sought him, and found him not.

Surgam et circuibo civitatem

Biblical text

Surgam et circuibo civitatem
Per vicos et plateas,
Quaeram quem diligit anima mea,
Quaesivi illum et non inveni.

I will rise and go about the city

I will rise and go about the city,
in the streets and in the squares;
I will seek him whom my soul loves.
I sought him, but found him not.

Hic est beatissimus Evangelista

Liturgical text

Hic est beatissimus Evangelista et Apostolus Johannes,
Qui privilegio amoris praecipui caeteris altius a Domino meruit honorari.

This is the most blessed evangelist

This is the most blessed evangelist and apostle John,
who by the privilege of extraordinary love was worth to be love by the Lord higher than others.

Hic est discipulus ille, quem diligebat Jesus,
Qui supra pectus Domino in coena recubuit.
Beatus Apostolus, cui revelata sunt secreta coelestia.

This is the apostle that Jesus loved,
who at meal lay at the breast of the Lord.
Blessed apostle, whom the heavenly secrets were revealed to.

Parce mihi, Domine

Biblical text

Parce mihi, Domine, nihil enim sunt dies mei.
Quid est homo, quia magnificas eum? Aut quid apponis erga eum cor tuum?
Visitas eum diluculo et subito probas illum.
Usquequo non parcis mihi, nec dimittis me, ut glutiam salivam meam?
Peccavi, quid faciam tibi, o custos hominum? Quare posuisti me contrarium tibi, et factus sum mihimet ipsi gravis?
Cur non tolles peccatum meum, et quare non auferis iniquitatem meam? Ecce, nunc in pulvere dormiam, et si mane me quaesieris, non subsistam.

Let me alone

Let me alone; for my days are vanity.
What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?
And that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?
How long wilt thou not depart from me, nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle?
I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men? why hast thou set me as a mark against thee, so that I am a burden to myself?
And why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away my iniquity? for now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be.

Credo from Missa Ut re mi fa sol la (1563)

Liturgical text

Credo in unum Deum.
Patrem omnipotentem,
Factorem caeli et terrae,
Visibilium omnium et invisibilium.
Et in unum Dominum
Jesum Christum,
Filium Dei unigenitum,
Et ex Patre natum ante omnia saecula.
Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine,
Deum verum de Deo vero.
Genitum, non factum,
Consubstantialem Patri:
Per quem omnia facta sunt.
Qui propter nos homines
Et propter nostram salutem
Descendit de caelis.

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
and of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord,
Jesus Christ,
Only begotten Son of God,
Begotten of his Father before all worlds.
God of God, light of light,
Very God of very God.
Begotten, not made,
being of one substance with the Father:
by whom all things were made.
Who for us men
and for our salvation
came down from heaven.

Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto Ex Maria Virgine: Et homo factus est.	And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary: And was made man.
Crucifixus etiam pro nobis sub Pontio Pilato: Passus, et sepultus est.	And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate: suffered, and was buried.
Et resurrexit tertia die, Secundum scripturas. Et ascendit in caelum: Sedet ad dexteram Patris. Et iterum venturus est Cum gloria judicare vivos et mortuos: Cujus regni non erit finis.	And the third day He rose again according to the scriptures. And ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead: His kingdom shall have no end.
Et in Spiritum sanctum Dominum, Et vivificantem: Qui ex Patre, Filioque procedit. Qui cum Patre, et Filio simul adoratur, Et conglorificatur: Qui locutus est per Prophetas.	And in the Holy Ghost, Lord and giver of life: Who proceedeth from the Father and Son. Who with the Father and Son together is worshipped and glorified: Who spake by the Prophets.
Et unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam. Confiteor unum baptisma In remissionem peccatorum. Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum Et vitam venturi saeculi. Amen.	And in one holy catholic and apostolic church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. And I look for the resurrection of the dead And the life of the world to come. Amen.

Pulchra es, amica mea

Biblical text

Pulchra es, amica
mea,
Suavis et decora sicut
Jerusalem,
Terribilis ut castrorum acies
ordinata.
Averte oculos tuos a
me,
Quia ipsi me avolare
fecerunt.

Thou art beautiful, o my love

Thou art beautiful, o my
love,
sweet and comely as
Jerusalem,
terrible as an army set in
array.
Turn away thy eyes from
me,
for they have made me
flee away.

Quae est ista, quae progreditur

Biblical text

Quae est ista quae progreditur
Quasi aurora consurgens,
Pulchra ut luna, electa ut
sol,
Terribilis ut castrorum acies
ordinata?

Who is she that cometh

Who is she that cometh
like the dawn,
fair as the moon, bright as
the sun,
terrible as an army
prepared for battle?

Descendi in hortum meum

Biblical text

Descendi in hortum
nucum, ut viderem poma
convallium, et inspicerem
si flouisset vinea,
et germinassent mala
punica.

I went down into the nut garden

I went down into the nut
garden to see the fruits
of the valley, and to see
whether the vine
flourished and the
pomegranates budded.

Agnus Dei I from Missa Ut re mi fa sol la

Liturgical text

Agnus Dei, qui tollis
peccata mundi, miserere
nobis.

Lamb of God, who takes
away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis
peccata mundi, miserere
nobis.

Lamb of God, who takes
away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.

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

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