

A BANQUET OF VOICES

Music for multiple choirs

Tallis 40-part motet, Allegri Miserere

Bach Singet dem Herrn, Brahms Fest- und Gedenksprüche

and music by Guerrero, Philips, Caldara, Scheidt and Mendelssohn

The Cambridge Singers • John Rutter



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The Cambridge Singers

directed by John Rutter

with Helen Gough (*baroque cello*), William Hunt (*violone*)

and Wayne Marshall (*chamber organ*)

Total playing time: 72' 28"

Note: Words credits are given at the end of each text.

Earlier polychoral music

- 1 Duo Seraphim (3' 09") Francisco Guerrero (1528–99)
- 2 Miserere mei, Deus (14' 05") Gregorio Allegri (1582–1652)
Soloists: Caroline Ashton (soprano 1), Karen Kerslake (soprano 2),
Patrick Craig (alto), Charles Pott (bass)
- 3 Crucifixus (4' 27") Antonio Caldara (c. 1670–1736)
- 4 Surrexit Pastor bonus (4' 12") Samuel Scheidt (1587–1654)
- 5 Spem in alium nunquam habui (The forty-part motet) (9' 45")
Thomas Tallis (c.1505–1585)
- 6 Ave Regina caelorum (3' 58") Peter Philips (1560/61–1628)

Later polychoral music

- 7–9 Fest- und Gedenksprüche (8' 48") Johannes Brahms (1833–97)
 - 7 1. Unsere Väter hofften auf dich (2' 11")
 - 8 2. Wie ein starker Gewappneter (2' 42")
 - 9 3. Wo ist ein so herrlich Volk (3' 50")
- 10 Mitten wir im Leben sind (8' 46") Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47)
- 11 Heilig (1' 31") Felix Mendelssohn
- 12–14 Motet No. 1: Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied, BWV 225 (13' 05")
J.S. Bach (1685–1750)
 - 12 1. Singet dem Herrn (4' 45")
 - 13 2. Wie sich ein Vater erbarmet (4' 37")
 - 14 3. Lobet den Herrn in seinen Taten – Alles was Odem hat (3' 41")

The Cambridge Singers

Sopranos: Caroline Ashton, Fiona Clarke, Ruth Gomme, Karen Kerslake, Simone Mace, Jocelyn Miles, Mary Mure, Olive Simpson, Penelope Stow, Clare Wallace, Julia Wilson-James, Lucy Winkett

Altos: Nicola Barber, Patrick Craig, Natanya Hadda, Phyllida Hancock, Mary Hitch, Frances Jellard, Melanie Marshall, Susanna Spicer, Penny Vickers

Tenors: Harvey Brough, Andrew Carwood, Simon Davies, Paul Gordon, Robert Graham-Campbell, Mark LeBrocq, Tom Phillips, Angus Smith, Paul Sutton, Jeremy Taylor

Basses: Edward Caswell, Michael Chambers, Charles Gibbs, Donald Greig, Bruce Hamilton, Patrick Lee-Browne, James Mure, Charles Pott, Benjamin Thompson, Julian Walker

A BANQUET of VOICES

Music for multiple choirs

This recording is a celebration, and an exploration, of some of the great wealth of choral music written for multiple choirs. For centuries composers have loved to make use of the spatial effects obtainable from placing two or more choirs antiphonally, and some of the most sumptuous and thrilling sounds in choral literature have resulted. One of the first documented occasions on which multiple choirs were used was the wedding of Constanzo Sforza and Camilla of Aragon at Pesaro in 1475, and ever since then polychoral writing has been associated with special occasions, often the great ceremonies of church or state. Northern Italy, and notably the Basilica of San Marco in Venice, was the main home of polychoral music in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; but—the theme of this album—composers elsewhere were greatly influenced by the possibilities of spaced choirs revealed in the Venetian motets of Wert and the Gabriellis, and were quick to import the idea into their own work. Sometimes the stimulus was an occasion, actual or imagined (as with the Brahms *Fest- und Gedenksprüche*), sometimes it was a text, such as *Duo Seraphim* with its visions of stereophonic angels; sometimes it may have been the technical challenge of writing for a large number of voices, Tallis's *Spem in alium* for forty voices being a possible example.

Polychoral music takes many forms. Common to most of them is the idea of sounds coming from different points in space, but this does not necessarily mean a simple traffic-light alternation of left-right-together, though a piece such as Scheidt's *Surrexit Pastor bonus* can certainly use this formula to excellent effect. The Allegri *Miserere* uses its nine voices (five choral parts, four soloists) sparingly: all nine sing together only in the final verse. Caldara's *Crucifixus* uses sixteen voices more for the richness of texture they afford than for antiphonal effect, and Mendelssohn's *Mitten wir im Leben sind* does not divide its eight voices spatially at all, but instead exploits an antiphonal relationship between high voices and low.

There is no theoretical limit to the number of independent voice-parts that a composer can write for, though beyond a certain number the practical problems of co-ordination in performance and maintaining clarity of sound become unmanageable. The 53-voice Mass formerly ascribed to Benevoli, performed in Salzburg Cathedral in the seventeenth century, is believed to be the record-holder. More voices do not, of course, necessarily make for better music, yet in the hands of a master such as Thomas Tallis, forty voices are not an extravagance: he uses them to make extraordinary, wonderful, and at times almost overwhelming sounds that could not have been created in any other way.

JOHN RUTTER

Earlier polychoral music

1. Duo Seraphim (Francisco Guerrero, 1528–99)

(Triple choir SSAT: SATB: SATB)

During his lifetime and for at least 200 years after his death, Francisco Guerrero was one of the most widely published and performed vocal composers of the Spanish Renaissance, second only to Victoria in reputation. From 1551 until his death he worked at Seville Cathedral, first as assistant director of music, then from 1574 as director. He travelled widely, and had his music published in several countries; it was much performed in the Spanish-American colonies. He wrote mainly vocal music, sacred and secular. Among his 150 or so published motets, *Duo Seraphim* is one of the most resplendent, imaginatively exploiting the spatial and illustrative possibilities suggested by the text, with duets, a trio and the full choirs used at the appropriate points.

Duo Seraphim clamabant alter ad alterum:
Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus Dominus Deus
Sabaoth:

Plena est omnis terra gloria eius.
Tres sunt qui testimonium dant in caelo:

Pater, Verbum, et Spiritus Sanctus et hi
tres unum sunt.
Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus Dominus Deus
Sabaoth:

Plena est omnis terra gloria eius.
Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto:

Plena est omnis terra gloria eius. Amen.

*Two seraphim cried one to the other:
Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth:*

*The whole earth is filled with his glory.
There are three who give this testimony in
heaven:*

*The Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit,
and these three are one.
Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth:*

*The whole earth is filled with his glory.
Glory be to the Father, the Son, and the
Holy Spirit:*

The whole earth is filled with his glory. Amen.

*(Respond, 3rd Nocturn at Matins on Trinity Sunday;
from Isaiah 6, v.3)*

2. Miserere mei, Deus (Gregorio Allegri, 1582–1652)

(Choir SSATB: Soloists SSAB)

Like Albinoni, it is Allegri's fate to be chiefly remembered for a single, overwhelmingly popular composition that is not entirely his own. He was a composer and singer who lived in Rome, studying under Palestrina's successor Nanino and becoming a member of the papal choir in 1629. He wrote his *Miserere* for performance in the Pontifical chapel during Holy Week, where it continued to be exclusively performed every year until 1870. The score, it is said, was guarded jealously, though the historian Burney obtained a copy and published it in 1771 along with other music used in the Vatican Holy Week ceremonies. Mozart reputedly wrote out the entire piece from memory after hearing it; and Mendelssohn, in Rome in 1831, wrote out some of the soloists' passage including the high C in a letter describing the ceremonies. Mendelssohn correctly surmised that this repeated passage does not form part of Allegri's composition but was added later, 'the work of some clever maestro who had a few fine voices at his disposal, and in particular a very high soprano'. The soloists' passage, as notated by him, was later grafted on to various reconstructions of the *Miserere*, which did not take its present form until 1951 when Sir Ivor Atkins published a patchwork edition that has become the basis of all later ones. Laying aside questions of authenticity, many will agree with Mendelssohn that Allegri's much-altered composition with its high C 'makes so deep an impression that when it begins, visible excitement pervades all present . . . whenever people say that the voices do not sound like the voices of men, but of angels from on high, and that these sounds can never be heard elsewhere, it is this particular *embellimento* to which they invariably allude'.

Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam.

Et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum: dele iniquitatem meam.

Amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea, et a peccato meo munda me.

Quoniam iniquitatem meam ego cognosco: et peccatum meum contra me est semper.

Tibi soli peccavi, et malum coram te feci: ut justificeris in sermonibus tuis, et vincas cum iudicaris.

Ecce enim in iniquitatibus conceptus sum: et in peccatis concepit me mater mea.

Ecce enim veritatem dilexisti: incerta et occulta sapientiae tuae manifestasti mihi.

Asperges me hyssopo et mundabor: lavabis me et super nivem dealbabor.

Auditui meo dabis gaudium et laetitiam: et exultabunt ossa humiliata.

Averte faciem tuam a peccatis meis: et omnes iniquitates meas dele.

Cor mundum crea in me, Deus: et spiritum rectum innova in visceribus meis.

Ne projicias me a facie tua: et spiritum sanctum tuum ne auferas a me.

Redde mihi laetitiam salutaris tui: et spiritu principali confirma me.

Docebo iniquos vias tuas: et impii ad te convertentur.

Libera me de sanguinibus, Deus, Deus salutis meae: et exsultabit lingua mea justitiam tuam.

Domine labia mea aperies: et os meum annuntiabit laudem tuam.

Quoniam si voluisses sacrificium, dedissem utique: holocaustis non delectaberis.

Sacrificium Deo spiritus contribulatus: cor contritum et humiliatum Deus non despicies.

Benigne fac Domine in bona voluntate tua Sion: ut aedificentur muri Jerusalem.

Tunc acceptabis sacrificium justitiae, oblationes et holocaustas tunc imponent super altare tuum vitulos.

(Psalm 51)

Have mercy upon me, O God, after thy great goodness: according to the multitude of thy mercies do away mine offences.

Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness: and cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my faults: and my sin is ever before me.

Against thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified in thy saying, and clear when thou art judged.

Behold, I was shapen in wickedness; and in sin hath my mother conceived me.

But lo, thou requirest truth in the inward parts: and shalt make me to understand wisdom secretly.

Thou shalt purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Thou shalt make me hear of joy and gladness: that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.

Turn thy face from my sins: and put out all my misdeeds.

Make me a clean heart, O God: and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from thy presence: and take not thy holy Spirit from me. O give me the comfort of thy help again: and stablish me with thy free Spirit.

Then shall I teach thy ways unto the wicked: and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou that art the God of my health: and my tongue shall sing of thy righteousness.

Thou shalt open my lips, O Lord: and my mouth shall shew thy praise.

For thou desirest no sacrifice, else would I give it thee: but thou delightest not in burnt-offerings.

The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt thou not despise.

O be favourable and gracious unto Sion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem.

Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifice of righteousness, with the burnt-offerings and oblations: then shall they offer young bullocks upon thine altar.

3. Crucifixus (Antonio Caldara, c.1670–1738)

(SSSSAAAATTTTBBBB, continuo)

Born in Venice, Caldara held court musical appointments in Mantua, Rome, and from 1716, Vienna, where he served the Emperor Charles VI. Among his other duties he was required to write music for the court's Lenten observances, and this exceptional *Crucifixus* could have been written for one of these. Caldara handles the sixteen voices with great skill and expressiveness; his superior at the Vienna court was the legendary contrapuntist Fux, and it is tempting to wonder whether Caldara wanted to display his own contrapuntal mastery for the approval of the older maestro. After Caldara's death, the piece was evidently remembered and admired: it was published and performed in Berlin in the 1830s, when the revival of old music was just beginning, and in 1906 it was included in a volume of Caldara's music from the Viennese court.

Crucifixus etiam pro nobis, sub Pontio Pilato; *(He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered, and was buried.)*

(from the Ordinary of the Mass)

4. Surrexit Pastor bonus (Samuel Scheidt, 1587–1654)

(double choir SSAT: ATBB, continuo)

Samuel Scheidt was one of the leading composers of the early German Baroque period, noted equally for his vocal and for his keyboard music. He was born in Halle (birthplace of Handel almost exactly a century later) and became a church organist there while still in his teens. He studied in Amsterdam with Sweelinck, but then returned to Halle, where he remained until his death, working as a court and church musician. *Surrexit Pastor bonus* comes from Scheidt's first published collection of work, the *Cantiones Sacrae Octo Vocum* of 1620. This impressive volume consists of double-choir motets, some in Latin, others in German, for different occasions in the church calendar. Musically, the influence of Gabrieli's Venetian style is apparent; in *Surrexit Pastor bonus*, two antiphonal choirs, one of high voices, one of low, exchange successive phrases of the text, with joyous Easter alleluias building to a powerful climax at the end.

Surrexit pastor bonus: alleluia.

The good Shepherd is risen: alleluia.

Qui animam suam posuit pro ovibus suis:
alleluia.

Who laid down his life for his sheep: alleluia.

Et pro grege suo mori dignatus est: alleluia.

And was worthy to die for his flock: alleluia.

(Antiphon for the second Sunday after Easter)

5. Spem in alium nunquam habui (Thomas Tallis, c.1505–1585)

(eight choirs of SATBB)

In 1567 the Italian composer and nobleman Alessandro Striggio visited the English court, where he was hospitably received by Queen Elizabeth. He brought with him a copy of his recently-written 40-voice motet *Ecce beatam lucem*, which he had shown around other European courts that year. No one knows whether Striggio met Tallis on this visit, but it would not have been unnatural if the Queen had arranged for her musical guest to meet the most senior and revered of the English court composers, the man best able to appreciate Striggio's extraordinary composition. Again, no one knows for certain whether Tallis's *Spem in alium* was written in response to *Ecce beatam lucem*, but if it was not, there

must have been some other exceptional reason for Tallis to write the work that was unlike anything else he had ever written before, both in scale, resources, and sheer sound, the work that stands as his greatest masterpiece. A possible occasion suggested for the first performance was Queen Elizabeth's fortieth birthday in 1573. This allows for a politically apposite allegorical interpretation of the rarely-set Latin text, which occurs in the Sarum rite as a respond to readings from the Book of Judith: Judith, the brave Israelite woman (= Queen Elizabeth) beguiles the commander of Nebuchadnezzar's armies, Holofernes (= Philip of Spain) and cuts off his head. This interpretation, put forward by the scholar Paul Doe, is not far-fetched: Renaissance artists were only too capable of flattering their patrons in this way. Another theory connects Tallis's motet with Thomas Howard; the Catholic nobleman executed for treason in 1572: an anecdote recorded some years later tells of a performance of *Spem in alium* in Arundel House, London home of his father-in-law, the Earl of Arundel. According to this account, Howard commissioned Tallis to write the motet to see whether an English composer could match Striggio's achievement; Tallis was judged to have so far surpassed the Italian that Howard took off the gold chain from around his neck and immediately put it round Tallis's neck as a gift. He was right: Striggio's motet is, frankly, a little pedestrian and monotonously chordal, as if the composer's imagination was constrained by the very size of his forces. Tallis's imagination in *Spem in alium* takes wing, transporting the listener into a sound-world as fantastical and undreamt-of now (even with our galaxy of electronic resources) as it was then. His technique combines three kinds of choral writing: the freely-interweaving counterpoint that was his normal means of expression; antiphonal exchanges in block harmony (as when the phrase 'Domine Deus' is bounced around from choir to choir); and carefully-judged moments of thrilling choral climax when all forty voices are heard together. As with all true polyphonic writing, each of the forty voices has its own distinct role, none subordinate to the others; and it should be noted that there are moments of expressive individuality and even intimacy in the writing. Listen especially to the mystically lovely polyphonic flowerings that follow immediately after the motet's several great massed outbursts of sound.

Spem in alium nunquam habui praeter in te, Deus Israel,
qui irasceris, et propitius eris, et omnia peccata hominum in tribulatione dimittis.
Domine Deus, Creator caeli et terrae, respice humilitatem nostrum.

(*Matin responsory, Sarum rite*)

(*My hope has never been in any other than thee, O God of Israel,
thou who will be angry, and then show mercy, forgiving all the sins of troubled man.
Lord God, Creator of heaven and earth, look down in mercy upon our lowliness.*)

6. Ave Regina caelorum (Peter Philips, 1560/1–1628)

(double choir SATB: SATB)

Peter Philips stands apart from the illustrious group of English composers active at the end of the sixteenth and start of the seventeenth centuries, by reason of exile. After childhood and youth in London as a choirboy at St Paul's Cathedral, he fled to the continent to escape persecution as a Catholic, settling first in Antwerp and later in Brussels where he was chapel organist to the Archduke Albert. *Ave Regina caelorum* comes from his *Cantiones Sacrae octonis vocis*, published in Antwerp in 1613. Liturgically it is proper to the end of the evening service of Compline, its serene radiance bringing the cycle of daily worship to an appropriate and restful close.

Ave Regina caelorum,
Ave Domina angelorum:
Salve Radix, salve porta,
Ex qua mundo lux est orta:
Gaude Virgo gloriosa,
Super omnes speciosa:
Vale, o valde decora,
Et pro nobis Christum exora.

(*Hail, Queen of heaven,
Hail, Empress of the angels:
Hail, root and gateway
From which the light of the world came forth:
Rejoice, glorious Virgin,
Fair above all other:
Farewell, O most lovely one,
And pray for us to Christ.*)

(*Antiphon of the BVM*)

Later polychoral music

7–9. Fest- und Gedenksprüche, Op. 109 (Johannes Brahms, 1833–97)

(double choir SATB: SATB)

In the summer of 1889, Brahms was made a freeman of his native city of Hamburg, an honour that must have partially made up for the disappointment he had always felt at being more than once passed over for any official appointment there many years earlier. It is likely that the *Fest- und Gedenksprüche* (roughly translatable as ‘Festival and Commemoration Sayings’) were almost complete at the time the news reached him (he had been working on them and the Op. 110 motets with no specific performance in mind), but he opportunely decided to dedicate the three Op. 109 pieces to Carl Petersen, the mayor of Hamburg and an old friend. On 14th September, Brahms conducted their first performance on the occasion of the conferment of his honour in Hamburg. He described the pieces thus in a letter to von Bülow: ‘They are three short hymn-like pieces for unaccompanied eight-part choir, expressly intended for national festival and commemoration days, such as the Leipzig and Sedan victory days and Emperor’s coronations (hopefully not the latter!) . . . The pieces are not very difficult, but I don’t mind if the voice parts are doubled by wind instruments.’ Notwithstanding the relative brevity of the pieces, they are filled with masterful and characteristically Brahmsian touches, none the less for being steeped in the tradition of earlier polychoral writing, especially that of Bach and his German predecessors. In performance the effect of the single word ‘aber’ [but] in No. 2 is unforgettable, and the sleight-of-hand by which Brahms gets back from 4/4 to 3/4 time after the stormy ensuing fugal section is dazzling. No. 3, mellow and sunny, deliberately recalls the world of Brahms’s Requiem, with a direct quotation from its first movement at the words ‘dass du nicht vergessest’ [so that thou shalt not forget]. The elderly composer reminisces, as it were, about his past, and then bids farewell with a lovely autumnal ‘amen’.

1. Unsere Vater hofften auf dich; und da sie hofften, halfst du ihnen aus.
Zu dir schrien sie und wurden errettet; Sie hofften auf dich und wurden nicht zu Schanden.
(*Psalm 22, vv.4, 5*)

Der Herr wird seinem Volk Kraft geben, der Herr wird sein Volk segnen mit Frieden.

(*Psalm 29, v.11*)

2. Wenn ein starker Gewappneter seinen Palast bewahret, so bleibet das Seine mit Frieden.

(*Luke 11, v.21*)

Aber, ein jeglich Reich, so es mit ihm selbst uneins wird, das wird wüste, und ein Haus fället über das andere.

(*Luke 11, v.17*)

3. Wo ist ein so herrlich Volk, zu dem Götter also nahe sich tun als der Herr, unser Gott, so oft wir ihn anrufen? Hüte dich nur und bewahre deine Seele wohl, daß du nicht vergessest der Geschichte die deine Augen gesehen haben, und daß sie nicht aus deinem Herzen komme alle dein Lebelang. Und sollt deinen Kindern und Kindeskindern kund tun. Amen.

(*Deuteronomy 4, vv.7, 9*)

1. *Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered; they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace.*

2. *When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace. But every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth.*

3. *For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: But teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons. Amen.*

10. Mitten wir im Leben sind (Felix Mendelssohn, 1809–47)

(SSAATTBB)

In 1830 Mendelssohn began an extended visit to Rome, part of the same grand tour that took him, famously, to the Hebrides. On 23rd November he wrote in a letter to his sisters: ‘The chorale *Mitten wir im Leben sind* is completed, and is probably one of the best pieces

of church music I have written': His youthful pride in the composition was justifiable: it is a worthy homage to the spirit of his revered Bach (whose *St Matthew Passion* he had revived in Leipzig the year before). Tenors and basses intone two verses of Luther's sombre chorale, punctuated by impassioned outcries from the full choir, first in block chords then in more contrapuntal style; the third verse is sung by the full choir, eventually subsiding into a hushed 'Kyrie eleison'.

Mitten wir im Leben sind
mit dem Tod umfängen,
Wen seh'n wir, der Hülfe thu',
dess' wir Gnad' erlangen?
Das bist du, Herr, alleine!
Uns reuet unser Missethat,
die dich, Herr, erzürnet hat.
Heiliger Herre Gott!
Heiliger, starker Gott!
Heiliger, barmherziger Heiland!
Du ewiger Gott,
lass uns nicht versinken
in des bittem Todes Noth!
Kyrie eleison!

Mitten in dem Tod anficht
uns der Höllen Rachen.
Wer will uns aus solcher Noth
frei und ledig machen?
Das thust du, Herr, alleine!
Es jammert dein' Barmherzigkeit
unser Sünd' und grosses Leid.
Heiliger Herre Gott!

*Though in midst of life we be,
Snares of death surround us;
Where shall we for succour flee,
Lest our foes confound us?
To thee alone, our Saviour.
We mourn our grievous sin which hath
Stirr'd the fire of thy fierce wrath.
Holy and gracious God!
Holy and mighty God!
Holy and all-merciful Saviour!
Thou eternal God!
Save us, Lord, from sinking
In the deep and bitter flood.
Kyrie eleison.*

*Whilst in midst of death we be,
Hell's grim jaws o'ertake us;
Who from such distress will free,
Who secure will make us?
Thou only, Lord, canst do it!
It moves thy tender heart to see
Our great sin and misery.
Holy and gracious God!*

Heiliger, starker Gott!
Heiliger, barmherziger Heiland!
Du ewiger Gott,
lass uns nicht verzagen
vor der tiefen Höllen Glut!
Kyrie eleison!

Mitten in der Höllen Angst
unser Sünd' uns treiben.
Wo soll'n wir denn fliehen hin,
da wir mögen bleiben?
Zu dir, Herr Christ, alleine!
Vergossen ist dein theures Blut,
das g'nug für die Sünde thut.
Heiliger Herre Gott,
heiliger, starker Gott,
heiliger, barmherziger Heiland,
du ewiger Gott,
lass uns nicht entfallen
von des rechten Glaubens Trost.
Kyrie eleison!

11. Heilig (Felix Mendelssohn) (double choir SATB: SATB)

This short but sonorous and effective piece was contributed by Mendelssohn to *Musica Sacra*, a publisher's collection of liturgical music; its date is unknown. The eight voice parts enable the composer to open the piece with a chain of voice entries descending by thirds through two octaves, probably the first piece of music to do this simple but remarkable thing.

*Holy and mighty God!
Holy and all-merciful Saviour!
Thou eternal God!
Let not hell dismay us
With its deep and burning flood.
Kyrie eleison.*

*Into hell's fierce agony
Sin doth headlong drive us:
Where shall we for succour flee,
Who, O, who will hide us?
Thou only, blessed Saviour.
Thy precious blood was shed to win
Peace and pardon for our sin.
Holy and gracious God!
Holy and mighty God!
Holy and all-merciful Saviour!
Let us not, we pray,
From the true faith's comfort
Fall in our last need away.
Kyrie eleison.*

(Martin Luther, 1524)

Heilig, heilig, heilig ist Gott der Herr Zebaoth!
Alle Lande sind seiner Ehre voll.
Hosianna in der Höh!
Gelobt sei der da kommt im Namen des
Herrn!
Hosianna in der Höh!

*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth:
Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.
Hosanna in the highest!
Blessed is he that cometh in the name of
the Lord:
Hosanna in the highest!
(from the Ordinary of the Mass)*

12–14. Motet No.1: Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied, BWV 225 (J. S. Bach, 1685–1750)
(double choir SATB: SATB)

Among the most treasured volumes in Bach's personal library was his Calov Bible—that is, a Bible with commentary by the Lutheran theologian J. A. Calov. Alongside Exodus 15, vv.20–21, where, after the Red Sea crossing, Miriam tells the women of Israel 'Sing ye to the Lord', Calov writes: 'But Miriam and the other women of Israel did not sing a new song but repeated like an echo what Moses and the Israelite men had sung first . . . and these two choruses must have produced a powerful song and a mighty sound and echo'. Bach added a marginal note: 'NB Erstes Vorspiel auf 2 Chören zur Ehre Gottes zu musizieren' [NB first introductory movement for 2 choirs to make music to the glory of God]. Here, seemingly, lay the seeds of his idea for *Singet dem Herrn* as a double-choir motet. The occasion and date of its composition are unknown; guesses have ranged from the birthday of August I of Saxony in 1727 to the signing of the Dresden peace treaty in 1745. It is indeed likely that it was written for some kind of special occasion; in Bach's churches motets had been superseded by cantatas as the principal music of the weekly worship service, and Bach wrote only six of them, as against 200 or so surviving cantatas. *Singet dem Herrn* is without doubt the grandest.

The motet, as it had evolved in seventeenth-century Germany, was a multi-sectional but continuous sacred choral composition (without any independent role for instruments) that sometimes made use of chorale melodies. Texts were usually biblical or drawn from Lutheran hymns. Essentially *Singet dem Herrn* is cast in this mould; it divides into four sections. The first section, lively and joyful, is structurally like one of Bach's preludes and

fugues: the prelude, with its sharp antiphonal exchanges, represents Calov's 'sound and echo'; the fugue, beginning at the half-way point to the words 'die Kinder Zion sei'n fröhlich', is heard first in Choir 1 but gradually takes over both choirs, to bring the section to an impressive close. The second section is of heart-easing serenity and beauty. Choir 2 sings the chorale *Nun lob mein Seel'* line by line, interspersed with a kind of devotional commentary from Choir 1 (Bach calls it 'aria') to an unidentified text that may be Bach's own; the two choirs never sing together. Section 3 brings a return to joyfulness and antiphonal exchanges, leading into the fourth and final section, where the two choirs join forces for a triumphant four-voiced fugue.

Such a toweringly magnificent composition as *Singet dem Herrn* hardly needs any endorsement from anyone else; yet it has never been forgotten that Mozart heard a performance in St Thomas's when he visited Leipzig in 1789. So impressed was he that he exclaimed 'Here at last is something we can learn from', and immediately asked to see a score. None was available, but he was given the eight separate voice parts which he spread out around him to study on the spot. Perhaps he, as one supreme professional, just wanted to admire the craftsmanship of another. But he must also have marvelled at the joy—intense, dancing joy—and calm faith radiated by the music of the irritable old church musician who knew that one day his earthly annoyances would be over and he would dance with the angels.

1. Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied;
Die Gemeinde der Heiligen sollen ihn loben.
Israel freue sich des, der ihn gemacht hat.
Die Kinder Zion sei'n fröhlich über ihrem
Könige.
Sie sollen loben seinen Namen im Reihem;
mit Pauken mid Harfen sollen sie ihm
spielen.

*Sing unto the Lord a new song;
The congregation of saints shall praise him.
Let Israel rejoice in him that made him.
Let the children of Zion be joyful in their
King.
Let them praise his name in the dance;
Let them sing praises unto him with the
timbrel and harp.*

(Psalm 149, vv.1–3)

2. Choir 1:
Gott, nimm dich ferner unser an,

*Choir 1:
Almighty God, preserve us still,*

denn ohne dich ist nichts getan
mit allen unsern Sachen.
Drum sei du unser Schirm und Licht
und trügt uns unsre Hoffnung nicht,
so wirst du's ferner machen.
Wohl dem, der sich nur steif und fest
auf dich und deine Huld verlässt.

Choir 2:

Wie sich ein Vater erbarmet,
über seine junge Kinderlein,
so tut der Herr uns allen,
so wir ihn kindlich fürchten rein.
Er kennt das arm Gemächte,
Gott weiss, wir sind nur Staub,
gleich wie das Gras vom Rechen,
ein Blum und fallend Laub.
Der Wind nur drüber wehet,
so ist es nicht mehr da.
Also der Mensch vergehet,
sein End, das ist ihm nah.

3. Lobet den Herrn in seinen Taten,
lobet ihn in seiner grossen Herrlichkeit.

4. Alles, was Odem hat, lobe den Herrn,
Halleluja!

*Teach us to heed thy sovereign will,
In all we do, direct us;
Be thou our shield by day and night,
Make hope our staff, and faith our light,
In all our ways protect us.
How blessed and secure is he,
Who placeth all his trust in thee.*

(Anon.)

Choir 2:

*Like as a father bendeth
in pity o'er his infant race;
So God the Lord befriendeth
The meek and lowly heirs of grace.
That we are frail he knoweth,
Like sheep we go astray:
Like grass the reaper moweth,
We fall and fade away!
Like wind that ever flieth,
We are but passing breath,
Thus man each moment dieth,
For life must yield to death.*

(Johann Gramann, 1530)

*Praise the Lord for his mighty acts,
Praise him according to his excellent
greatness.*

*Let everything that hath breath praise the
Lord.
Alleluial*

(Psalm 150, vv. 2, 6)

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