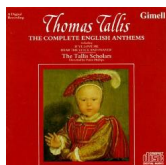


Thomas Tallis - The Complete English Anthems (1986/2001)

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Thomas Tallis - The Complete English Anthems (1986/2001)



1 *If Ye Love Me* 2:02 2 *Hear The Voice And Prayer* 3:02 3 *A New Commandment* 2:43
4 *O Lord, Give Thy Holy Spirit* 2:15 5 *Purge Me, O Lord* 1:42 6 *Verily, Verily I Say Unto You*
1:43 7 *Remember Not, O Lord God* 3:42 8 *Tunes For Archbishop Parker's Psalter* 7:52 9
Out From The Deep 1:48 10 *O Lord, In Thee Is All My Trust* 2:55 11 *Christ Rising Again*
4:35 12 *Blessed Are Those That Be Undeiled* 3:38 Choir – The Tallis Scholars: Soprano
Vocals – Alison Gough, Deborah Roberts (tracks: 12), Sally Dunkley, Tessa Bonner (tracks: 12)
Countertenor Vocals – Adrian Hill, Graeme Curry, Robert Harre-Jones, Timothy Wilson Tenor
Vocals – Nicolas Robertson, Rufus Müller Bass Vocals – Donald Greig, Francis Steele
Director – Peter Phillips

The Anglican Church, newly founded after the Reformation of the 1540s and '50s, was fortunate in having a composer of Tallis's calibre to serve it. He, more than any of his contemporaries, was able to grasp what the Protestant clergy wanted in their church music, and to give that formula life. Essentially, this was intelligibility and clarity in the word-setting, which involved singing in English and keeping the musical style simple. All the anthems recorded here have this simplicity yet, despite the dogmatic restrictions on their musical elaboration, they maintain a high artistic standard. The repertoire of Anglican music before Byrd would look a lot more bleak without them.

The underlying principle of the Protestant clergy was to make worship as comprehensible and as immediate for the congregation as possible. This involved every aspect of the liturgy (including moving the altar, called the 'table', from the east end to a central position – not at all dissimilar in spirit or effect to recent reforms of liturgical procedure). Music was considered as only a minor part of the whole, though only in Edward VI's reign (1547–1552) was it seriously affected. Some of these pieces by Tallis come from those years, the remainder come from the early years of Queen Elizabeth's reign, when it seemed as though she would take up afresh the austere style of the extreme Protestants. When Tallis discovered that she was not going to do this, he went back to setting Latin texts. One peculiarity of this English-texted repertoire is the

number of pieces in ABB form, that is to say with the last bars of a binary piece exactly repeated. This is the case with A new commandment, Hear the voice and prayer, If ye love me, O Lord, give thy holy spirit, Out from the deep and Purge me, O Lord. No one is sure why this came about. Peter le Huray (in *Music and the Reformation in England*, 1967, p.181) says that 'repetition forms were much used abroad, but this structure seems to have been one of the rarer ones'. A possible reason is that the composers instinctively wished to emphasize the words by repetition, catching up the second half of the verbal phrase as preachers sometimes do. This is quite often the spirit given in performance. It is, in fact, a satisfying musical structure, giving possibilities of varying the dynamic for the repeat, and there may be no more to its popularity than these practical reasons.

Of the four-part pieces, three are for men's voices only – scored for two countertenors, tenor and bass – and are the best known. If ye love me and Hear the voice and prayer are perfect examples of their kind, the second a little more protracted than the first, but both beautifully concise. A new commandment is less well known, perhaps because the bass part has had to be reconstructed, but it is just as fine and deserves as high a place in the repertoire as the other two have achieved.

The other four-part pieces are for the more usual choir of MATB. The simplest of them – O Lord, in thee is all my trust and Remember not, O Lord God – are little more than harmonizations of a melody. In the case of O Lord, in thee the characterful tune first appeared in Sternhold and Hopkins' Psalter of 1562 and is set in three verses. The music shows in the clearest way Tallis's capacity for uncomplicated tonal thought. Remember not was built on an earlier and simpler setting of the same text by Tallis, so that this version is probably early Elizabethan (c.1560). In this piece more than any other, the layout is an exercise in repetition of phrases. This can be very beautiful, especially in the repeat of the words 'for thy name's sake'.

Verily, verily I say unto you and the Psalm Tunes for Archbishop Parker's Psalter extend this idiom slightly, though there is still no real attempt at independent part-writing. Verily, verily is a powerful setting, with dramatic rests after the most important words. The eight Tunes and the 'Ordinal' were written to metrical versions of the Psalms by the first Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker. Amongst their number are two which have achieved a wider circulation than the others: the third contains the melody on which Vaughan Williams based his Fantasia on a theme by Thomas Tallis for string orchestra; and the eighth is Tallis's 'Canon', the canon itself worked between the soprano and tenor parts with the tenor leading.

The most elaborate four-part pieces are O Lord, give thy holy spirit, Out from the deep and Purge me, O Lord. Though none is exactly expansive, there is a certain amount of counterpoint

and imitation between the parts, especially in the repeated B section, which they all have. The first of these is an especially beautiful piece, calm, with all the words carrying their due weight.

There are, in addition, two much more substantial works – Christ rising again for five voices (MAATB) and Blessed are those that be undefiled. Christ rising was either the latest extant English anthem by Tallis or was actually written by William Byrd; there is a dual attribution in the sources. Stylistically the old method of repeating the phrases is retained, albeit on a more elaborate basis than in any of the four-part pieces. Uniquely in this repertoire, the music has two separated halves, each self-contained and each building to a resonant conclusion. Blessed are those is a freak, scored for the standard pre-Reformation choir of high treble, mean, countertenor, tenor and bass. It even adopts the pre-Reformation compositional format of duos and trios, at least to start with; after a while Tallis decided to make do with simple antiphony between the upper and lower voices. The Gloria contains some of his brightest writing, making as strong a contrast as possible with the contemplative style of the simpler anthems, and culminating in a splendid 'Amen'. ---Peter Phillips, hyperion-records.co.uk

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