



ORIANA CONSORT

Choral music from seven centuries

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Walter Chapin, Director

8pm Friday, Mar 2, 2018

Brighton Allston
Congregational Church
Brighton, MA

Madrigals and Motets

Wilbye, Byrd, Vautor
Palestrina, Morley, De Sermisy

5pm Sunday, Mar 4, 2018

St. John's Episcopal Church
Jamaica Plain, MA

Choral Music of the 21st Century

Wachner, Bray, Betinis
Gjeilo, Ešenvalds, Whitacre

THE ENDURING MUSE

The choral ideal, then and now

The Enduring Muse

Few sounds are as beautiful to the human ear as a *cappella* choral music, sung by unaccompanied voices, tuning only to each other. This was the choral sound sought by many composers of the Renaissance, and it remains the choral sound sought by many composers of the twenty-first century — two eras that are each distinguished by a flowering of new choral music.

In these concerts, Oriana brings you a *cappella* music from both eras, from twelve composers all of whom have contributed to these two flowerings that are four hundred years apart. They are international: three are from the USA, five are from England, and one each is from France, Italy, Norway, and Latvia.

You'll hear music by six composers of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries: William Byrd, Thomas Morley, Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, Claudin de Sermisy, Thomas Vautor, and John Wilbye. Each of these is paired with one of six related pieces written just recently — since our own twenty-first century began — by the six young composers Abbie Betinis, Charlotte Bray, Ēriks Ešenvālds, Ola Gjeilo, Julian Wachner, and Eric Whitacre.

If you find yourself responding to choral music from both of these eras, then the music from both must have something in common that motivates your response. But if these two eras are separated by four hundred years, whatever could it be that their music has in common? Perhaps the answer to that lies in a principle that was first discovered by the composers who began to write the first Italian madrigals, just before the beginning of the first of our two eras:

If sung words are going to mean something to the listener, then the music to which those words are set must be carefully crafted so as to convey and reinforce that meaning. That was what composers of the first Italian madrigals learned to do, during the second quarter of the sixteenth century, and in doing so they found their muse. This principle was so fundamental that it became the basis of all Western vocal music ever since. Embodied in the Italian madrigal as it was transplanted to England in the late sixteenth century, it was the catalyst for the explosive flowering of the English madrigal. Its influence made the Latin church motet an instrument for the expression of deepest religious feelings. Its later development under Claudio Monteverdi and others led not only to the beginnings of Italian opera (and thus to all opera) but also to the vocal and instrumental music of the Baroque era that would later culminate in the music of J. S. Bach.

And this principle has come to rest in the heart of all Western choral music ever since. It pervades all of the music that you are about to hear. Six of our twelve composers are no longer with us, while the other six are very much with us — but in all twelve, the muse endures.

—Walter Chapin

- I John Wilbye 1574-1638
Flora gave me fairest flowers
 madrigal for five voices
- Julian Wachner b. 1969
somewhere i have never travelled
 on a poem by e cummings
- II G. P. da Palestrina 1525-1594
Pulchra es, amica mea
You are beautiful, my friend: motet from the Song of Songs
- Ola Gjeilo b. 1978
Northern Lights
 words: *Pulchra es, amica mea*
- III Thomas Vautor c. 1572 – d. after 1619
Sweet Suffolk Owl
 madrigal for five voices
- Abbie Betinis b. 1980
 selections from *Songs of Smaller Creatures:*
The Bees' Song
 on a poem by Walter de La Mare
A noiseless patient spider
 on a poem by Walt Whitman

intermission

- IV William Byrd b. 1540 or 1543 – d. 1623
Agnus Dei
Lamb of God: from Mass for Five Voices, 1595
- Charlotte Bray b. 1982
Agnus Dei
 inspired by Byrd's *Agnus Dei*
- V Thomas Morley 1557-1602
O sleep, fond fancy
 madrigal (or canzonet) for three voices
- Ēriks Ešņvalds b. 1977
Only in Sleep
 on a poem by Sara Teasdale
- VI Claudin de Sermisy c. 1490-1562
Aspice, Domine
Look down, Lord: motet
- Eric Whitacre b. 1970
Sainte-Chapelle
 on a poem by Charles Anthony Silvestri

Flora gave me fairest flowers
 madrigal for five voices

Julian Wachner

b. 1969

somewhere i have never travelled
 on a poem by e cummings

Wilbye

The essence of the Renaissance madrigal — a musical genre that arose in Italy during the second quarter of the sixteenth century — is that its lyrics determine its music. Before the madrigal, polyphonic songs (i. e. songs for many voices singing simultaneously) were composed such that successive verses of lyrics were all set to the same or similar music, with a refrain between each verse, rather like folk songs that we hear today. The madrigal, quite differently, was composed according to an entirely different principle: its musical form and content were not fixed, but varied from moment to moment in such a way as to reflect the mood of the lyrics at every point. If the mood of the lyrics changed, then the music changed with it, always reflecting whatever lay behind the words at any given moment.

In 1588 the Italian madrigal abruptly entered English musical culture with the publication, in England, of a collection entitled *Musica Transalpina*, a compendium of Italian madrigals whose lyrics had been translated into English. English composers responded quickly and positively to the new musical genre that had come to them from across the Alps, and began to set English lyrics in madrigal style. The era of the English madrigal had begun.

One English composer who was much influenced by the Italian madrigal was the young John Wilbye, who in 1598, at age twenty-four — only ten years after *Musica Transalpina* — brought out his *First Set of English Madrigals*. *Flora gave me fairest flowers* is one of the twenty-six pieces in this collection.

The poetry of *Flora* is brief, simple, elegant, and a masterpiece of understatement; yet its underlying eroticism could not be more transparent: a first-person narrator bestows flowers upon a lady love, and a tryst in a meadow follows. Wilbye's publication does not acknowledge the poem's author, though that would likely have been Wilbye himself, for English madrigal composers tended to be their own poets.

The poetry is in the form of three couplets of two lines each. In the first line of the first couplet — which is only about receiving flowers — Wilbye gives all five voice parts simple melodies based on just five tones of the scale, and as they sound simultaneously, they form harmonies that are primarily just the two simple chords of the first and fifth degrees of the scale. In the second line the setting is more complicated: the voice parts sing rising lines that cover all seven tones of the scale, whose resulting harmonies now form additional chords. The couplet closes with a repeat of the second line's music.

The second couplet — which reveals the purpose of the flowers — brings

more new melodic lines, staggered entrances of the voice parts, and introduces the chord based on the fourth degree, which sounds prominent because it has been withheld until just now. Again, the music of the second line is repeated.

In the third couplet — the *tryst* — the entrances are staggered still more widely, to form a long cascade based on the entire descending scale. This passage cadences strikingly outside of the main key, perhaps to represent the “smiling meadows” that are calling to the couple. But in this couplet, instead of just repeating the music of the second line, Wilbye repeats the words *Come, ye wantons, here to play*, set to an entirely new musical motive, which takes the soprano voices to the top of their range. To close the piece, it is this new motive that gets repeated — one step of the scale lower, just for harmonic variety.

In this brief madrigal, a miniature as madrigals go, we can sense the mastery of its still-young composer, who combines the two musical dimensions of melody and harmony into a clever musical texture that reflects each nuance of the charming lyrics.

Wachner

Julian Wachner is no stranger to the Boston area, for he earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees at Boston University in the 1990s, and was choir director at BU’s Marsh Chapel even as he was pursuing his D.M.A. In 2001 he joined the faculty of McGill University; in 2008 he became director of the Washington Chorus in DC; and in 2011 he became choral director at Trinity Church Wall Street. His musical accomplishments are extensive: he is an organist, a conductor, a teacher, and a composer of both sacred and secular musical works, which range from choral miniatures to full-length operas.

Wachner composed *somewhere i have never travelled* in the summer of 1998, while he was directing the Young Artists Chorus of the Boston University Tanglewood Institute, as one of a cycle of three choral songs on poems of Cummings entitled *Sometimes I Feel Alive*. Through its poet, this piece has a second Boston-area connection, for Edward Estlin Cummings (1894-1962) was born into a noted Cambridge family and earned degrees from Harvard in 1915 and 1916. His predilection for lower-case orthography and his often-illogical-seeming sentence structure were features of his turn in the 1920s toward modernist poetry.

Although Wachner may not have called *somewhere i have never travelled* a madrigal, it follows madrigalian principles, for its music continually shifts so as to reflect the mood behind the poetry — thereby showing its connection with past centuries of choral song. The poetry of both Wilbye’s *Flora* and *somewhere* is erotic, though the latter poem, in communicating the narrator’s complex thoughts directly to the beloved, fairly radiates with eroticism.

The dreamlike atmosphere of the first two lines of the first verse is musically reflected in the opening mildly dissonant chords in the Lydian mode on F (the F major scale with its fourth degree raised from B flat to B natural — a perfect scale for communicating uncertainty). In the second half of this verse, as the thoughts behind the words begin to expand, the melodic line passes from

one voice part of the choir to another, and the scale bends from F Lydian to regular F major (as the B natural gives way to B flat).

In the poem as it is written, in the second verse the expression *Spring opens her first rose* is interrupted by the parenthesized words *touching skilfully, mysteriously*. This could sound confusing if it were sung as written. The composer avoids this by having the lower three voice parts sing the words *touching skilfully, mysteriously*, leaving the soprano part free to sing *Spring opens her first rose* without interruption.

The passing of melody from one voice part to another continues through the second and third verses, as the mode bends in the third verse toward F Mixolydian (the F major scale with its seventh degree lowered from E natural to E flat), and comes to a point of rest on the word *descending*.

This resting point sets the stage for the fourth verse, all of which is sung on a single mildly dissonant and unresolved chord in F major — reflecting the words of this verse, which seem suspended in space. The chord resolves only when the fifth and concluding verse begins, by returning to the F Lydian motive heard at the beginning. At *the voice of your eyes* the mode shifts to F major (the same shift as in the first verse), and this piece, reflecting confidence at last, ends decisively on a low-pitched satisfying F major chord.

With Julian Wachner, as with John Wilbye, we hear the music of a composer who is a master at communicating and reinforcing every nuance of a poem by carefully crafting the music to which it is sung.

II	G. P. da Palestrina	1525-1594
	<i>Pulchra es, amica mea</i>	
	<i>You are beautiful, my friend: motet from the Song of Songs</i>	
	Ola Gjeilo	b. 1978
	<i>Northern Lights</i>	
	words: <i>Pulchra es, amica mea</i>	

Palestrina

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (“Palestrina” is the name not of his family but of the town just east of Rome in which he was born, which was founded by Greeks in pre-Roman times and was originally called Prainestos) is best known for his sacred music, primarily his motets and masses. Although he did indeed write a large body of secular music (including over 100 madrigals), and although one might think that his *Pulchra es, amica mea* is secular music, it is actually one of the twenty-nine sacred motets in his fourth book of motets to five voices — *Motetorum quinque vocibus Liber Quartus* — which he published in 1584, when he was fifty-nine. The texts in this collection are all from that eyebrow-raising part of the Hebrew Bible known as the *Song of Songs*, or *Canticum Canticorum*, their Latin name in the *Liber Quartus*. The official position taken by the Church was that *Canticum Canticorum* was not actually about love between man and woman, but that it employed that theme allegorically to represent divine love between God and Israel. Perhaps we can be content to

leave this question to the theologians.

There are five phrases in the biblical passage that is the text of *Pulchra es amica mea*. Following his typical practice, Palestrina introduces the first phrase of this passage by having each of the five voice parts sing it in turn, allowing a few beats to intervene between successive entrances of the voice parts, so that each entrance can clearly be heard. (This process, known as imitation, is very audible; do listen for it!)

In introducing the remaining four phrases, the composer uses modified imitation: the phrase begins not with a single voice part, but simultaneously by two to four parts, which are followed by the other parts.

Sacred motets of the late sixteenth century had not escaped the powerful influence of the secular madrigal. In this late motet, the melody at each phrase reflects (though perhaps not as forcefully as it would in a madrigal) the sense of that phrase. Thus *pulchra* — *beautiful* sounds smooth and elegant; *suavis et decora* — *sweet and comely* sounds firm and persuasive; *terribilis* — *terrifying* rises to the top of the parts' voice ranges; *averte oculos tuos a me* — *avert your eyes from me* sounds almost angry; and *quia ipsi me avolare fecerunt* — *for they have made me flee away* is emphasized through repetition.

Gjeilo

Since the highly gifted young Norwegian-American composer Ola Gjeilo is still unknown to many in the USA, it may be well, by way of introduction, to present the pronunciation of his name: OH-lah YAY-loh.

Gjeilo earned his undergraduate degree at the Norges Musikkhøgskole in Oslo. He continued his studies at the Royal College of Music in London, and in 2006 earned a master's degree in composition from the Juilliard School of Music in New York City. Gjeilo's choral music attracted the attention of Charles Bruffy, director of the Phoenix Chorale in Arizona, who commissioned a number of works from him, many of which can be heard on the CD album called *Northern Lights*, recorded by the Phoenix Chorale in 2012.

The choral piece *Northern Lights* can perhaps be best described in the composer's own words: "*Northern Lights* is my most Norwegian production in years; it was composed in an attic outside of Oslo at Christmas time in 2007. It's one of the few works I have written in Norway since I moved to New York in 2001... Most of all, this piece and its text is about beauty. About a terrible, powerful beauty. Looking out from the attic window that Christmas in Oslo, over a wintry lake under the stars, I was thinking about how this 'terrible beauty' is so profoundly reflected in the northern lights, or *aurora borealis*... It is one of the most beautiful natural phenomena I've ever witnessed, and has such a powerful, electric quality that must have been both mesmerizing and terrifying to people in the past, when no one knew what it was and when much superstition was attached to these experiences."

Gjeilo's manner of presenting the *Pulchra es* text differs radically from Palestrina's. Yet, despite major compositional dissimilarities, there is a strong

similarity about the way both composers present the text, and this shows their common legacy from the madrigal: each composer fashions his music so that it *reflects the sense of the words being sung at every given moment* — although each does so in a different way.

Whereas Palestrina presents the initial phrase of the text in imitation, so that the listener hears many voice parts singing similar lines in a staggered fashion, Gjeilo presents the initial phrase in homophony, i. e. with all voices speaking as one, as they all present the same words in a single common rhythm.

Gjeilo quickly changes this, however, for the *pulchra es* and the *suavis et decora* lines are soon combined into a single phrase: one voice part, the alto, presents this combined phrase while other parts continue to repeat *pulchra es* in the background, as a sort of “backup choir.” (Palestrina, in contrast, presented each phrase of the text only once, without returning to it.) This “backup choir” device continues at *terribilis ut castrorum*, but with the soprano voice part now the presenter, while the other three parts are the “backup.” At *averte oculos tuos* the alto part returns as the presenter, while the other three parts, as “backup,” still faithfully chant *pulchra es* — as though to reflect an unceasing fascination with the natural beauty being witnessed, as Gjeilo personally felt. The music continues in this fashion until the final word *fecerunt*, at which point it reaches a *fortissimo* climax that is suddenly interrupted by dead silence, which is followed by a reprise of the piece’s homophonic opening.

The reprise continues for the line *suavis et decora sicut Jerusalem*, however, which the alto voices repeat a number of times, while the other three continue to chant *pulchra es* in “backup” style, until they eventually die away, leaving the altos alone to sound a persistent D natural — the single tone which, since the piece began, has served as its tonal “home base.”

III Thomas Vautor c. 1572 – d. after 1619
Sweet Suffolk Owl
madrigal for five voices

Abbie Betinis b. 1980

selections from *Songs of Smaller Creatures*:

The Bees' Song

on a poem by Walter de La Mare

incidental solo: **Adrienne Fuller**

A noiseless patient spider

on a poem by Walt Whitman

solo: **Ashley Mac**

Vautor

In houses of the English aristocracy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was not uncommon for a family to have a house musician in its employ — to play, to compose, to entertain, in service of the estate. Thomas Vautor was a house musician, as was John Wilbye. Very little seems to be known of the life of Vautor except for this handful of facts:

> In 1592 he began musical employment in the house of Sir George Villiers, a country gentleman of Leicestershire, a Member of Parliament (and, incidentally, an ancestor of three Prime Ministers — Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, and David Cameron).

> Vautor was offered this position after Sir George's second marriage to his half-cousin Anne Beaumont.

> Vautor had previously been a musician in the house of Anthony Beaumont, Anne's father. So, assuming that he was about twenty at the time he changed positions, that would put his birth year at about 1572.

> In 1616 Vautor was granted the degree of Bachelor of Music from Oxford. That would make him about forty-four at that time. A late Bachelor's degree is not unusual in our day, and may not have been unusual then.

> In 1619 he published, in London, a set of twenty-two madrigals under the lengthy and elegant title *The First Set; being Songs of diverse Ayres and Natures for Five and Sixe parts; Apt for Vyols and Voices*.

> *Sweet Suffolk Owl* was the twelfth item of that set.

> Nothing appears to be known of Vautor after 1619.

The charm of *Sweet Suffolk Owl* is that it not only is about an owl, but imitates the sound of an owl. Musical onomatopoeia like this was not new. Birdsong, battle cries, and hunts were depicted in the music of the French composer Clément Janequin, c. 1485-1558, and other examples can be found in choral music of the late sixteenth century.

In true madrigal fashion, it is the lyrics that generate the music of *Sweet Suffolk Owl*. After a homophonic introduction, the words *Thou sing'st alone...* are sung by a single voice part (alone — get it?). The full choir imitates the *Te whit, te whoo* sound of this idealized owl. *At for dying souls* the music seems to die away for a moment, before it resumes the *Te whit, te whoo* effects.

Betinis

Musical onomatopoeia continued from the seventeenth century through the twentieth, in both vocal and instrumental music. Handel imitated birds in *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale*; sounds of the countryside and a thunderstorm are heard in Beethoven's Symphony No. 6; sounds of nature abound in Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 3; a solo violin "sings" the title role in Ralph Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending*; and the sounds of forest animals abound in the opening of Part Two of Maurice Ravel's opera *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*. Even Abbie Betinis' highly inventive and original *The Bees' Song* has an apian instrumental precedent: the orchestral interlude from Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *Tsar Saltan*, which is popularly known as *The Flight of the Bumblebee*. But until Betinis' *The Bees' Song*, there may well have been no choral precedent for the musical representation of buzzing bees.

With her setting of *The Bees' Song*, on lyrics by the British poet Walter de La Mare (1873-1956), Betinis brings choral onomatopoeia into the twenty-first

century. The poem is from de La Mare's *Songs of Childhood*, a collection of poetry for children which was published in 1902 and established him as a major writer of children's literature. The poem's nonsense words contain no less than twenty-nine occurrences of the buzzing "Z" sound, which surely must have delighted the young listeners to whom it was read.

Through the use of dissonant chords of the seventh and ninth, and lots of half-steps (in the conventional Western harmonic system, the half-step is the smallest musical interval between two tones), Betinis has created a breakneck-tempo texture which, when sung to the poem's Z-saturated words, gives a most convincing impression of a swarm of bees. The poem's natural rhythms generate the groupings of the unceasing eighth-note pulse into highly irregular groups of twos and threes. After a brief incidental soprano solo in the singer's high range, the poem's repetition of the opening line *Thousandz of thornz there be* provides the opportunity for a reprise of the opening music, soon to be followed by the disappearance of the swarm into the distance.

In *A noiseless patient spider*, Betinis' setting of a poem by Walt Whitman (1819-1892), we take leave of musical onomatopoeia inspired by animate creatures (for the spider is noiseless, after all), and return to the more general theme of choral music that represents the moods, feelings, and unspoken messages behind the lyrics being sung.

This piece opens with soft chords in the key of A minor with added dissonant tones, suggesting what must be going through a spider's tiny mind as it begins the work of spinning a web. The vastness of space it must conquer (from its point of view) is suggested by an unexpected *pianissimo* A major chord with a poignant added dissonant tone, D sharp. In a *forte* outburst of broad harmonies, the spider launches its filaments into the vastness; the music gradually accelerates as the spider spins and spins until its work is finally done.

At this point a soloist reveals what Whitman is really saying: the spider is a metaphor for the poet's own soul, which he addresses as *you*, using the second person; and which is seeking to connect *the spheres of measureless oceans of space* by throwing a *gossamer thread* in the hope that it will *catch somewhere*. The music ends quietly, on what is at first only a gentle A major chord, until it is punctuated at the very end by the same D sharp dissonant tone that earlier suggested the vastness of space to the spider.

Abbie Betinis grew up in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, and graduated in 2001 from St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, with concentration in musical composition and linguistics. She earned a master's degree in composition from the University of Minnesota, and studied at the Conservatoire Américain in Fontainebleau, France, the school at which the distinguished musical pedagogue Nadia Boulanger had trained many an aspiring American composer. Her dozens and dozens of compositions include a number of works with Boston-area connections: *Expectans expectavi* was commissioned by Chorus Pro Musica, which premiered this work in 2011; *From Behind the Caravan* was performed by Cappella Clausura at a symposium for women's choruses at Harvard's Memorial Church; and the Oriana Consort did

the East Coast premiere of *The Waking*, Betinis' setting of a poem by the Midwestern poet Theodore Roethke.

The Bees' Song and *A noiseless patient spider* are two of the three pieces in a set called *Songs of Smaller Creatures*, which Abbie Betinis composed in 2005, and which in that year won the University of Minnesota Craig and Janet Swan Composer Prize.

Please enjoy a fifteen-minute intermission!

IV William Byrd

b. 1540 or 1543 - d. 1623

Agnus Dei

Lamb of God: from Mass for Five Voices, c. 1595

Charlotte Bray

b. 1982

Agnus Dei

inspired by Byrd's *Agnus Dei*

incidental solo: **Laura Amweg**

Byrd

William Byrd, a highly gifted composer and organist, was appointed master of choristers at Lincoln Cathedral in 1563, at about the age of twenty-two, where he wrote a large body of service music for the Anglican Church. In 1572, at about thirty-one, he was appointed a singer of the Chapel Royal, the body of clerics and musicians which since the eleventh century had provided divine services for the English monarchy (and still does). While at the Chapel, he and Thomas Tallis, perhaps the greatest English composer of the previous generation, were granted a patent by the Crown for the printing of music. Their joint publications under this patent included the *Cantiones Sacrae*, a large volume of motets dedicated to Queen Elizabeth.

During the 1570's, however, Byrd's personal religious convictions drew him away from the Anglican Church and toward Catholicism. This was perilous, for by the 1580's one who was even suspected of having Catholic sympathies was perceived as a threat in the eyes of the Crown, and was subject to arrest and the accusation of sedition. Fortunately, however, Byrd was in the Queen's favor, for she admired his music and pretended not to notice his Catholic leanings. Byrd quietly resisted the Crown's anti-Catholic stance during the 1580's and early 1590's by composing motets which drew their texts from scriptural passages about persecution.

In 1594, when Byrd was about fifty-three, he retired from the Chapel Royal and moved with his family to Standon Massey, a village in Essex northeast of London. There he lived near the manor house of Sir John Petre, another discreet

Catholic, who became his friend and patron. Petre held Mass services in his house for a group of fellow Catholics, where they could worship in their own way, safe from the prying eyes of the Crown's agents.

By the time of this move, Byrd had begun to compose a cycle of liturgical music for the entire Catholic church year. This included his three famous Mass settings: the *Mass for Three Voices*, *Mass for Four Voices*, and *Mass for Five Voices*, which he wrote for use in Mass services held in Petre's manor house. Although these works were published, scholars have only approximated the year of publication of the *Mass for Five Voices* as "about 1595," because its prints had no title pages. So that the composer and publisher could be made as untraceable as possible, their names and the publication dates were omitted from the prints. And that is the "back story" of the *Mass for Five Voices*, whose *Agnus Dei* we perform here.

Even such an austere work as this *Agnus Dei* owes its effectiveness to the madrigalian principles which in 1595 were sweeping the English world of secular music. Byrd had written a handful of madrigals along with his many sacred works, and he well knew how to make vocal polyphony express the sense of the words.

The effectiveness of Byrd's *Agnus Dei* is due to its arc of ever-increasing intensity. In the liturgy, the words *Agnus Dei* are sung three times. In the first iteration of Byrd's setting, these words are sung by a sparse choir of but three voice parts. At the second iteration one of these parts drops out, but two other parts join, so that there are now four parts. At the third iteration the missing fifth part joins, so that all five voice parts are finally present. The listener can easily hear the resulting buildup of musical texture in the words *Agnus Dei*, whose first two occurrences are followed by the plea *miserere nobis* — *have mercy upon us*. The third and final plea is *dona nobis pacem* — *give us peace*, which is repeated three times by the five voice parts, in a mood of quiet supplication.

Bray

It was the carefully crafted musical arc in Byrd's *Agnus Dei* that inspired Charlotte Bray's setting of the same text. She borrows Byrd's opening five notes for her own opening theme, and, like Byrd, she begins her piece with but three voice parts singing — first sopranos, second sopranos, and altos. Unlike Byrd, however, her harmonies are based on poignant close intervals (major and minor seconds), which tend to combine as tone clusters that strike the listener's ear with great intensity. (In Bray's *Agnus Dei*, we have left the world of conventional harmony far behind.)

Like Byrd, Bray introduces new voice parts at each of the three iterations of the words *Agnus Dei*. At the second iteration the choir that began the piece drops out, and the first tenor, second tenor, and bass voices take over. The

returning first sopranos add intensity to the second *miserere nobis*.

The third *Agnus Dei* iteration is sung by all six voice parts, over which a solo soprano voice repeats the original five-note theme that was derived from Byrd. There is a very poignant *qui tollis peccata mundi*, followed by a quiet *dona nobis pacem* sung by all six voice parts, separated by wide tonal intervals.

The effect on the listener of Bray's *Agnus Dei*, like the effect of Byrd's, is to be drawn into an intimate musical space and be surrounded and affected by it.

Charlotte Bray earned her undergraduate degree from the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and her M.M. in Composition from the Royal College of Music. She studied at the Tanglewood Music Centre, with the Boston area's own John Harbison, and with a number of composers in the UK of a previous generation.

She is an eclectic composer. Her orchestral works have been performed by the London Symphony Orchestra, the London Philharmonic, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and the London Sinfonietta. She has written several dozen works for solo instruments, for chamber ensemble (some with solo voice), and a half dozen choral works, including this *Agnus Dei*.

V Thomas Morley 1557-1602

O sleep, fond fancy

madrigal (or canzonet) for three voices
vocal ensemble:

Melanie Armstrong

Alex Conway

Melanie Donnelly

Jana Hieber

Paulina Jones-Torregrosa

Frank S. Li

Ēriks Ešenvalds

b. 1977

Only in Sleep

on a poem by Sara Teasdale

soloist: **Olivia Adams**

Morley

Thomas Morley, of humble origin in the east of England, showed youthful promise as a musician and singer, and successfully made his way in the world with these talents. He moved to London in his late teens to become a chorister at St. Paul's Cathedral, and, probably, to study with William Byrd. He earned a Bachelor of Music at Oxford in 1588, when he was thirty-one. This was the year that *Musica Transalpina* took the English musical world by storm. Morley was much influenced by the music in this publication, and it determined the course he would take as a composer. Although he eventually became director of music at St. Paul's, he also became England's foremost composer of madrigals. One

of his madrigal collections was *Canzonets or Little Short Songs to Three Voyces*, published in 1593, one of which is *O sleep, fond fancy*.

Like Wilbye's *Flora*, Morley's *O sleep* is a miniature, brief but charming. Its lyrics seem to make little sense until we recall that poets of the English madrigal school frequently spoke not directly, but in a sort of code; and often, like Wilbye, with great understatement. The words will make sense if one assumes that the word *sleep*, in this little poem, is not really referring to sleep, but to a certain other human activity.

In style, the piece is not actually a madrigal, but a canzonet — a dance-like form which, like the madrigal, originated in Italy, but which lacked the madrigalian tendency to reflect a poem's meaning in the music. The music's simple structure follows the simple two-couplet form of the poem. The musical setting of each couplet begins with simple slow triadic chords, which give way to ever-more-rapid figures; the music then comes to a point of rest back on slow triadic chords.

(It was Thomas Morley who gave the Oriana Consort its name. In 1601 he published a madrigal collection he called *The Triumphes of Oriana*, which consisted of madrigals submitted by many of his composer friends. Although he encouraged them to write their own texts, Morley stipulated that each text should conclude with the words *Thus spake the nymphs and shepherds of Diana: Long live fair Oriana*. He dedicated his collection to Queen Elizabeth. But who was Oriana? Some claim, though it has not been proved, that Oriana was a code name for Elizabeth herself, and that Morley's dedication was intended to pay homage to her and to cultivate her favor. Whatever the case, the Oriana Consort borrowed this very nice name.)

Ešenvalds

Ēriks Ešenvalds is a native of Latvia. He earned a master's degree in composition at the Latvian Academy of Music in 2004, and became associated with the State Choir of Latvia. From 2011 to 2013 he was in the UK as a Fellow in Creative Arts at Trinity College, Cambridge, where Stephen Layton, director of the world-renowned Trinity College Choir, performed and recorded many of Ešenvalds' choral works. He has composed an extensive body of choral and instrumental music, much of which has been performed and recorded by the Latvian Radio Choir, the State Choir of Latvia, Trinity College Choir, Sinfonietta Riga, and, in the USA, the Portland State University Chamber Choir.

Only in Sleep was commissioned and premiered by the University of Louisville Collegiate Chorale, which, under its director Kent Hatteberg, has achieved national recognition.

The poem, by the American poet Sarah Teasdale (1884-1933), is a poem to warm the heart: An adult woman remembers her childhood playmates only in her dreams, and only as the children they once were, not as the adults they are now, for contact with them has been lost in adulthood. This reflection leads her to ask: How do they now remember me? Am I still a child to them as well?

The soloist gives us the first verse, sung on a simple folksong-like melody with simple chordal support by the choir. The choir takes over for the second verse, a repeat of the first verse, and two repeats of the second verse. The thoughts expressed in the first two verses are very sensitive, and perhaps not easily internalized — so the composer is wise in allowing the listener so many repetitions to absorb the words. These set the stage for the third verse, for which the soloist returns, to ask if her childhood friends remember her, too, as a child.

The composer gives us a most moving coda, by having the soloist repeat, five times, the poem's closing words: *Am I a child?* She does this over a very simple two-chord accompaniment by the choir, and with a melodic line that seems to have been intended to sound like an improvisation, as though it had been made up by the soloist on the spot.

VI	Claudin de Sermisy	c. 1490-1562
	<i>Aspice, Domine</i>	
	<i>Look down, Lord: motet</i>	
	Eric Whitacre	b. 1970
	<i>Sainte-Chapelle</i>	
	on a poem by Charles Anthony Silvestri	

de Sermisy

Claudin de Sermisy was chosen as the companion composer for Eric Whitacre in our "Enduring Muse" program not because his music and Whitacre's have anything special in common, but because de Sermisy wrote music that was performed in the very same church that Whitacre wrote his music about, namely the world-famous Sainte-Chapelle in Paris — the Holy Chapel for the kings of France, built in the thirteenth century, and known the world over for its magnificent stained glass windows.

De Sermisy is mostly remembered not for his sacred music but for his 175 secular chansons, which are considered to be the pinnacle of the French chanson genre. Yet he was a priest, and had been a canon in Rouen and Amiens before he was appointed a canon at Sainte-Chapelle in 1533, the post in which he stayed for the remainder of his life. It is uncertain whether he wrote *Aspice, Domine* specifically for use at Sainte-Chapelle — but since he wrote about 100 motets during his lifetime, and since he was associated with Sainte-Chapelle for twenty-nine years, it seems highly likely that this motet was performed in that royal chapel at some time or other.

The text of De Sermisy's motet has nine lines. The composer sets each line in strict imitative style, like the first line of Palestrina's *Pulchra es*. These imitative entries are very audible, and it's fun to follow the text in this program booklet while listening to each of the four voice parts begin each line. These beginnings of each line, called "points of imitation," are staggered far enough apart so that the entry of each part can easily be heard.

Whitacre

The Tallis Scholars, the choral ensemble that is famous the world over for its re-creation of music of the Renaissance, was founded in 1973 by Peter Philips, then a student at Oxford. As the group approached its fortieth anniversary year of 2013, Philips wished to commission a new choral work for that event, and approached the American composer Eric Whitacre, who had become widely known for his innovative and exceptional choral music. Whitacre, who had long been a fan of the Tallis Scholars, said that he found this proposal to be “thrilling and terrifying at the same time.” But what should this piece be like?

Whitacre remembered that when he had visited the basilica of Sagrada Família in Barcelona, the signature work of the renowned Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí, he had been fascinated by the many iterations of the word *sanctus* that ascended one of the building’s towers. Perhaps a musical re-creation of that effect, he thought, could be the germ of the anniversary piece for the Scholars.

Whitacre wrote a trial piece that included a setting of the word *sanctus* and brought it to a Scholars rehearsal. Upon hearing what he had written, he found that he didn’t like most of it, and discarded all of it except for the single fragment that he did like, which was his setting of the word *sanctus*. He then recalled how impressed he had been, when once visiting Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, with the colored light as it came through the chapel’s magnificent stained glass windows. He approached a friend, the poet Charles Anthony Silvestri (b. 1965), who had written texts in Latin for him. Would Silvestri craft a story, in Latin, about Sainte-Chapelle, whose central word would be *sanctus*?

Silvestri obliged, writing verses in Latin about a young girl who enters Sainte-Chapelle and kneels, seeming to hear the angels in the stained glass singing the word *sanctus* to her, as though their singing and the multi-colored refracted light from the windows were all the same. Here was Whitacre’s inspiration for the new piece! The Tallis Scholars were noted for their beautiful choral sound in singing music of the Renaissance, so why not set Silvestri’s story to music that would be reminiscent of the Renaissance, yet whose harmonies, like the light refracted by the stained glass, were reshaped so as to include the striking dissonances that are characteristic of contemporary music? Music that would, as Whitacre said, “sound ancient and modern at the same time?”

Whitacre composed his piece with this idea in mind, again brought it to a Scholars rehearsal, and this time the music worked. While hearing it in rehearsal, Whitacre continued to make small adjustments in the scoring until the music seemed just right.

The Tallis Scholars sang the premiere performance of Eric Whitacre’s *Sainte-Chapelle* on March 7, 2013, to a large audience assembled at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. Five years later, almost to the day, the Oriana Consort brings this remarkable piece to you.