

# BYRD ENSEMBLE

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## FLEMISH MASTERS

**Friday, March 6, 2026, at 8pm**

Christ Church Cathedral, Victoria, BC

**Saturday, March 7, 2026, at 8pm**

Holy Rosary Catholic Church, Seattle, WA

**Sunday, March 8, 2026, at 5pm**

St. Mary the Virgin, San Francisco, CA

### *Program*

<b>Josquin des Prez</b>	Benedicta es
<b>Jacobus Clemens non Papa</b>	Ego flos campi
<b>Nicolas Gombert</b>	Media vita
<b>Kerensa Briggs</b>	Media vita
<b>Josquin/Rue</b>	Absalon fili mi
<b>Gombert</b>	Lugebat David Absalon

### *Intermission*

<b>Thomas Crecquillon</b>	Pater peccavi
<b>Jean Mouton</b>	Nesciens mater
<b>Gabriel Jackson</b>	O sacrum convivium
<b>Gombert</b>	Magnificat tertii et octavi toni

The Franco-Flemish School produced some of the greatest composers of the Renaissance. Originating in the region that is now northern France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, these composers were among the most influential figures in Europe for nearly two centuries. Tonight's program traces three generations of this tradition through the works of Josquin des Prez, Nicolas Gombert, and Thomas Crecquillon, alongside music by their contemporaries Jean Mouton, Pierre de la Rue, and Jacobus Clemens non Papa. Joining them are two contemporary British composers—Kerensa Briggs and Gabriel Jackson—whose music draws inspiration from Renaissance music.

### BYRD ENSEMBLE

*Artistic Director*  
Markdavin Obenza

*Soprano*  
Margaret Obenza  
Ruth Schauble

*Alto*  
Sophia Nash  
Kyle Tingzon

*Tenor*  
Orrin Doyle  
Sam Faustine  
Joshua Haberman

*Bass*  
Clayton Moser  
Willimark Obenza  
Matthew Peterson

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# BYRD ENSEMBLE



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## ABOUT THE PROGRAM

**Josquin des Prez** (c.1450–1521) was the central composer of the Franco-Flemish School. His music merges the prevailing Franco-Flemish contrapuntal tradition with an extraordinary sensitivity to text and emotion—qualities that set him apart from his predecessors. Martin Luther famously remarked, “Josquin is the master of the notes, which must do as he wishes; other composers must do as the notes wish.” Josquin was so admired that many anonymous compositions were attributed to him by copyists, probably to increase their sales.

Opening the program is Josquin’s *Benedicta es*, a magnificent six-voice motet on a Marian text. Built on a plainchant, the work unfolds with Josquin’s characteristic clarity and balance, as pairs of voices engage in flowing imitative dialogue before expanding to the full six-part texture. The result is a grand tribute to the Virgin Mary.

**Jacobus Clemens non Papa** (c. 1510–c. 1556) was one of the most prolific Flemish composers of his generation. The curious addition of “non Papa” (not the Pope) to his

name remains something of a mystery—likely a joke to distinguish him from a local poet named Jacobus Papa, or simply a nod to the fact that he was decidedly not Pope Clement VII. His five-voice motet *Ego flos campi* (I am the flower of the field) sets a text from the Song of Songs with sensuous, interweaving lines that evoke the lush imagery of the text. Clemens’s writing here is deeply expressive, with a warmth and lyricism which foreshadows the more overtly emotional style of the later Renaissance.

**Nicolas Gombert** (c.1495–1560), a likely student of Josquin himself, became choirmaster for the Habsburg royal chapel under Charles V in 1529. He and the singers would travel with the emperor, further spreading the Franco-Flemish polyphonic tradition. He unofficially held the position of court composer, arranging many works commemorating key events during Charles V’s life. Gombert ran into trouble with the law in 1540 and was sentenced to hard labor on the galleys but was pardoned sometime around 1547 after Charles heard the Magnificat settings he composed while serving his

sentence. Gombert's setting of *Media vita* is one of his most celebrated works, so significant that he later used it as the basis for an entire parody mass. Scored for predominantly low voices, the motet is dense and unrelenting, a reflection of the text's confrontation with death. It is deeply somber music.

**Kerensa Briggs** (b. 1991) is an award-winning British composer specializing in choral music. Rooted in the English cathedral tradition, her style is often described as deeply expressive, appealingly tonal, and influenced by Gregorian chant and French Romanticism. Briggs's works, lauded for their clarity and poignant emotion, have been performed in international venues including the Sistine Chapel and recorded by premier ensembles such as The Tallis Scholars and Voces8. Her setting of *Media vita*, drawing on the same words as Gombert's, achieves a more reflective, almost hopeful sound by contrast.

The first half closes with two works on the story of Absalom, the rebellious son of King David, whose death in battle moves his father to one of the most anguished laments in scripture: *O my son Absalom, would God I had died for thee*. *Absalon fili mi* has long been attributed to Josquin, though modern scholarship suggests it may have been composed by his contemporary **Pierre de la Rue** (c. 1452–1518). Whoever the composer, the music is dark and wrenching. Scored almost entirely in the lowest voice ranges, it descends as if into the grave itself.

Misattribution is also part of the story with Gombert's *Lugebat David Absalon*, originally attributed to Josquin. Gombert's version is scored for eight voices and is a contrafactum of two of his chansons (i.e., the composer substitutes one text for another without making substantial changes to the music). The motet is filled with beautiful, imitative, descending lines (classic lament text-painting) and the pleading repetition of "O fili mi!" ("O my son!") While Josquin's setting feels more personal and introspective, Gombert's *Lugebat* is more of an outward cry of devastation, particularly during the line "et calamabat voce magna" ("and cried with a great voice").

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We know little about **Thomas Crecquillon** (c.1505–1557). He was born in the Low Countries, became a priest and a member of the chapel of Emperor Charles V as either a singer or chapel master, and died in 1557, likely in a plague outbreak in Béthune. *Pater peccavi*, a motet about the

story of the Prodigal Son scored for eight voices, epitomizes the Flemish style that considered uninterrupted counterpoint, especially eight-part counterpoint, to be the highest art. The style valued subtle and intimate expression over antiphonal or polychoral music that was meant to impress by sheer size and volume.

Considering he was a court composer highly regarded by his contemporaries and in high demand by royal patrons, it is a mystery why **Jean Mouton** (c. 1459–1522) remains one of the least known Flemish composers. Mouton is often compared to his teacher, the famous Josquin. On the surface they share many similarities—paired imitation, canonic techniques, and equal-voiced polyphonic writing, though Mouton tends to write rhythmically and texturally more uniform music with relatively little textural contrast. But one should not dismiss Mouton as the "less flashy" Josquin. Mouton's genius lay in his ability to capture a sense of calm and control through the continuous flow of vocal lines, something many composers, including Josquin, lacked. Mouton's *Nesciens mater* (The Mother not knowing) is a perfect example of Mouton's serene style. It is also a tour de force of canonic writing: a single melody generates all eight voices through strict canon, yet the result feels effortless and luminous rather than academic.

**Gabriel Jackson** (b. 1962) is one of Britain's most respected contemporary composers, known for his choral liturgical pieces. He evokes a variety of styles to create a distinctly modern sound, with parts of his music referencing Josquin, Tavener, and Stravinsky. Jackson's *O sacrum convivium* was commissioned for the 1990 Guildford and Portsmouth Cathedrals Festival and written for the combined forces of two cathedral choirs—an origin that shaped its expansive, richly divided scoring. The setting is predominantly quiet and meditative, with a radiant climax at the words "et futurae gloriae" (and a pledge of future glory).

Closing the program is Gombert's *Magnificat tertii et octavi toni*, a double Magnificat setting in the third and eighth tones. As with Palestrina's Magnificat settings, the work alternates polyphony with plainchant verses, reflecting the liturgical practice of Vespers. Gombert brings to the Cantic of Mary all the richness and density of his mature style.

## ABOUT THE BYRD ENSEMBLE

Described as “pure and radiant” (Gramophone), “immensely impressive” (Early Music Review), and “rich, full-voiced, and perfectly blended” (Early Music America), the Byrd Ensemble has been internationally acclaimed for its performances and recordings of chamber vocal music, particularly Renaissance polyphony. John Rutter describes the ensemble as “a fine group that has achieved an enviable standard of tuning, blend, and ensemble.” Founded in 2004, the Byrd Ensemble, directed by Markdavin Obenza, is a professional ensemble made up of 10 to 12 singers. The ensemble presents a subscription series in Seattle, and it tours across the United States and internationally.

The Byrd Ensemble is represented by Artist Manager Marianne LaCrosse of Suòno Artist Management ([marianne@suonoartistmanagement.com](mailto:marianne@suonoartistmanagement.com)).

## ABOUT MARKDAVIN OBENZA

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MARKDAVIN OBENZA is a choral director, recording producer, singer, and composer. He is also the director of Seattle-based Radiance, specializing in American choral music, and Director of Choral Activities at Trinity Parish Church in Seattle. As a producer for Scribe Records, Markdavin has produced recordings for over 40 choirs and soloists, several of which have been reviewed in *Gramophone*, *Early Music America*, *Early Music Review*, and *Fanfare*. He has also produced and directed virtual choirs and musical broadcasts, including Caroline Shaw's *and the swallow*, featured on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and *Shaker Spirituals in Maine* (2021) for the Library of Congress American Folklife Center.

## SEASON FINALE

**BYRD ENSEMBLE PRESENTS**  
**HANDEL DIXIT DOMINUS**

**AUGUSTA MCKAY LODGE**  
**MARKDAVIN OBENZA**

Inspired by the Carmelite Vespers of 1707, featuring Byrd Ensemble and players, led by guest concertmaster and internationally acclaimed violinist, Augusta McKay Lodge.

**MAY 2 / 3**

byrdensemble.com

**SATURDAY, MAY 2, 2026**, at 7:30 PM  
Town Hall Seattle  
1119 8th Ave, Seattle, WA

**SUNDAY, MAY 3, 2026**, at 3:00 PM  
Holy Rosary Catholic Church  
4139 42nd Ave SW, Seattle, WA

The Byrd Ensemble and players present a program inspired by the Carmelite Vespers of 1707. The program features Handel's *Dixit Dominus*, *Laudate pueri*, *Nisi Dominus*, *Saeviat tellus inter rigores*, and chant, for baroque orchestra, choir, and soloists. The program features guest concertmaster and internationally acclaimed violinist Augusta McKay Lodge.

## TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

### **Benedicta es caelorum regina**

Benedicta es caelorum regina,  
Et mundi totius domina  
Et aegris medicina.  
Tu praeclara maris stella vocaris  
Quae solem justitiae paris  
A quo illuminaris.  
Te Deus Pater, ut Dei Mater  
Fieres et ipse frater,  
Cujus eras filia,  
Sanctificavit sanctam servavit  
Et mittens sic salutavit:  
Ave plena gratia.  
Per illud ave prolatum  
Et tuum responsum gratum  
Est ex te Verbum incarnatum  
Quo salvantur omnia.  
Nunc mater exora natum  
Ut nostrum tolrat reatum  
Et regnum det nobis paratum  
In caelesti patria. Amen.

### **JOSQUIN DES PREZ (c.1450–1521)**

Blessed are you, queen of heaven,  
And ruler of the whole world,  
And medicine for the sick.  
You are called the brightest star of the sea,  
Who gives birth to the sun of justice,  
By whom you are illuminated.  
God the Father, so that you might become  
The Mother of God and He your brother,  
Whose daughter you were,  
Sanctified and preserved you as holy,  
And sending his messenger, greeted you thus:  
Hail, full of grace.  
Through that proclaimed greeting  
And your gracious reply,  
The Word was made flesh from you,  
By whom all things are saved.  
Now, Mother, implore your Son  
That he may take away our guilt  
And give us the kingdom prepared for us  
In the heavenly homeland. Amen.

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### **Ego flos campi**

Ego flos campi et liliium convallium.  
Sicut liliium inter spinas,  
sic amica mea inter filias.  
Fons hortorum et puteus aquarum viventium,  
quae fluunt impetu de Libano.

### **JACOBUS CLEMENS NON PAPA (c.1510–c.1556)**

I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valleys.  
As the lily among thorns,  
so is my love among the daughters.  
The fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, which run with a  
strong stream from Lebanon.

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### **Media vita**

Media vita in morte sumus;  
quem quaerimus adiutorem nisi te, Domine,  
qui pro peccatis nostris juste irasceris?  
Sancte Deus, sancte fortis,  
sancte et misericors Salvator:  
amarae morti ne tradas nos.

### **NICOLAS GOMBERT (c.1495–1560)**

In the midst of life we are in death;  
of whom may we seek for succour but of thee, O Lord,  
who for our sins art justly displeased?  
Holy God, holy and mighty,  
holy and merciful Saviour:  
deliver us not into the bitterness of death.

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### **Media vita**

(Same text as above)

### **KERENSA BRIGGS (b.1991)**

## Absalon fili mi

Absalon fili mi,  
quis det ut moriar pro te,  
fili mi Absalon.  
Non vivam ultra,  
sed descendam in infernum plorans.

## JOSQUIN DES PREZ / PIERRE DE LA RUE (c.1452–1518)

Absalom, my son,  
would God I had died for thee,  
my son Absalom.  
Let me live no more,  
but descend into hell weeping.

---

## Lugebat David Absalon

Lugebat David Absalon,  
pius pater filium,  
tristis senex puerum:  
"Heu me, fili mi Absalon,  
quis mihi det ut moriar,  
ut ego pro te moriar,  
O fili mi Absalon?"  
Rex autem David filium,  
cooperto flebat capite:  
"Quis mihi det ut moriar,  
O fili mi, O fili mi?"  
Porro rex operuit caput suum,  
et clamabat voce magna:  
"Fili mi Absalon, Fili mi Absalon."

## NICOLAS GOMBERT

*David mourned for Absalom,  
the devoted father for his son,  
the grieving old man for his boy:  
"Alas, my son Absalom,  
would that I might die,  
that I might die in your place,  
O my son Absalom?"  
But King David, for his son,  
wept with covered head:  
"Would that I might die,  
O my son, O my son!"  
Then the king covered his head,  
and cried out with a great voice:  
"My son Absalom, My son Absalom."*

*Intermission*

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## Pater peccavi

Pater, peccavi in caelum et coram te:  
jam non sum dignus vocari filius tuus;  
fac me sicut unum ex mercenariis tuis.

Quanti mercenarii in domo patris mei  
abundant panibus,  
ego autem hic fame pereo.  
Surgam et ibo ad patrem meum et dicam ei:  
Pater, peccavi in caelum et coram te.

## THOMAS CRECQUILLON (c.1505–1557)

*Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;  
I am no longer worthy to be called your son;  
make me as one of your hired servants.*

*How many of my father's hired servants  
have bread enough and to spare,  
but I perish here with hunger.  
I will arise and go to my father and say to him:  
Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.*

---

## Nesciens mater

Nesciens mater virgo virum,  
peperit sine dolore  
salvatores saeculorum.  
Ipsam regem angelorum  
sola virgo lactabat,  
ubere de caelo pleno.

## JEAN MOUTON (c.1459–1522)

*The Virgin Mother, knowing not man,  
bore without pain  
the Saviour of the ages.  
The King of angels himself  
only the Virgin nursed,  
at a breast made full from heaven.*

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**O sacrum convivium**

O sacrum convivium,  
in quo Christus sumitur;  
recolitur memoria passionis ejus;  
mens impletur gratia;  
et futurae gloriae nobis pignus datur.

**GABRIEL JACKSON (b.1962)**

*O sacred banquet,  
in which Christ is received;  
the memory of his Passion is renewed;  
the mind is filled with grace;  
and a pledge of future glory is given to us.*

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**Magnificat tertii et octavi toni**

Magnificat anima mea Dominum.  
Et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo.  
Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae:  
ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes.  
Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est:  
et sanctum nomen ejus.  
Et misericordia ejus a progenie in progenies  
timentibus eum.  
Fecit potentiam in brachio suo:  
dispersit superbos mente cordis sui.  
Deposuit potentes de sede:  
et exaltavit humiles.  
Esurientes implevit bonis:  
et divites dimisit inanes.  
Suscepit Israel puerum suum:  
recordatus misericordiae suae.  
Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros,  
Abraham et semini ejus in saecula.  
Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto.  
Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper,  
et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

**NICOLAS GOMBERT**

*My soul doth magnify the Lord.  
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.  
For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden:  
for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.  
For he that is mighty hath magnified me:  
and holy is his Name.  
And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all  
generations.  
He hath showed strength with his arm:  
he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.  
He hath put down the mighty from their seat:  
and hath exalted the humble and meek.  
He hath filled the hungry with good things:  
and the rich he hath sent empty away.  
He hath holpen his servant Israel:  
in remembrance of his mercy.  
As he promised to our forefathers,  
Abraham and his seed for ever.  
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.*

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### Dear Byrdies,

One of my favorite things is hearing from first-time listeners of Renaissance music how moving this music is to them. There is often a moment of surprise — they didn't expect music written five centuries ago to feel so immediate, so human. We identify with that deeply. It's that very feeling that drew so many of us to this music: the sense of awe and wonder, that feeling of being transported somewhere else, of being in the presence of something timeless.

That feeling is what drives everything we do at the Byrd Ensemble — the concerts, the recordings, the tours. But none of it is possible without your support. If this music has moved you tonight, please consider making a donation so we can keep bringing it to new audiences and spreading it far and wide.

You can donate via the QR code below or send a check to:

The Byrd Ensemble  
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Seattle, WA 98116



Thank you for your support!

Markdavin Obenza, *Artistic Director*

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