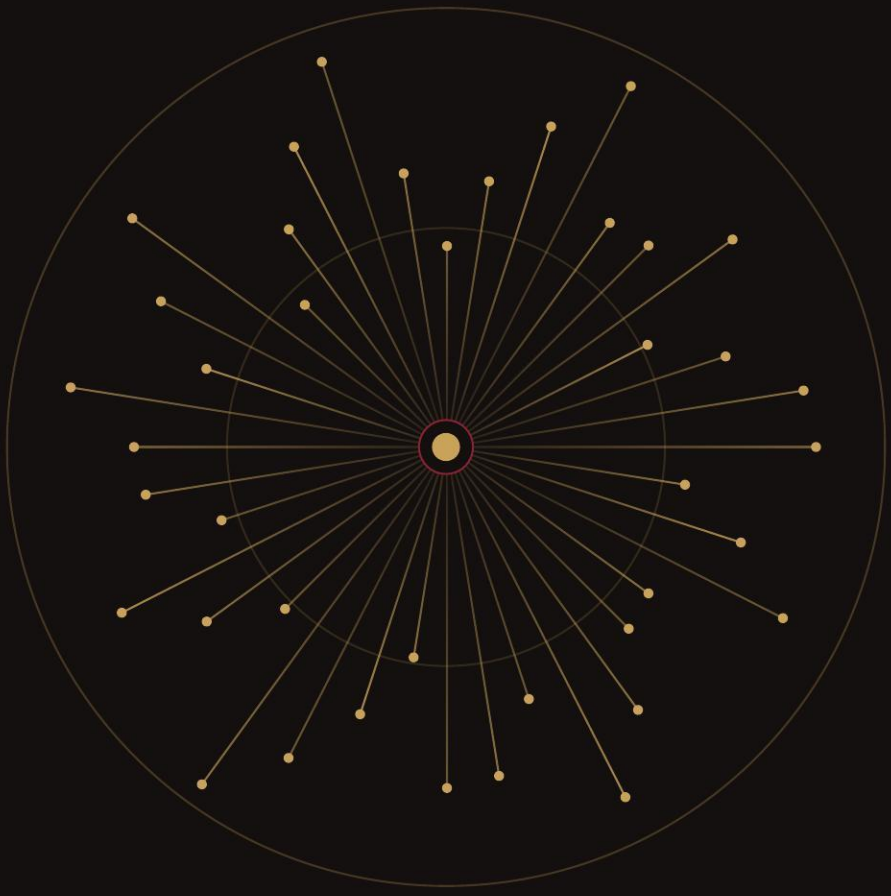
THE BYRD ENSEMBLE PRESENTS

Spem in alium

Hope in Darkness

TALLIS · BYRD · TAVERNER



SAT, OCT 24, 2026 · 1:30 PM
St. Mary's Cathedral, Portland

SUN, OCT 25, 2026 · 3:00 PM
Holy Rosary Church, Seattle

BYRD ENSEMBLE · SHADOW & SPLENDOR · 26|27

Program.

Spem in alium: Hope in Darkness

In memory of Mel Belding

THOMAS TALLIS	Loquebantur variis linguis
JOHN TAVERNER	Mater Christi sanctissima
WILLIAM BYRD	Tristitia et anxietas
JOHN TAVERNER	Gaude plurimum

INTERMISSION

WILLIAM BYRD	Magnificat
THOMAS TALLIS	Absterge Domine
ARVO PÄRT	Da pacem Domine
THOMAS TALLIS WILLIAM BYRD	Miserere nostri
THOMAS TALLIS	Spem in alium

> *"You can't fully experience Spem in alium until you're in the room, surrounded by forty voices arranged in a horseshoe. You can see the music."*
>
> MARKDAVIN OBENZA · ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Byrd Ensemble.

Directed by Markdavin Obenza

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About the program.



Photo credit: Willi Pixel

OUR PROGRAM IS BUILT AROUND ONE OF THE GREAT MONUMENTS OF ENGLISH MUSIC: Thomas Tallis's 40-voice motet *Spem in alium*. Alongside this great work is music by three generations of Tudor composers, John Taverner, Thomas Tallis, and William Byrd. Their texts move between grief and hope, from Byrd's "sorrow and anguish" to Tallis's pleas for mercy, joined by Arvo Pärt's prayer for peace. At the heart of the program is Tallis's *Spem in alium*: "I have never put my hope in any other but you."

Thomas Tallis (c. 1505–1585) was well into his career by the time he wrote the music on this program. A Gentleman of the Chapel Royal since the early 1540s, he had already written Latin polyphony for Henry VIII and plain English anthems for the Protestant Edward VI. When the Catholic Mary I came to the throne in 1553 and brought back the Latin rite, Tallis returned to the large-scale style of his youth, though whether *Loquebantur variis linguis* dates from Mary's reign or the last years of Henry VIII is uncertain. Under Elizabeth I, now in his sixties, he wrote some of his most ambitious music, including *Spem in alium*. In 1575, he and his pupil William Byrd published *Absterge Domine* and *Miserere nostri* in their joint collection, *Cantiones sacrae*.

Opening the program is Tallis's *Loquebantur variis linguis*, a seven-voice respond for Pentecost, telling of the apostles who "spoke in various tongues" as the Holy Spirit descended. The tenor part contains the plainchant in long note values while six voices weave around it, their clashing lines creating an intensity that evokes the many tongues of the text. Repeated cries of "Alleluia" build to a radiant close.

John Taverner (c. 1490–1545) wrote the music on this program at the height of the old Catholic order in England, just before the Reformation swept it away. By 1524 he was a singer at the collegiate church of Tattershall in Lincolnshire, and in 1526 Cardinal Wolsey recruited him as the first master of the choristers at his lavish new Cardinal College (now Christ Church), Oxford. Votive antiphons like *Mater Christi sanctissima* and *Gaude plurimum* were the showpieces of richly endowed choral foundations like Tattershall and Cardinal College, which kept trained boy choristers and lay singers precisely to perform such elaborate music. In 1528, Taverner was caught up with a group of Lutheran sympathizers at the college, but Wolsey reportedly excused him as "but a musician." Taverner left Oxford in 1530 for Boston, Lincolnshire, and seems to have composed little afterward. His music connects the florid style of the Eton Choirbook with the simpler, imitative style of Tallis.

Mater Christi sanctissima is a five-voice votive antiphon to the Virgin Mary, the kind of devotional music sung each evening after Compline in English churches and colleges before the Reformation. Taverner later used its music as the basis for his *Missa Mater Christi* (not on the program). Shorter than many of Taverner's antiphons, it alternates sections for reduced voices with passages for the full choir.

"Tallis is dead, and music dies," wrote **William Byrd** (c. 1540–1623) in his elegy for his teacher and colleague. By the time of Tallis's death in 1585, Byrd was a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal and a committed Catholic at a dangerous time. Jesuit missionaries began arriving in England in 1580, and Catholic priests were being executed. Byrd and his family were repeatedly fined for refusing to attend Anglican services, an offense known as recusancy. He went further than quiet dissent. In 1586, he joined a secret gathering at a country house to welcome the newly arrived Jesuits, Henry Garnet and Robert Southwell, both of whom were later executed. His two books of *Cantiones sacrae* (1589 and 1591) are filled with texts of exile and desolation and pleas for deliverance, which many believe express, in veiled terms, Byrd's longing for the return of Catholicism to England.

Tristitia et anxietas, published in Byrd's first book of *Cantiones sacrae* in 1589, is one of his most intense penitential motets. The first part dwells on grief ("my eyes are darkened") with slow, descending lines and aching suspensions. The second part turns to the God "who does not forsake those who hope in you" and ends with a plea for mercy.

Taverner's *Gaude plurimum* (Rejoice greatly), also a Marian votive antiphon for five voices, shows the composer at his most expansive. Long, florid lines unfold, with passages for two and three solo voices set against the full choir. Within a few decades, the Reformation had abolished the votive antiphon, and many of the choirbooks that preserved such music were destroyed. It is remarkable that a work as vast as *Gaude plurimum* survives at all.

Byrd's *Magnificat*, the only English-texted work on the program, comes from his *Great Service*, the most ambitious setting of the Anglican canticles of the Elizabethan era. A Catholic in the service of a Protestant queen, Byrd wrote some of his grandest music for the Church of England. The setting divides the choir into its two traditional halves, decani and cantoris (the dean's and cantor's sides of the choir), which answer one another across the chancel and join for passages in as many as 10 parts. The *Great Service* was never printed in Byrd's lifetime and was largely forgotten until its rediscovery in the 1920s.

Tallis's *Absterge Domine*, from the 1575 *Cantiones sacrae*, is a five-voice penitential prayer: "Wash away, O Lord, the stain of my sins." Its smooth imitative writing and clear text setting made it popular beyond the Latin rite, and it was later adapted to several English texts, among them *Wipe away my sins*, for use in the Anglican church.

During a long creative silence in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Estonian composer **Arvo Pärt** (b. 1935) immersed himself in Gregorian chant and the music of medieval and Renaissance masters such as Machaut, Ockeghem, and Josquin. Out of that study came *tintinnabuli*, the spare, bell-like technique that became his signature compositional style.

Pärt wrote *Da pacem Domine* in 2004 at the request of conductor and viol player Jordi Savall, who was preparing a concert for peace. Pärt began composing in the days after the March 11 train bombings in Madrid, and the piece has since become a memorial to the victims, performed in Spain each year on the anniversary. The voices move slowly between the notes of the chant and the notes of a single chord, producing a still, ringing sound.

Miserere nostri, published in the 1575 *Cantiones sacrae*, is a seven-voice setting of a verse from the Te Deum: "Have mercy on us, O Lord." It is a feat of canonic writing. From just a few written lines, the remaining voices are derived by strict rules, some moving at different speeds and some in inversion (upside down). Despite the complexity, the result is calm and unhurried,

with no hint of the puzzle beneath the surface.

Closing the program is Tallis's *Spem in alium*, written for 40 independent voices arranged in eight choirs of five (soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, and bass). Its origins remain uncertain. An account from 1611 records that an Italian song in 40 parts had been performed in London, and that a nobleman, likely the Duke of Norfolk, asked whether any Englishman could match it. Tallis answered with *Spem in alium*, which was sung in the long gallery of Arundel House and so pleased the Duke that he gave Tallis a gold chain from his own neck. The Italian song was likely Alessandro Striggio's 40-voice *Ecce beatam lucem*, which Striggio brought with him on a visit to London in 1567. Others have suggested that *Spem in alium* was written for Elizabeth I's 40th birthday in 1573. In 1610, it was sung with an English text, "Sing and glorify," when Henry, son of James I, was made Prince of Wales.

The text, a responsory drawn from the Book of Judith, is a prayer of trust in a time of crisis: "I have never put my hope in any other but you, O God of Israel." The music begins with a single voice in the first choir and passes from choir to choir around the eight groups before all 40 voices enter together. Throughout, Tallis contrasts small groups of choirs with the full ensemble. After the words "Creator caeli et terrae" (Creator of Heaven and Earth), the entire choir falls silent, then re-enters together on a sudden, full chord: "respice humilitatem nostram" (look upon our lowliness). Performing *Spem in alium* means expanding the Byrd Ensemble from our usual 10 or 12 singers to 40. We are grateful to the singers who have joined us and to the generosity of Kate Brostoff, whose support made these performances possible.

—Markdavin Obenza

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 tours across the United States and internationally.

MARKDAVIN OBENZA

Artistic Director

Markdavin Obenza is artistic director of the Byrd Ensemble. A choral director, recording producer, and singer, he also directs Seattle-based Radiance, which specializes in American choral music, and is Director of Choral Activities at Trinity Parish Church in Seattle. Through Scribe Records, he has produced recordings for choirs and soloists, several reviewed in Gramophone, Early Music America, Early Music Review, and Fanfare.



Texts and translations.

THOMAS TALLIS — *Loquebantur variis linguis*

Loquebantur variis linguis apostoli, alleluia.
Magnalia Dei, alleluia.
Repleti sunt omnes Spiritu Sancto,
et ceperunt loqui variis linguis.
Magnalia Dei, alleluia.
Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.
Alleluia.

The apostles spoke in many tongues, alleluia,
Of the great works of God, alleluia.
They were all filled with the Holy Spirit,
and began to speak in many tongues
of the great works of God, alleluia.
Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
Alleluia.

JOHN TAVERNER — *Mater Christi sanctissima*

Mater Christi sanctissima, virgo sacrata Maria,
tuis orationibus benignum redde Filium,
unica spes nostra Maria;
nam precibus nitentes tuis
rogare audemus Filium.

Ergo, Fili, decus Patris, Jesu,
fons fecundissime a quo vivae
fluunt aquae rigantes fida pectora,
O Jesu, vitalis cibus
te pure manducantibus,
salutari potu et cibo pavisti nostra corpora.

Tua pasce animam gratia;
tibi consecratos Spiritu
tuo fove munere.

Quin et nostras, Jesu bone, mentes illustra gratia,
et nos pie fac vivere
ut dulci ambrosia
tuo vescamur in palatio. Amen.

Most holy mother of Christ, hallowed virgin Mary,
through your prayers make kind your Son,
our only hope, Mary;
for, relying on your prayers,
we dare to beseech your Son.

Therefore, O Son, glory of the Father, Jesus,
most abundant fountain from which
flow living waters refreshing faithful hearts,
O Jesus, food of life
for those who feed on you in purity,
with the food and drink of salvation you feed our bodies.

Feed the soul by your grace;
favour with your gift
those who are dedicated to you by the Spirit.

Even more, good Jesus, enlighten our minds with grace,
and make us to live in holiness
so that we may enjoy the sweet food of heaven
in your palace. Amen.

WILLIAM BYRD — *Tristitia et anxietas*

Tristitia et anxietas occupaverunt interiora mea.
Moestum factum est cor meum in dolore, et
contenebrati sunt oculi mei.

Væ mihi, quia peccavi.
Sed tu, Domine, qui non derelinquis sperantes in
te, consolare et adjuva me propter nomen
sanctum tuum, et miserere mei.

Sadness and anxiety have overtaken my inmost being.
My heart is made sorrowful in mourning, my
eyes are become dim.

Woe is me, for I have sinned.
But thou, O Lord, who dost not forsake those
whose hope is in thee, comfort and help me for
thy holy name's sake, and have mercy on me.

JOHN TAVERNER

Gaude plurimum

Gaude plurimum, Servatoris nostri mater, femina quæ vixerunt omnium felicissima, sola virgo præ ceteris quae naturali partu sed conceptione cælesti mediam divinae Trinitatis personam, verum Deum, sempiterni Patris sempiternum Filium, quo nos a perpetua morte servaremur, benignius hominem edidisti.

Rejoice greatly, mother of our Saviour, most blessed of all women who have lived, the one virgin above all others who by natural birth but heavenly conception benevolently brought forth as man the middle person of the Holy Trinity, true God, eternal Son of the eternal Father, that we might be saved by him from everlasting death.

Gaude, Maria Virgo, divinitus hanc tibi præstitam gratiam, ut ipsa præter ceteras omnes unica sis mortalis femina quae Christum Jesum in utero gesseris, gravida ederis, enixa, materno foveris gremio immortalem sobolem.

Rejoice, Virgin Mary, in this outstanding grace from heaven, that you yourself before all others should be the one mortal woman who bore Jesus Christ in your womb, and, heavy with child, gave birth, and after the birth cherished your immortal offspring in your maternal lap.

Gaude, sacratissima Virgo, illum non minus tibi quam ceteris hominibus immortalem Filium peperisse, qui cælica sua potestate inferni debellavit tyrannidem, cruentas mortis æternae principis vires fregit, vitamque humano generi perpetuam restituit.

Rejoice, most holy Virgin, that you bore him who is an immortal Son to you no less than for all men, who by his heavenly power vanquished the tyranny of hell, broke the bloody powers of the prince of eternal death, and restored everlasting life to human kind.

Gaude, Maria, Jesu mater, talem te genuisse Filium, qui divina sua resurrectione futuræ nostræ in gloria resurrectionis spem certam tradidit; ad Deumque Patrem ascendens, et Deus et homo, misericordia plenus, in cælum quoque reditum omnibus policetur.

Rejoice, Mary, Mother of Jesus, that you bore such a son, who by his divine resurrection bequeathed to us the sure hope of our future resurrection in glory, and who, ascending to God the Father as both God and man, full of mercy, promises a return to heaven for all.

Gaudemus itaque, et nos omnes nobis, et tuæ beatitudini, Maria, Jesu mater, gratias habentes, gratulamur, quæ supernam adepta gratiam, ad perennem quoque in cælum gloriam assumpta es.

Therefore we rejoice, and we all congratulate ourselves and give thanks for your blessedness, O Mary, Mother of Jesus, who has gained divine favour and been taken up into heaven to everlasting glory.

Eundem igitur Jesum tuum Filium supplices deprecamur ut, qui indigni, qui exaudiamur assequi non valemus, tuis benignissimis precibus impetrare possimus eandem tecum cælestem gloriam. Amen.

Therefore as supplicants we pray to that same Jesus your Son that we who are unworthy and unfit to gain a hearing may by your most kindly prayers attain that same heavenly glory with you. Amen.

INTERMISSION

WILLIAM BYRD

Magnificat

My soul doth magnify the Lord: and my spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour.
For he hath regarded: the lowliness of his hand-maiden.
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.

MAGNIFICAT, CONTINUED

He hath shewed 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 remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel:
As he promised to our forefather Abraham and to 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.

LUKE 1: 46–55

THOMAS TALLIS — *Absterge Domine*

Absterge Domine delicta mea, quae inscienter juvenis feci, et ignosce poenitenti, nam tu es Deus meus, tibi soli fidit anima mea.

Tu es salus mea. Dolorem meum testantur lachrimae meae. Sis memor Domine bonae voluntatis tuae. Nunc exaudi preces meas et serviet per aevum tibi spiritus meus. Amen.

O Lord, wipe away my faults which I in ignorance committed in my youth, and forgive the penitent one: for thou art my God, my soul hath faith in thee alone.

Thou art my salvation. My tears witness my grief. Remember, O Lord, thy good will. Hear now my prayers, and my spirit shall serve thee throughout all ages. Amen.

ARVO PÄRT — *Da pacem Domine*

Da pacem, Domine, in diebus nostris,
quia non est alius qui pugnet pro nobis,
nisi tu Deus noster.

Give peace, O Lord, in our time,
because there is none other that fighteth for us,
but only thou, O God.

THOMAS TALLIS / WILLIAM BYRD — *Miserere nostri*

Miserere nostri Domine.

Lord, have mercy upon us.

THOMAS TALLIS — *Spem in alium*

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 nostram

I have never put my hope in any other
but in Thee, God of Israel
who canst show both wrath and graciousness,
and who absolves all the sins
of man in suffering
Lord God,
Creator of Heaven and Earth
Regard our humility

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Thank you.

Thank you for joining us for *Spem in alium*, the opening of the Byrd Ensemble's 26|27 season, Shadow & Splendor. Forty voices in one room are possible only because of you. Next come world-premiere arrangements of *Silent Night* and Rutter's *Dancing Day* with harp (and our new Christmas CD, *Silent Night*, on November 28), Allegri's *Miserere* in February, and music of grief and devotion in April. Your generosity keeps Renaissance polyphony thriving here in Seattle and beyond. We look forward to seeing you again soon.



MARKDAVIN OBENZA · ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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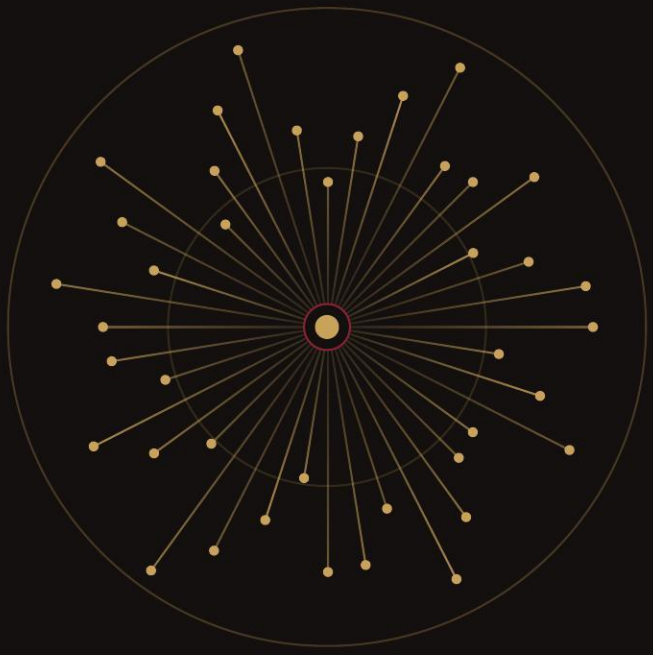
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