

PALESTRINA 500

October 11-19, 2025

PROGRAM

PALESTRINA (c. 1525—1594)	Magnificat primi toni à8
PALESTRINA	Tribulationes civitatum
Tomás Luis de VICTORIA (1548—1611)	Versa est in luctum
PALESTRINA	Stabat mater
Kerensa BRIGGS (b. 1991)	Reflection on Stabat Mater
	<i>World Premiere</i>

Intermission

PALESTRINA	Cantantibus organis
PALESTRINA	Missa Cantantibus organis Caecilia

Missa Cantantibus composers

Kyrie (Annibale Stabile, c. 1535—1595)	Credo, Crucifixus (Annibale Stabile)
Christe (Francesco Soriano, c. 1548—1621)	Et Ascendit (Francesco Soriano)
Kyrie (Giovanni Andrea Dragoni, c. 1540—1598)	Et in Spiritum (Ruggiero Giovannelli, c. 1560—1625)
Gloria (Palestrina)	Sanctus (Prospero Santini, 1591—1614)
Domine Deus (Palestrina?)	Agnus Dei (Curzio Mancini, c. 1553—1611)
Qui Tollis (Giovanni Andrea Dragoni)	

IT IS HARD TO THINK OF A GREATER COMPOSER THAN GIOVANNI PIERLUIGI DA PALESTRINA (c. 1525–1594). Some may think of Josquin—understandably so—but Palestrina’s vast output of 105 Masses and over 300 motets is unmatched. Most importantly, the smoothness of Palestrina’s style became the gold standard for counterpoint and a foundational influence for icons of Western Music: Bach, Handel, Mozart, and Haydn.

Palestrina spent nearly his entire career in Rome and held a number of prestigious posts. He was likely a choirboy at the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, became an organist in his hometown of Palestrina and eventually maestro di cappella for St. Peter’s Basilica (1551–1555), where he was briefly dismissed from the Papal Choir by the stricter Pope Paul IV for being a married layman. He quickly moved to St. John Lateran (1555–1560) and eventually returned to Santa Maria Maggiore (1561–1571) before entering a period of private service. He returned to St. Peter’s Basilica (1571–1594) as maestro di cappella and held this post for the remainder of his life. Palestrina lost his wife and two sons to the plague in the late 1570s and considered entering the priesthood. Instead, he remarried a wealthy widow, Virginia Dormoli, who provided him with the financial independence that allowed him to compose and publish his vast repertoire.

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A group of eleven people, likely a choir or musical ensemble, posing for a formal portrait. They are dressed in semi-formal attire, including suits, dresses, and a shawl. The group is arranged in a tiered fashion, with some individuals standing in the back, others sitting on a low sofa in the middle, and one person lying on the floor in the front. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Opening the program is Palestrina's double-choir setting of the Magnificat, used for the Catholic office for Vespers. Of his 35 settings of the *Magnificat*, this one stands as his most popular. The work was copied into a large choirbook for the papal choir around the late 1580s and was not initially intended for public use. He composed the work for two choirs, which come together for maximum impact on the text "omnes

Tomás Luis de Victoria (c.1548-1611), the most famous Spanish composer of the time, arrived in Rome around 1564 and likely studied with Palestrina. While there is no formal documentation of a teacher-student relationship, it is very probable that Victoria crossed paths with and took instruction from Palestrina, given how small and interconnected the world of Roman church music was. We can hear Palestrina's influence on Victoria's music, with its emphasis on pure and smooth-flowing polyphony and textual clarity.

Composed for the funeral of his long-time patron, Dowager Empress Maria of Austria, sister of King Philip II of Spain, in 1603, *Versa est in luctum* is one of Victoria's most dramatic motets on one of the most mournful passages of the Old Testament. The use of unexpected dissonance, chromaticism, and text painting makes Victoria's setting one of the most dramatic versions of this text.

Composed during Palestrina's final years around 1590, *Stabat mater* was likely composed for Pope Gregory XIV as one of his last major compositions. Like Allegri's *Miserere* (not on the program), *Stabat mater* was treasured by the Papal Choir (Sistine Chapel), jealously guarded, and withheld from publication until the 19th century. Scored for two separate choirs (SATB / SATB), much of the *Stabat mater* employs a homophonic (chordal) texture and is mostly syllabic, which appealed to the Council of Trent's desire for textual clarity.

In honor of Palestrina's 500th Anniversary, we are proud to present a new work by British composer **Kerensa Briggs** (b. 1991), *Reflection on Stabat Mater* (2025), commissioned by the Byrd Ensemble. Briggs 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.

"[Reflection on Stabat Mater] draws on the antiphonal style of Palestrina's *Stabat mater* but adds a modern take through its harmonic language and the inclusion of English translations of phrases from the text. These are reflective not only of human experience/grief, but they also encompass a sense of compassion/conversation between mother and child or perhaps human and the Spirit/the divine." - Kerensa Briggs.

Published in 1575, the five-voice motet *Cantantibus organis* honors Saint Cecilia, the patron saint of music. The motet is a prime example of Palestrina's pure and smooth style, which became the basis for the massive, collaborative *Missa Cantantibus organis*.

An exceptional and unique example of late Renaissance sacred music, the *Missa Cantantibus organis* (c. 1580) is a powerful collaborative work and a direct tribute to Palestrina himself. The work's unique structure was brought to existence by the joint effort of seven prominent Roman composers—a confraternity which was a forerunner of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia. Each composer was assigned a section to compose, using themes from Palestrina's *Cantantibus organis* as their starting point. The contributing composers were: Palestrina (who wrote the first half of the Gloria), Giovanni Andrea Dragoni, Ruggiero Giovannelli, Curzio Mancini, Prospero Santini, Francesco Soriano, and Annibale Stabile.

Scored for three separate choirs (for a total of twelve voices), the mass juxtaposes Palestrina's traditional imitative counterpoint with the newer, grander polychoral style. This massive setting created a spectacular, dramatic, and acoustically rich sound—a stylistic innovation favored in late 16th-century Rome which contrasts with the motet's more intimate setting. The *Missa Cantantibus organis* serves as both a musical homage to the "Prince of Music" and a demonstration of the breadth of talent in the Roman musical establishment.

-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 it tours across the United States and internationally.

The Byrd Ensemble is represented by Artist Manager Marianne LaCrosse of Suono Artist Management (marianne@suonoartistmanagement.com).

TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

Magnificat primi toni à8

Magnificat anima mea Dominum.
Et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo.
Quia respexit humilitatem ancillæ suæ: ecce enim ex hoc
beatam me dicent omnes generationes.
Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est: et sanctum nomen eius.
Et misericordia eius 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 misericordiæ suæ.
Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros, Abraham et semini eius in
sæcula.
Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto.
Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in sæcula
sæculorum. Amen.

PALESTRINA (c. 1525—1594)

*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.*

Tribulationes civitatum

Tribulationes civitatum audivimus quas passae sunt, et
defecimus.
Timor et hebetudo mentis cecidit super nos, et super liberos
nostros.
Domine, miserere.

Peccavimus cum patribus nostris, iniuste egimus, iniquitatem
fecimus.
Domine, miserere.

PALESTRINA

*We have heard of the tribulations of the cities which they have
suffered, and we have grown faint.
Fear and dullness of mind have fallen upon us, and upon our
children.
O Lord, have mercy.

We have sinned with our forefathers, we have committed
injustice, we have done evil things.
O Lord, have mercy.*

Versa est in luctum

Versa est in luctum cithara mea,
et organum meum in vocem flentium.
Parce mihi, Domine,
nihil enim sunt dies mei.

VICTORIA (1548—1611)

*My harp is turned into mourning,
and my organ into the voice of those that weep.
Spare me, O Lord,
for my days are as nothing.*

Stabat mater

Stabat Mater dolorosa,
Juxta Crucem lacrimosa,
Dum pendebat Filius.

Cujus animam gementem,
Contristantem et dolentem
Pertransiuit gladius.

O quam tristis et afflicta
Fuit illa benedicta
Mater Unigeniti!

Quae moerebat et dolébat,
Pia Mater, dum vidébat
Nati poenas íncliti.

Quis est homo qui non fleret,
Matrem Christi si vidéret
In tanto supplicio?

Quis non posset contristári,
Christi Matrem contemplári
Doléntem cum Fílio?

Pro peccátis suae gentis
Vidit Jésum in torméntis,
Et flagéllis súbditum.

Vidit suum dulcem Natum
Moriéndo desolátum,
Dum emísit spíritum.

Eia, Mater, fons amóris,
Me sentíre vim dolóris
Fac, ut tecum lúgeam.

Fac, ut árdeat cor meum
In amándo Christum Deum,
Ut sibi compláceam.

Sancta Mater, istud agas,
Crucifíxi fige plagas
Cordi meo válide.

Tui Nati vulneráti,
Tam dignáti pro me pati,
Poenas mecum dívide.

Fac me tecum pie flere,
Crucifíxo condolére,
Donec ego víxero.

PALESTRINA

*At the Cross her station keeping,
Stood the mournful Mother weeping,
Close to Jesus to the last.*

*Through her soul, of joy bereaved,
Bowed with anguish, deeply grieved,
Now at length the sword hath passed.*

*Oh, how sad and sore distressed
Was that Mother, highly blessed,
Of the sole-begotten One!*

*Christ above in torment hangs;
She beneath beholds the pangs
Of her dying glorious Son.*

*Is there one who would not weep,
Whelm'd in miseries so deep,
Christ's dear Mother to behold?*

*Can the human heart refrain
From partaking in her pain,
In that Mother's pain untold?*

*Bruised, derided, cursed, defiled,
She beheld her tender Child
All with bloody scourges rent.*

*For the sins of His own nation,
Saw Him hang in desolation,
Till His spirit forth He sent.*

*O thou Mother! fount of love!
Touch my spirit from above;
Make my heart with thine accord.*

*Make me feel as thou hast felt;
Make my soul to glow and melt
With the love of Christ our Lord.*

*Holy Mother! pierce me through,
In my heart each wound renew
Of my Saviour crucified.*

*Let me share with thee His pain,
Who for all my sins was slain,
Who for me in torments died.*

*Let me mingle tears with thee,
Mourning Him who mourn'd for me,
All the days that I may live.*

Stabat mater (cont'd)

PALESTRINA

Juxta Crucem tecum stare,
Et me tibi sociáre
In planctu desídero.

Virgo vírginum praeclára,
Mihi jam non sis amára,
Fac me tecum plángere.

Fac ut portem Christi mortem,
Passiónis fac consórtem,
Et plagas recólere.

Fac me plagis vulnerári,
Fac me Cruce inebriári,
Et cruóre Fílii.

Flammis ne urar succénsus,
Per te, Virgo, sim defénsus
In die judícii.

Christe, cum sit hinc exíre,
Da per Matrem me veníre
Ad palmam victóliae.

Quando corpus moriétur,
Fac, ut ánimae donétur
Paradísi glória. Amen.

*By the Cross with thee to stay,
There with thee to weep and pray,
Is all I ask of thee to give.*

*Virgin of all virgins best,
Listen to my fond request:
Let me share thy grief divine.*

*Let me, to my latest breath,
In my body bear the death
Of that dying Son of thine.*

*Wounded with His every wound,
Steep my soul till it hath swooned,
In His very Blood away.*

*Be to me, O Virgin, nigh,
Lest in flames I burn and die,
In His awful Judgment day.*

*Christ, when Thou shalt call me hence,
Be Thy Mother my defence,
Be Thy Cross my victory.*

*While my body here decays,
May my soul Thy goodness praise,
Safe in Paradise with Thee. Amen.*

Reflection on Stabat mater *world premiere*

KERENSA BRIGGS (b. 1991)

Stabat Mater dolorosa iuxta crucem lacrimosa.
Mater, dum pendebat filius.
Fons amoris.
Fac me tecum pia flere.
Sancta Mater.
Fac, ut ardeat cor meum dum emisit Spiritum.
Eia Mater, fons amoris.
Me sentire vim doloris, Fac ut tecum lugeam.
Quando corpus morietur, fac, ut animae donetur. gloria.

Interpolated English text:

Blessed one.

Let me weep with you

Let me share thy grief divine.

When the time comes let me be guarded.

O Thou Mother be thy defence,

Holy mother, pierce through my heart,

grant my heart to burn.

Make me mourn with you, safe in paradise,

may thy soul thy goodness praise.

Blessed one.

Let me die in your embrace.

*The sorrowful Mother stood weeping beside the cross.
Mother, while the Son was hanging.
Fountain of love.
Make me weep devoutly with you.
Holy Mother.
Grant that my heart may burn. while He gave up the spirit.
O Mother, fountain of love.
Make me feel the strength of sorrow, that I may mourn with you.
When the body shall die, grant that my soul may be given glory.*

Intermission

Cantantibus organis

PALESTRINA

Cantantibus organis,
Caecilia virgo soli Domino decantabat dicens:
Fiat Domine cor meum et corpus meum immaculatum,
ut non confundar.

*While the organs played,
the virgin Cecilia sang to the Lord alone, saying:
Lord, let my heart and my body remain immaculate, that I not be
not confounded.*

Missa Cantantibus organis Caecilia

PALESTRINA

Kyrie eleison.
Christe eleison.
Kyrie eleison.

*Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.*

Gloria in excelsis Deo.
Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.
Laudamus te. Benedicimus te.
Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.
Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam.
Domine Deus, Rex caelestis,
Deus Pater omnipotens.
Domine Fili unigenite, Iesu Christe.
Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris.

*Glory to God in the highest
and on Earth peace to men of goodwill.
We praise you. We bless you.
We worship you. We glorify you
We give thanks to you for your great glory.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God the Father
O Lord, the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father.*

Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem
factorem caeli et terrae,
visibilium omnium et invisibilium.
Et in unum Dominum Jesum Christum,
Filium Dei unigenitum.
Et ex Patre natum ante omnia saecula.
Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine,
Deum verum de Deo vero.
Genitum, non factum, consubstantialem Patri:
per quem omnia facta sunt.
Qui propter nos homines
et propter nostram salutem
descendit de caelis.
Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto
ex Maria virgine: et homo factus est.
Crucifixus etiam pro nobis: sub Pontio Pilato
passus et sepultus est.
Et resurrexit tertia die secundum scripturas.
Et ascendit in caelum:
sedet ad dexteram Patris.
Et iterum venturus est cum gloria
iudicare vivos et mortuos:
cuius regni non erit finis.
Et in Spiritum Sanctum Dominum, et vivificantem:
qui ex Patre Filioque procedit.
Qui cum Patre et Filio simul
adoratur et conglorificatur;
qui locutus est per Prophetas.

*I believe in one God, the Father, the almighty
maker of Heaven and Earth,
of all that is seen and unseen.
I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only begotten Son of God.
Eternally begotten of the Father.
God from God, light from light,
true God from true God.
Begotten not made, of one being with the Father:
through him all things were made.
For us men
and for our salvation,
he came down from Heaven.
By the power of the Holy Spirit he became
incarnate of the virgin Mary: and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified: under Pontius Pilate
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again in accordance with the scriptures.
He ascended into heaven:
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He shall come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead:
and his kingdom shall have no end.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life:
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son
he is worshipped and glorified;
he has spoken through the Prophets.*

Et unam sanctam catholicam
et apostolicam Ecclesiam. Confiteor unum
baptisma in remissionem peccatorum.
Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum.
Et vitam venturi saeculi. Amen.

Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua.
Hosanna in excelsis.
Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
Hosanna in excelsis.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis
pacem

*I believe in one holy
and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one
baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
And I look for the resurrection of the dead.
And the life of the world to come. Amen.*

*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth.
The heavens and the Earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.*

*Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy
on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us
peace.*

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Markdavin Obenza, Artistic Director



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