

# BYRD ENSEMBLE

directed by Markdavin Obenza

www.byrdensemble.com | 4722 Fauntleroy Way SW #123, Seattle, WA 98116

## MUHLY MEETS BYRD

Saturday, October 21, 2023, at 8:00 p.m.

St. James Cathedral

804 9th Ave, Seattle, WA 98104

### PROGRAM

<b>Thomas Tallis</b>	Candidi facti sunt
<b>Philippe de Monte</b>	Super flumina Babylonis
<b>William Byrd</b>	Quomodo cantabimus
<b>William Byrd</b>	Tribue Domine

*Intermission*

<b>Thomas Tallis</b>	Miserere nostri
<b>William Byrd</b>	Ne irascaris Domine
<b>Nico Muhly</b>	Fallings <i>World Premiere</i>
<b>Thomas Morley</b>	Domine Dominus noster
<b>Thomas Tallis</b>	Spem in alium

TO OPEN OUR 20TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON, we honor the 400th anniversary of the death of our namesake, William Byrd, with a program that celebrates Renaissance masterpieces and their enduring relevance. These works of art tell stories of love, despair, longing, and death—eternal aspects of the human condition—that resonate as deeply today as they did centuries ago.

Byrd was a master composer who both influenced and was influenced by other composers. Thomas Tallis, his teacher, friend, and business partner, had a profound impact on Byrd's life. Byrd in turn influenced his own student, Thomas Morley, who admired Byrd so much that he would quote his music in his own writing. Byrd's connections extended beyond England, with a remarkable exchange with Flemish composer Philippe de Monte. De Monte set a few verses of a psalm to a motet and sent it to Byrd, who then set the subsequent verses.

We continue this cultural exchange through time with the world premiere performance of *Fallings*, a motet inspired by Byrd's *Ne irascaris*, written and conducted by composer Nico Muhly himself.

#### SOPRANO

Julia Baker  
Rebekah Gilmore  
Natalie Ingrisano\*  
Jane Long  
Jen Milius  
Margaret Obenza\*  
Ruth Schauble\*  
Jenny Spence

#### ALTO

Heidi Blythe  
Teresa Clark  
Sarra Sharif Doyle\*  
Joshua Haberman\*  
Lauren Kastanas  
Jessica Martin  
Tyler Morse  
Melike Yersiz

#### TENOR

Jacob Buys  
Chad DeMaris  
Orrin Doyle\*  
Sam Faustine\*  
David Hendrix  
Kurt Kruckeberg  
Carson Truett Lott  
Ryan Peterson

#### BASS

John Eisemann  
Doug Fullington  
Ben Harris  
Andrew Horton  
Scott Kovacs  
James Mayclin  
Clayton Moser\*  
Evan Norberg  
Willimark Obenza\*  
Andrew Payne  
Matthew Peterson\*  
Isaiah Ragland  
Will Schlott  
Jared White  
James Wilcox  
Robin Wyatt-Stone

\*Byrd Ensemble Core

20  
BYRD  
ENSEMBLE



Photo: Willi Pixel

We honor the present by making contemporary connections with the past. The masterpieces of the Renaissance need not be museum pieces; rather, they are timeless expressions of our shared humanity—our suffering, loss, resilience, and hope for a better future.

## ABOUT THE PROGRAM

**Thomas Tallis** (1505–1585) composed under four successive Tudor monarchs (Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I) during a period of extreme political and religious instability. Henry VIII wanted to divorce Catherine of Aragon, so he broke away from the Catholic Church in 1534, paving the way for the Protestant Reformation, which favored simpler forms of writing and introduced sacred music in the vernacular. The Reformation flourished until Mary I's accession in 1553. Mary I, a devout Catholic determined to crush the Protestant faith, restored the Catholic Rite to the English church during her brief reign, and the compositional style reverted back to the more elaborate and florid writing prevalent earlier in the century.

During Mary I's short time as Queen, Tallis produced a large number of works, including a Latin responsory, *Candidi facti sunt*. A declamatory motet for five voices, Tallis deploys the chant melody in long notes in the tenor part while weaving the other four voices around it in imitative polyphony. Points of imitation set apart each textual section, each section ending with a polyphonic alleluia.

From the *Cantiones sacrae* (1575), a musical publication that Tallis and Byrd undertook together, *Miserere nostri* follows a tradition of canonic writing found on the Continent. Apart from one free voice in the tenor, the other six parts are in canon. The two highest voices are in canon at the unison separated by one beat. The discantus and contra tenor parts have the same music at the same pitch, but the notes in the contra tenor part are four times longer. The two bassus parts are also in canon at the unison with the discantus part, but for every upward interval in the tenor part, the basses have a downward interval and vice versa. In the bassus I, the notes are eight times longer than in the discantus part, and in the bassus 2 the notes are doubled.

The program ends with Tallis's crowning achievement, *Spem in alium*. Tallis composed the 40-part tour de force in 1570 for eight choirs of five voices each.

According to a letter written by Thomas Wateride in 1611, a song of 30 parts was sent from Italy to a music-loving duke in England, who asked if an "Englishman could sett as good a songe." Tallis took up the challenge and set the text of the Matins response "Spem in alium" to a total of 40 parts.

Supposing the "30" to be a mistake, the Italian song that inspired Tallis is likely to have been the 40-part motet *Ecce beatam lucem* or *Missa sopra Ecco si beato giorno*, both by Alessandro Striggio. Striggio probably met Tallis while on a European tour that stopped in London in June 1567.

*Spem in alium* is laid out for eight choirs of five voices (soprano, alto, tenor, baritone and bass). We are performing the motet as Tallis likely would have intended, with singers standing in a horseshoe shape. Beginning with a single voice from the first choir on the far left, other voices join in imitation, each in turn falling silent as the music moves around the eight choirs. All forty voices enter simultaneously for a few bars, and then the pattern of the opening is reversed, with the music passing from choir eight to choir one. There is another brief full section, after which the choirs sing in antiphonal pairs, throwing the sound across the space between them. Finally all voices join for the culmination of the work.

"Tallis is dead and music dies," lamented **William Byrd** (1540–1623), Tallis's pupil and, later, colleague. Byrd obtained the prestigious post of Gentleman of the Chapel Royal in 1572. Though he was not required to write in as many styles as Tallis—the political and religious situation in England had settled somewhat by Byrd's tenure—he was an impressive successor to his teacher. Byrd's musical challenges were more personal—he spent his life composing for a Protestant church as a devout Catholic. Many believe that his music often reflects his desire for the return of Catholicism in veiled terms, particularly in *Ne irascaris*, *Domine* and *Quomodo cantabimus*.

*Super flumina Babylonis* and *Quomodo cantabimus* came out of a musical exchange between **Philippe de Monte** (1521–1603) and Byrd. Monte's *Super flumina*, a setting of Psalm 136 (vs. 1, 3, 4, 2), was sent in 1583 to Byrd, who continued the Psalm setting in *Quomodo* (Psalm 136: 4-7) using the same number of parts and in the same key beginning with the fourth verse set by Monte. The fourth verse of the Psalm, which both composers set — "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" — possibly reflects the desire of both to practice Catholicism in an age when it was not permitted. The two composers knew and respected each other. Monte traveled to England in 1554 as a member of the chapel of Prince Philip of Spain and may have met Byrd during his visit.

English composer **Thomas Morley** (1557–1602) was a student and great admirer of Byrd, but his career took a different direction from his teacher's. Morley was an enthusiast for Italian madrigals. After obtaining the latest madrigals from Rome or Venice, he reset them to English words, changed a few notes, and used the Elizabethan monopoly on printing music (which Byrd generously passed along to him and his family) to sell cheap mass-market editions of them to the English middle class. *Domine Dominus noster* is one of Morley's rare serious works. He must have had a taste for borrowing, as the last half-dozen measures are lifted directly from one of Byrd's motets, *Libera me Domine* (not on the program). Despite his love for light-hearted Italian music, Morley still reserved high praise for the Latin motet:

"... of all others [it] requireth most art, and moveth and causeth most strange effects in the hearer: for it will draw the auditor, and especially the skillful auditor, into a devout and reverent kind of consideration of him for whose praise it was made."

Closing the first half is Byrd's *Tribue Domine*. The most peculiar aspect of *Tribue* is the text Byrd chose. Unlike most of the other pieces in the *Cantiones Sacrae*, this text is from a medieval collection of Meditations (Meditations on the Life of Christ) attributed to St. Augustine. Divided into three parts, the six-part motet clocks in at around twelve minutes. Byrd pulls out his full arsenal, perfectly balancing polyphonic and homophonic textures as well as polychoral writing.

The 1589 publication of the *Cantiones Sacrae* contains many of Byrd's greatest motets including *Ne irascaris, Domine*. Although the music was mostly non-liturgical and intended as chamber music, many of these pieces may have been written for England's oppressed Roman Catholic community, as evidenced by the textual references to Jerusalem lying desolate and the pleas to God to remember his people.

**Nico Muhly's** (b. 1981) *Fallings* takes inspiration from Byrd's *Ne irascaris, Domine*. The text is the verses of Isaiah directly following and preceding the verses set by Byrd. Unlike the Byrd, which laments a Jerusalem already fallen, Muhly gives the sense that we are watching the fall of the temple in real time. The opening paints a picture of a house that is unblemished, almost childlike in its innocence and security. But the mood quickly becomes more serious and threatened, and we are soon hearing about the temple burning with fire in a texture that becomes increasingly agitated. In the second half, this cacophony is suspended for a moment of respite, in which the text asks God whether help is forthcoming. Muhly follows this with an earlier verse from the same chapter that takes comfort from the image of God as potter. Like *Ne irascaris*, Muhly breaks up the polyphony with sections of homophonic writing to give certain sections more gravity.

Nico writes: "*Fallings* takes small melodic fragments and large harmonic building-blocks from the second part of *Ne irascaris Domine — Civitas Sancti Tui* and explores them through repetition and mutation: sometimes quite subtle and other times dramatic. I tried to imitate Byrd's contrasting textures of imitative counterpoint and hymn-like chords. The 'burning of fire' uses traditional word-painting, and the end obsesses over Byrd's chords on Sion deserta (Zion has become a wilderness) and on the phrase 'O Lord, thou art our father.'"

- Notes compiled by 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. The Byrd Ensemble, directed by Markdavin Obenza, is a Seattle-based professional ensemble made up of 10 to 12 singers.

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

## ABOUT NICO MUHLY



Photo: Heidi Solander

Nico Muhly, born in 1981, is an American composer who writes orchestral music, works for the stage, music for film, choral music, chamber music and sacred music. He's received commissions from The Metropolitan Opera: *Two Boys* (2011), and *Marnie* (2018); Carnegie Hall, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, The Australian Chamber Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, the Tallis Scholars, King's College and Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, at which he is composer in residence. He is a collaborative partner at the San Francisco Symphony and has been featured at the Barbican and the Philharmonie de Paris as composer, performer, and curator. An avid collaborator, he has worked with choreographers Benjamin Millepied at the Paris Opéra Ballet, Bobbi Jene Smith at the Juilliard School, Justin Peck and Kyle Abraham at New York City Ballet; musicians Sufjan Stevens, The National, Teitur, Anohni, James Blake and Paul Simon. His work for screen includes scores for *The Reader* (2008) and *Kill Your Darlings* (2013), *Howards End* (2017) and *Pachinko* (2022). Recordings of his works have been released by Decca and Nonesuch, and he is part of the artist-run record label Bedroom Community, which released his first two albums, *Speaks Volumes* (2006) and *Mothertongue* (2008).



## WELCOME TO ST. JAMES CATHEDRAL

St. James is the Cathedral Church for the Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle and its Archbishop, the Most Reverend Paul D. Etienne. We are also a parish church for a vibrant faith community of 2,500 households, with a long history that reaches back to Seattle's early days. We are an inner-city parish with an extensive social outreach to the homeless and disadvantaged of our city. We are a diverse community that welcomes, accepts, and celebrates the differences we all bring.

The Cathedral is also a center for many musical, cultural, and ecumenical events, and a crossroads where ideas and challenges both old and new are explored in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Cathedral is a place where the rich and ongoing tradition of sacred music and art is treasured and expanded.

Above all, St. James Cathedral is a community of prayer.

We welcome you to St. James Cathedral. Find out more at [www.stjames-cathedral.org](http://www.stjames-cathedral.org).

### **St. James Cathedral**

The Most Reverend Paul D. Etienne,  
*Archbishop of Seattle*

The Very Reverend Michael G. Ryan,  
*Pastor of St. James Cathedral*

Joseph Adam,  
*Director of Music and Cathedral Organist*

Christopher Stroh,  
*Assistant Director of Music and Organist*

Stacey Sunde,  
*Director of Youth Music*

Marjorie Bunday,  
*Administrative Assistant for Music and Concert Manager*

Corinna Laughlin,  
*Director of Liturgy*

## ABOUT MARKDAVIN OBENZA



ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MARKDAVIN OBENZA is a choral director, recording producer, singer, and composer. He is also the director of Seattle-based choral ensemble Radiance, specializing in the performance of American choral music, and is the Director of Choral Activities at Trinity Parish Church in Seattle, WA. As a producer for independent record label Scribe Records, Markdavin has produced CD recordings for over 40 choirs and soloists, of which several have been reviewed in *Gramophone*, *Early Music America*, *Early Music Review*, and *Fanfare*. Markdavin has also produced and directed a number of virtual choirs, including Caroline Shaw's *and the swallow*, which was featured on Modern Choral Masterworks, broadcast by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. He has also produced "concertmentaries" and musical broadcasts in collaboration with various music ensembles and artists during the pandemic, including *Shaker Spirituals in Maine* (2021), featuring composer Kevin Siegfried and Radiance, for the Library of Congress American Folklife Center.

## TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

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### Candidi facti sunt

Thomas Tallis (1505–1585)

Candidi facti sunt Nazarei ejus, alleluya. Splendorem  
Dei dederunt, alleluya. Et sicut lac coagulati sunt,  
alleluya.

*Radiant white became his Nazarites, alleluia; they  
gave splendour to God, alleluia, and are curdled like  
milk, alleluia.*

In omnem terram exivit sonus eorum: et in fines orbis  
terræ verba eorum.

*Their sound is gone out through all the earth; and  
their words to the ends of the earth.*

Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the  
Holy Spirit.*

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### Super flumina Babylonis

Philippe de Monte (1521–1603)

Super flumina Babylonis  
illic sedimus et flevimus,  
dum recordaremur tui Sion.  
illic interrogatorunt nos,  
qui captivos abduxerunt nos,  
verba cantionum;  
Quomodo cantabimus canticum  
Domini in terra aliena?  
In salicibus in medio ejus  
suspendimus organa nostra:

*By the streams of Babylon  
there we sat and wept:  
when we remembered you, Zion.  
There they questioned us,  
those who had led us into captivity,  
about the words of our songs.  
How shall we sing the Lord's song  
in a foreign land?  
There on the willows  
we hung up our harps.*

*-Psalm 136:1, 3, 4, 2 (Vulgate)*

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### Quomodo cantabimus

William Byrd (1540–1623)

Quomodo cantabimus canticum  
Domini in terra aliena?  
Si oblitus fuero tui, Jerusalem,  
oblivioni detur dextra mea.  
Adhaereat lingua mea faucibus meis,  
si non meminero tui;  
si non proposuero Jerusalem  
in principio laetitiae meae.  
Memor esto, Domine, filiorum  
Edom in die Jerusalem.

*How shall we sing the Lord's song  
in a foreign land?  
If I should forget you, Jerusalem,  
let my right hand fall idle.  
Let my tongue stick in my throat,  
if I do not remember you;  
if I do not keep Jerusalem  
as the greatest of my joys.  
Remember, Lord, what the sons  
of Edom did on that day in Jerusalem.*

*-Psalm 136: 4-7*

## Tribue Domine

William Byrd

Tribue, Domine, ut donec in hoc fragile corpore positus sum laudet te cor meum, laudet te lingua mea, et omnia ossa mea dicant: Domine, quis similis tui? Tu es Deus omnipotens, quem trinum in personis, et unum in substantia deitatis colimus et adoramus: Patrem ingenitum, Filium de Patre unigenitum, Spiritum Sanctum de utroque procedentem et in utroque permanentem, sanctam et individuum Trinitatem, unum Deum omnipotentem.

Te deprecor, supplico et rogo, auge fidem, auge spem, auge charitatem: Fac nos per ipsam gratiam tuam semper in fide stabiles, et in opera efficaces, ut per fidem rectam, et condigna fidei opera, ad vitam, te miserante, perveniamus aeternam.

Gloria Patri, qui creavit nos, gloria Filio, qui redemit nos, gloria Spiritui Sancto, qui sanctificavit nos: gloria summae et individuae Trinitati, cuius opera inseparabilia sunt, cuius imperium sine fine manet. Te decet laus, te decet hymnus, tibi debetur omnis honor, tibi benediction et claritas, tibi gratiarum action, tibi honor, virtus et fortitude, Deo nostro, in saecula saeculorum. Amen

*Grant, O Lord, that while I am in this fragile body my heart may praise you, my tongue may praise you, and all my being may say: Lord, who is there like you? You are the Almighty God whom we worship and adore, three persons, and one divine essence: the Father unbegotten, the only begotten Son of the Father, the Holy Spirit proceeding from both, yet abiding in both, the holy and undivided Trinity, One God omnipotent.*

*I pray, ask, and entreat you: increase my faith, increase my hope, increase my charity. By your grace make us always steadfast in our faith and successful in our deeds, that through true faith and deeds worthy of that faith we may come, by your mercy, to eternal life.*

*Glory to the Father, who created us. Glory to the Son, who redeemed us. Glory to the Holy Spirit, who sanctified us. Glory to the highest and undivided Trinity, whose works are inseparable, whose kingdom abides for ever. You are worthy of praise, worthy of songs of praise: all honor and blessing and glory, thanksgiving, honor, virtue, and might be yours, our God, for ever and ever. Amen*

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## Intermission

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## Miserere nostri

Thomas Tallis

Miserere nostri Domine, miserere nostri.

*Have mercy on us Lord, have mercy on us.*

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## Ne irascaris Domine

William Byrd

Ne irascaris Domine satis,  
et ne ultra memineris iniquitatis nostrae.  
Ecce respice populus tuus omnes nos.

*Be not angry, O Lord,  
and remember our iniquity no more.  
Behold, we are all your people.*

Civitas sancti tui facta est deserta.  
Sion deserta facta est,  
Jerusalem desolata est.

*Your holy city has become a wilderness.  
Zion has become a wilderness,  
Jerusalem has been made desolate.*

Fallings (World Premiere)

Nico Muhly (b. 1981)

The house of our hallowing and of our glory, where our fathers praised thee, is made into burning of fire; and all our desirable things be turned into fallings.

But now, O Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.

*-Isaiah 64 v. 8 (King James Version)*

Lord, whether on these things thou shalt withhold thee? shalt thou be still, and shalt thou torment us greatly?

*-Isaiah 64 v. 11–12 (Wycliffe, modernised)*

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Domine Dominus noster

Thomas Morley (1557–1602)

Domine, Dominus noster,  
quam admirabile est nomen tuum  
in universa terra!

*O Lord, our Lord,  
how admirable is your name  
in the whole earth!*

*-Psalm 8*

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Spem in alium

Thomas Tallis

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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Support the Byrd Ensemble by making a donation.



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