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# GOLDEN RENAISSANCE



*The Tallis Scholars at 50*





The Tallis Scholars in Merton College  
Chapel, March 1, 1980



September 30, 1987, was the date when history was made for two companies. For *Gramophone* it was the first time in the life of the *Gramophone* Awards (admittedly only 10 years old at the time) when a recording of Early Music was voted our Recording of the Year. Dame Elizabeth Legge-Schwarzkopf presented the Awards that year, and amid some pretty stellar company (see the group photo below), a young Peter Phillips collected the Award. It was a major milestone in the life of Gimell, The Tallis Scholars' record label. Thirty-five years on from that memorable occasion, and 50 in the life of The Tallis Scholars, it's cause for celebration.

It probably shows a staggering lack of curiosity on my part, but in the nearly 40 years that I've known about, and listened to, Gimell recordings, I've never wondered what 'a gimell' actually is. And now I know: (according to *Grove*) it's a '15th- and 16th-century English term denoting the counterpoint that results from the temporary splitting of one voice part in a polyphonic composition into two voices of equal range'. It's a fitting name for the label that, for many people, introduced them to the sound of polyphony, and opened the door on an entirely new world.

When Gimell was founded by Peter Phillips and the producer Steve Smith, the idea of an 'own-label' or 'single-artist label' was a novelty; nowadays it's become much more commonplace. The benefits are colossal: total control of the process from studio to release, a focused marketing approach that isn't diluted by the demands of other artists, superior quality control, and

the ability to coordinate the live performances with recordings in a way that the pop and rock scene have done for years, but which the classical world has only embraced relatively recently. The risks are, of course, also considerable, but have been skilfully avoided. Hence this glorious Big 50!

To mark this major milestone, we've mined the *Gramophone* archive and have gathered together a collection of articles and reviews that tell the story, as reflected in our pages, of The Tallis Scholars' remarkable journey on record, and also sets the Early Music scene in the group's formative years. It's not only a story of an ensemble developing and cultivating a very particular style and sound – captured in recorded quality of impressive fidelity – but it's a story of a single-minded service to a wondrous repertoire. And sheer hard work – their 50th anniversary concert on November 3 is their 2522nd (of which 1721 were given outside the UK)! Long may they continue to champion this extraordinarily rich, powerful and life-affirming music. **James Jolly** Editor-in-Chief, *Gramophone*, October 2023

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The presentation of this year's GRAMOPHONE Record Awards was held on September 30th at London's Savoy Hotel. Dr Elisabeth Legge-Schwarzkopf presented the Awards. The Award winners, back row, left to right: David Murray (Producer, EMI International, Classical Division—Contemporary); Keith Hardwick (Remastering Controller, EMI International, Classical Division—Historical vocal); John Pellowe (Engineer, Decca Recording Studios—Engineering); John Holland (Product Manager, EMI Records UK—Remastered Compact Disc); Peter Wadland (Producer, Decca Recording Studios—Choral); Klaus Tennstedt (Orchestral); Bryden Thomson (Concerto). Front row, left to right: Stefan Bown (General Manager, EMI Records UK—Chamber and Historical non-vocal); Rosalind Plowright (Operatic); Peter Phillips (Early Music and Record of the Year); Dr Elisabeth Legge-Schwarzkopf; Brigitte Fassbaender (Solo vocal); Roger Norrington (Period); Volker Straus (Producer, Philips Classics Productions—Instrumental).

Winning  
Recording of  
the Year at the  
Gramophone  
Awards, 1987



OCTOBER 1987

# The 1987 Record Awards



The Tallis Scholars with Peter Phillips

[photo: Gimell/Barda]

**R**ECORD OF THE YEAR in this year's GRAMOPHONE Record Awards is the Gimell issue of the *Missa Pange lingua* and the *Missa La sol fa re mi* by Josquin Desprez, from The Tallis Scholars directed by Peter Phillips. This is the first time in the ten-year history of the awards that a record of early music has won the top prize, and the first time that a small company, Gimell, specializing in choral records of the highest quality, has been responsible for the Record of the Year.

It was only last year that voting procedure was changed to have all the categories, except those for engineering, decided by direct voting from the panel of GRAMOPHONE critics. Before that panels of four or five specialist critics decided the awards for early music and other categories, leaving only general categories like operatic, orchestral, concerto or instrumental available for the Record of the Year contest. Now with the

full panel given the chance to vote in each category, opting out if preferred, there is no limit any longer over what issues are eligible to be Record of the Year. The choice this year of The Tallis Scholars' record of Josquin Desprez, the runaway winner in the Early Music category, is a very positive indication of the benefit of the change.

Remarkably, every single one of the critics voting in that Early Music category gave a first choice to that Gimell issue. Critics opting into each category are asked to number their choices from one to six on the final voting list. That allows a proportional evaluation to be made between the winners in each category in finally deciding the Record of the Year.

Winning a full complement of first choices made the Gimell issue virtually unassailable, though the runner-up as Record of the Year, EMI's recording of Sir Michael Tip-

pett's massive oratorio, *The Mask of Time*, winner of the Contemporary award, ran it close. This put it well ahead of all other final contenders in that section, with the next in line, the Wergo issue of Elliott Carter works with the London Sinfonietta conducted by Oliver Knussen, achieving fewer than two-thirds the number of votes. Significantly, perhaps, that section, too, used to be a specialist category, not eligible to produce the Record of the Year.

As before, the final voting lists of six or seven issues in each category (ten in the orchestral section, involving many more records) were drawn up in a two-stage process. The full initial list came from nominations made by the companies themselves, each based on a proportion of their output. On these lists—with critics allowed to fill in obvious omissions in special nominations—groups of specialist critics voted to produce the final lists.

The important change in the Awards this year involved Period Performance. Last year there were, for example, several choral issues in the Early Music (Baroque) category which were thereby excluded from the main choral section. With period performance, from early and baroque music to Beethoven and beyond, an increasingly important factor among record issues, it was felt that the Early Music (Baroque) category should be replaced by the new Period Performance category, in which any records aiming at 'authentic' performing practice would be eligible. That obviously allows such issues to be eligible for more than one category, whether choral, orchestral, operatic or whatever, but that course effectively eliminates previous objections over the allocation of category for each issue.

The Period Performance award has at once justified the change, Roger Norrington's much-admired





Peter Philips and producer Steve C. Smith

[photo: Gimell/Barda]

recording for EMI with the London Classical Players of Beethoven's Symphonies Nos. 2 and 8. Previously that would obviously have been ineligible for the Early Music (Baroque) category, yet presenting very different claims from the main run of orchestral issues. In fact it did prove to be one of the three front-runners in the main Orchestral category, won by Klaus Tennstedt's fine EMI recording of Mahler's Eighth Symphony with the LPO and Choir. The other runner-up was Charles Dutoit's brilliant Montreal recording by Decca of Holst's *The Planets*, which had already been chosen by the "Sounds in Retrospect" panel at their summer meeting as winner in the Engineering category.

Though The Tallis Scholars' record of Josquin Desprez was such a clear winner in the Early Music category, it had a significant rival in The Hilliard Ensemble's recent EMI Reflexe issue of choral music by Dufay including the *Missa super L'homme armé*, which most of those voting made their second choice. In the Period Performance category Roger Norrington's record of Beethoven was similarly a clear winner, but there was substantial backing too for Reinhard Goebel's revelatory collection with Cologne Musica Antiqua for Archiv Produktion of cantatas by members of the Bach family before Johann Sebastian.

In the Choral category voting was very close between four of the six issues on the final list. The Oiseau-Lyre issue of Handel's *Athalie* directed by Christopher Hogwood

with Dame Joan Sutherland, Emma Kirkby and Aled Jones in the cast, came out by the narrowest possible margin ahead of John Eliot Gardiner's set for Archiv Produktion of Bach's *St John Passion*. Closely behind, with exactly the same vote were the recent Hyperion set from Harry Christophers and The Sixteen of Handel's *Messiah* and the EMI set of Elgar's *King Olaf* with the LPO conducted by Vernon Handley.

The Operatic category, too, brought fairly close voting for five of the six issues on the final list. In the end the DG set of Verdi's *La forza del destino* conducted by Giuseppe Sinopoli was a clear winner, a few points ahead of the next four issues, which came in a cluster—Handel's *Alcina* conducted for EMI by Richard Hickox, Chausson's *Le roi Arthus* from Erato, the EMI set of Verdi's *Otello* with Plácido Domingo, conducted by Lorin Maazel and John Eliot Gardiner's Lyon Opera set for Philips of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*—in that order, each a single point behind the other. Interestingly, though the DG *Forza* was substantially ahead of that group, well supported by a high proportion of those voting, it won only one first choice.

In the Solo Vocal category Brigitte Fassbaender's record of Liszt and Strauss Lieder for DG was similarly a clear winner, but won only two first choices, where each of the runners-up, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau's recording of Schubert's *Die Winterreise* with Alfred Brendel and Josef Protschka's Capriccio issue of Schu-

bert's *Die schöne Müllerin*, had three. In the Historical Vocal category all three of the issues attracting most votes were of transfers made by Keith Hardwick for EMI of old 78rpm material. The collection of recordings by Tito Schipa emerged ahead of the Wagner recordings by Kirsten Flagstad. The Historical Non-Vocal award brought remarkably even voting for all six of the final issues with the last four within a single point of each other—Hindemith conducting Hindemith, Beecham conducting Delius, Lipatti playing Chopin and Toscanini conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra in Beethoven (all EMI). But well ahead of those were the EMI set of the Busch Quartet playing Schubert and the Archive Piano Recordings set of Moriz Rosenthal's complete HMV recordings of 1934-7. Though the Busch set was a clear winner, the Rosenthal won more first choices.

In the Chamber category the winning issue of Chausson's *Concert* for Piano, Violin and String Quartet, made by EMI Pathé Marconi with Jean-Philippe Collard, was fairly closely followed in heavy voting by the CBS issue of the Piano and Wind Quintets of Mozart and Beethoven from Murray Perahia and members of the ECO, and the EMI collection of the complete Beethoven piano trios with Ashkenazy, Perlman and Harrell. The Instrumental category, similarly well-supported, had Alfred Brendel's record of Haydn for Philips closely followed by the DG collection of the late Emil Gilels's last Beethoven sonata recordings.

In the Concerto category the Chandos issue of Hummel piano concertos played by Stephen Hough with the ECO conducted by Bryden Thomson won no fewer than six first choices. The close runner-up was Murray Perahia's recording for CBS of Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto*, though it only won two first choices. Perahia's coupling of the Third and Fourth Concertos in the same series was the winner last year.

As before, the two awards for Engineering were decided at the summer meeting of the "Sounds in Retrospect" panel. As mentioned, the final vote in the main category went to the Decca issue of Charles Dutoit and the Montreal Symphony Orchestra in Holst's *The Planets*, but there were several hot contenders, particularly among Chandos issues, notably Neeme Järvi's recording with the Scottish National Orchestra of Rachmaninov's cantata, *The bells*. In the award for a remastered CD, which last year went to the historic Decca issue of Britten's *Peter Grimes*, the panel felt that such issues as Sir Colin Davis's Philips set of Berlioz's *Les troyens*, was too recent to qualify, dating from 1970. Other issues seriously considered included Mravinsky's set of the last three Tchaikovsky symphonies with the Leningrad Philharmonic for DG and Karajan's Decca recording of Verdi's *Otello*, but final choice went to the collected set of Beecham's stereo recordings of Delius, covering as it does transfers of recordings made at a number of different times.

EDWARD GREENFIELD.



THERE have been many welcome surprises in my recent listening. The last retrospect of music before 1600 was 18 months ago, and much has happened since. At the time Tess Knighton began by saying that it looked as though the emphasis of 'early' music was becoming later but that in fact the earlier period was continuing strongly. That is how it still looks: the GRAMOPHONE editorial office produced a list of over 70 records that seemed worth my attention. Many of them were old friends (or at least old acquaintances). But given the recent increase of new issues and reissues, not to mention the fact that most records now contain over 70 minutes of music as opposed to the 50 minutes of ten years ago, it is almost inevitable that several major issues should have escaped me entirely. And it is also inevitable that much of what follows concerns records that I have only now heard for the first time, records that grabbed me, opening up new vistas of musical pleasure and excitement. Moreover, in these days when most records are too long for comfortable listening in a single session, they were all records that I simply couldn't put down.

## Carver

Take, for example, the case of Robert Carver. He is decidedly one of the strangest of all sixteenth-century composers, often with cluttered textures, lines that run in bizarre directions and harmonic progressions that can seem incompetent when heard alongside more famous composers of the time such as Taverner in England or Gombert in the Low Countries. But in his native Scotland, Carver has a determined and enthusiastic following of musicians who rightly say that comparison with his non-Scots contemporaries is only marginally relevant: what we have here is a composer with a distinctive and individual style who must be approached on his own terms. But even that was easier said than done, because much of his music is still unpublished (though the Scottish Music Information Centre has, and can supply, handwritten scores of everything).

Now you can hear his entire works on three records from ASV, sung by the Cappella Nova (Ⓢ ZCGAU124 and 126; Ⓢ CDGAU124 and 126, 10/91, and Ⓢ ZCGAU127; Ⓢ CDGAU127—to be reviewed). Some of their performances are better than others: the famous 19-voice motet *O bone Jesu* and the 10-voice Mass *Dum sacrum mysterium* are magnificent, the confidence and clarity of the sound challenging any of the most famous choirs, and conducted by Alan Tavener with a truly admirable flexibility and sensitivity; others, such as the intricate four-voice Mass *L'homme armé*, are more chaotic. But everything is well enough done to give considerable pleasure and—in some ways more important—to allow the listener to begin to come to terms with the maverick ways of this unusual composer.

Listeners may well divide on whether he is a special kind of genius or a provincial fumbler. After two discs I was beginning to get a little

tired of the ubiquitous runs up through a fourth, of the persistent mordent-like figures in his melodic lines, and—particularly in the thicker textures—his reliance on an apparently irrational alternation of chords on G and F. But those are only the surface of his musical language. Part of the challenge for the listener is to hear beyond those details to the substance: it is a challenge to which I look forward with relish.

Still, the irony here is that the support of the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Airports makes Robert Carver the first composer of any quantity of music before Dowland whose entire known works are available on record. (In this, Carver narrowly beats the glittering Philippe de Vitry—a recording of whose works I will review next month—to the mark; nor is there room here to give more than a passing delighted reference to the start of Decca's CD reissue of the complete Dowland from The Consort of Musicke.) Meanwhile, assembling a collection of even the major Masses of Josquin is rather like collecting the Bruckner symphonies in 1950: several are still not available anywhere, and for others you need to go abroad.

## Records from abroad

In that search, many will welcome a record of Josquin Mass *Gaudeamus* by the Cappella Pratensis from Amsterdam under Rebecca Stewart (Jubal Ⓢ CDZV90117-2). This is firmly one of Josquin's masterpieces, exploring the borrowed chant melody in a breathtaking variety of ways with a clarity of exposition that no other composer could quite match. The ten singers of the Cappella Pratensis are consistently clear and elegant, the women on the top line sounding remarkably like boys of the throaty continental kind that I imagine Josquin heard. There may be rough moments, and they have an annoying habit of preceding pieces with a bit of the opening voice sung alone; but the disc, which also includes motets by Ockeghem and Josquin, takes a most welcome place among my gallery of treasured Josquin recordings.

While on the subject of records not officially distributed or not widely available in this country, it is worth noting several more, mainly from very small companies. Even if the performances are not always entirely polished, the serious collector of Renaissance music may want to know about them. Thus from the Schola

Cantorum in Basle there is an eloquent record of sixteenth-century German adaptations of French and Italian songs under the title "Musicalische Artzney" (Ex Libris Ⓢ CD6093) directed by Willem de Waal and drawing heavily on the excellent research of John Kmetz. And also from the Schola Cantorum there is a superb record of music from the fourteenth-century *Codex Engelberg 314* (Deutsche Harmonia Mundi Ⓢ RD77185), directed by Dominique Vellard with the help of Wulf Arlt, whose recent lavish edition of the manuscript has done so much to clarify our knowledge of Swiss music during those years. Dominique Vellard directs again, this time issued under the auspices of Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Lyons, in "Les tons de la musique" (Harmonic Records, Ⓢ H/CD8827). This anthology of early chants is organized according to their mode so as to give some aural sense of this matter so urgently discussed by the theorists of the time (and indeed modern textbooks) but rarely understood by listeners (or students); and the performers here are no students or amateurs but the Ensemble Gilles Binchois.

Finally, from Seville there is a five-record set of local composers performed by the ensemble Taller Ziriyab and issued with support from the department of education and sciences of the Junta de Andalucía (Dial Discos, Madrid Ⓢ CALS017-21): Guerrero and Morales are fairly well represented elsewhere; but this is a first chance to hear any quantity of Juan Vasquez, of the wonderful Peñalosa and particularly of the earliest of them all, the bizarre Juan de Triana (another composer who could easily be described as a provincial fumbler, but then again ...). It would be as well to mention that the performances here are very much in the heavily orchestrated style of Venhoda's Prague Madrigal Singers; but even if you think this is not the best approach, you may agree that it is worth putting your prejudices aside with music of such undoubted interest or quality that is so rarely heard.

Returning to what is actually available in Britain, however, it is worth welcoming, however briefly, the mid-price release here of several CD reissues of the EMI Reflexe series—which was only sporadically available here. Of special interest for the pre-1600 period are the Studio der frühen Musik's "Roman de Fauvel"

(Ⓢ CDM7 63430-2) and particularly their Ciconia record (Ⓢ CDM7 63442-2), as well as The Hilliard Ensemble's Byrd Masses (Ⓢ CDM7 63441-2). It is not yet clear how much of the original Reflexe series will be made available in this way.

There is a fine Italian record from the small and young company Tactus, containing Emilio de' Cavalieri's music for Tenebrae and the Holy Week responsories (Tactus/Conifer Ⓢ TC55030501, 1/91)—unusual and striking works by a composer who is normally known only for his later (and blander) *Rappresentazione di anima e di corpo*. It has an excellently rich continuo group (much aided by the contribution of Rolf Lislevand on chitarrone), and some irresistibly stylish singing, particularly by the soprano Elisabetta Tiso. The Padua Centre for Early Music Madrigalists under the lucid direction of Livio Picotti show that glorious combination of an unmistakably Italian vocal production coupled with the balance, intonation and clarity of tone that have recently come to be called the 'English sound'.

Something even closer to the 'English sound' can be heard in two records from Belgium by the Huelgas Ensemble under Paul van Nevel. I am not sure I entirely share Mary Berry's enthusiasm for "La dissection d'un Homme armé" (Sony Classical Vivarte Ⓢ CD45860, 6/91), an anthology of sections from the coherent cycle of six *L'homme armé* Masses probably from the 1470s: much of the music whizzes past at such a speed that you lose the details, and many of the textures are confused; but at least we now have on record some of the music that generated Sir Peter Maxwell Davies's *Missa super L'homme armé*. Far more impressive, however, is their record of Brumel's imposing 12-voice Mass *Et ecce terrae motus* (Sony Classical Vivarte Ⓢ CD46348, 5/91), a work that, apart from much else, shows what a slightly earlier continental contemporary of Carver does with multi-voice textures—particularly in terms of clear harmonic designs. Here there is well controlled and expressive singing of such quality that there seems a danger of the leadership in Renaissance choral music moving away from England.

## Three British ensembles

Even so, turning from these to The Tallis Scholars is a reminder of how supremely good Peter Phillips and his singers really are. It is like the move from an ordinary family car to a high-octane Ferrari, a magnificently honed machine in which every component functions superbly. Recently there has been an undercurrent of discontent with the performances of The Tallis Scholars, a disappointment that they sing so much different music in more or less the same way; and along with that there has been increasing reference to the fact (perfectly obvious and always freely admitted) that the women on the top lines do not and cannot sound like the boys or falsetto men used at the time. Listening to their new record of music by Isaac



(Gimell ⊕ 1585T-23; ⊕ CDGIM023, 10/91) makes any such remarks seem to miss the point entirely. As the years pass and the singers of the ensemble become more experienced, the sheer musical control of their performances becomes more vital. So if their actual sound quality is approximately the same for Isaac as it is for Palestrina, the musical details come ever more directly from the shapes of the lines themselves and from the varieties of texture in the particular piece—and at the end of the day that must be more important than any abstract notions of 'authenticity'.

As Peter Phillips observes in his note to the record, Isaac has had a disappointing career in recent years. Editions of his music are scattered and incomplete. Writing about him is confined almost entirely to the German scholarly presses, and very little is available on record even though in the sixteenth century his reputation was second only to that of Josquin. If there is a slight disappointment in this new record it is that the big work on it is the *Missa de Apostolis*, certainly a work in six voices and showing all the range of colours and textures that Isaac deployed with such evident relish, but all the same an alternim work—short chunks of polyphony alternating with chant—which gives little hint of his broad and very un-Josquinian rhetoric. (I see, having written this, that TK absolutely disagrees; but the contradiction between us can stand as representing two valid viewpoints.) For some sense of that you must go to the five motets that complete the record, especially the famous *Virgo prudentissima*. Here the generous flow of the singing amply shows why Isaac was so widely respected; and it leaves you looking forward enthusiastically to the next Isaac record from The Tallis Scholars.

Another British ensemble that is too easily taken for granted is The Consort of Musick. This is high-octave music-making of a rather different kind, partly because they may take more risks in what they do. Despite the deserved success of the first issues in their planned set of the Monteverdi madrigals, what struck my ear with most force—again perhaps because of the surprise and delight at hearing neglected music so persuasively presented—was their record devoted to the work of Thomas Ravenscroft (Virgin Classics Veritas ⊕ VC7 91217-2, 8/91). It is not just that the record shows an unaccustomed side of The Consort of Musick's work, largely unbuttoned and using a variety of regional accents, though without ever for a moment short-changing the music. It is rather that we have here another composer who rarely hits the headlines and is sometimes thought a bit of a joke (for years various people have been trying to persuade their research students to concentrate on Ravenscroft, but still apparently without any success). Certainly he is no Isaac, and he can hardly boast the idiosyncratic style of Carver; but he did write a large quantity of very fine music in a variety of styles. Some of the music has been well recorded before: Alfred Deller was a staunch supporter of his catches and his lighter consort songs. But it is supremely invigorating to hear a record entirely

of Ravenscroft's work, giving a wide and representative selection of what he did—including three impressive fantasies for viols and two positively mouth-watering Latin motets. Obviously the style of his simpler pieces is the result of a clear decision to compose in that way; and hearing them alongside the more intricate works helped me to understand some of the skill in the technically less ambitious pieces. That is to say that hearing brought insight and deeper understanding as well as a sense that Ravenscroft merits a rather higher position than he currently has in the roster of composers from the Shakespearean era. Perhaps it may even persuade somebody to write the detailed study of his work that certain cognoscenti have for so long been saying it needs.

That brings us to the last of the records that dropped on to my doorstep this week and opened up unexpected new worlds of musical pleasure, the record by Fretwork

and organ is notoriously difficult. On all these fronts, the record seems to get it absolutely right. But the point is not so much the technical control (because there are a fair number of messy details and even plain old-fashioned blunders here); rather it is the verve and the vital musicianship that mark all the playing. To put four large consort sets together like this takes courage; to keep it all so alive that the ear never loses track or interest is very difficult indeed, but Fretwork manage it.

## Old friends

All of which leaves relatively little space to mention some superb records that have been in the house for rather longer: it is not that they have lost their novelty, rather that I have said my bit about most of them already and so feel less garrulous at this point.

Two records of thirteenth-century music have made a particularly deep impression. Christopher Page can

well on the way to a new and clearer grasp of thirteenth-century music.

From the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it is very good to welcome the arrival in Britain of records by the Ensemble Gilles Binchois, with songs by Machaut (Harmonic/Complete Record Co ⊕ H/CD8825, 6/91) and by Dufay and Binchois (Harmonic ⊕ H/CD8719, 6/91). This is not just because it is refreshing to have early French song well sung by native French speakers but because their performances are so much more restrained than we are accustomed to hearing. Those who think some British groups are far too unemotional in their approach to this music may find that listening to the Ensemble Gilles Binchois rather changes their attitude. I am by no means suggesting that this is the right, the 'true French' or necessarily the best way of getting the most out of the music; but I am saying that these are performances that seem at first blush a little bland but grow on you considerably on repeated hearing.

My next two records come similarly from colleagues of Dominique Vellard at the Basle Schola Cantorum (an institution that becomes more and more important for the world of pre-1550 chamber music, where Britain has now definitively lost her former leadership, perhaps the result of a decade of comparative neglect from BBC Radio 3, while comparable continental radio stations help their local ensembles so much more). The Ferrara Ensemble under Crawford Young offers a representative anthology of the secular music of Alexander Agricola (Deutsche Harmonia Mundi ⊕ RD77038, 7/90): this contemporary of Josquin was the most prolific song composer of his generation, and it is again a relatively restrained approach here that allows the music's many astonishing qualities to emerge on repeated hearing. And Hopkinson Smith devotes two records to the earliest vihuela composer, Luis Milán (Auvidis Astrée/Koch International ⊕ E7748 and E7777, 5/91), giving an amazingly lucid account of the music, aided in the second record by the distinctive voice of Montserrat Figueras.

Very briefly I must recall and commend Christopher Wilson's two elegantly presented anthologies of Spanish vihuela music and Elizabethan lute music (Virgin Classics Veritas ⊕ VC7 91136-4; ⊕ VC7 91136-2, 4/91 and VC7 91216-2, 11/91). Ursula Dutschler's spirited and thoughtful recital of keyboard music by Byrd (Claves/Albany ⊕ CD50-9001, 10/90), the complete run of Byrd's five-voice *In nomine* settings together with music by Dowland from Fretwork (Virgin Classics Veritas ⊕ VC7 91117-4; ⊕ VC7 91117-2, 3/91) and The Parley of Instruments' ear-opening record of music from the court of the future King Charles I by Gibbons and Lupo (Hyperion ⊕ KA66395; ⊕ CDA66395, 9/91).

Finally a record that is hard to pigeonhole in a chronological survey but easy to commend as one of the most consistently well-performed records of the year, The Hilliard Ensemble's mixed anthology of "Sacred and Secular Music from Six Centuries" (Hyperion ⊕ KA66370; ⊕ CDA66370, 6/91).

*"To put four large consort sets together like this takes courage; to keep it all so alive that the ear never loses track or interest is very difficult indeed"*

devoted to the viol music of William Lawes (Virgin Classics Veritas ⊕ VC7 91187-4; ⊕ VC7 91187-2, 8/91)—an idiosyncratic composer if ever there was one, though in this case there is to my mind no possible doubt of his genius. Moreover William Lawes has not been neglected by the record companies over the years, except in the sense that it is hard to imagine the possibility of there being too much of his music on record. The six-part consort sets that take up so much of Fretwork's new record are very difficult to play and record well: the writing is astonishingly detailed, full of allusive imitations that can either disappear or be made to sound clumsy; the occasional surprising harmonic shifts or chromatic alterations need treating with considerable tact lest they upstage the rest of a piece; and the balance between viols

always be counted on to offer something new and stimulating in performances of awe-inspiring polish: last year's Gothic Voices record was "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" (Hyperion ⊕ KA66423; ⊕ CDA66423, 12/90), which was a challenging juxtaposition of trouvère songs and early motets, perhaps for the first time forcing the listener to hear the two apparently disparate musical worlds as part of the same artistic ambience. In a rather different way, Sequentia opened up a new and important chapter in our knowledge of the thirteenth century by devoting a record to settings of poetry by Philippe the Chancellor (Deutsche Harmonia Mundi ⊕ RD77035, 11/90) a man only recently seen to have been absolutely central to the evolution of the Notre Dame school. With those two records at your elbow you are

## FALLOWS'S CHOICE

**CARVER. SACRED CHORAL WORKS.** Cappella Nova / Alan Tavener. ASV Gaudeamus ⊕ ZCGAU124/ZCGAU126; ⊕ CDGAU124/CDGAU126 (10/91); ⊕ ZCGAU127; ⊕ CDGAU127.

**CAVALIERI.** Lamentationes Hieremiae prophetae. Padua Centre for Early Music Madrigalists / Livio Picotti. Tactus/Conifer ⊕ TC55030501 (1/91).

**ISAAC. SACRED CHORAL WORKS.** The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips. Gimell ⊕ 1585T-23; ⊕ CDGIM023 (10/91).

**LAWES. FOR YE VIOLLS.** Fretwork; Paul Nicholson (org). Virgin Classics Veritas ⊕ VC7 91187-4; ⊕ VC7 91187-2 (8/91).

**RAVENSCROFT. THERE WERE THREE RAVENS.** The Consort of Musick / Anthony Rooley. Virgin Classics Veritas ⊕ VC7 91217-2 (8/91).

**SACRED AND SECULAR MUSIC FROM SIX CENTURIES.** The Hilliard Ensemble. Hyperion ⊕ KA66370; ⊕ CDA66370 (6/91).





SEPTEMBER 1994

# The road to Rome from Oxford

For a brief two hours after sunset on a mild February evening in Rome, one corner of the city came to a standstill. The two streets framing the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore on the Esquiline hill were closed to all traffic by the authority of the Mayor of Rome and the City Police. The Vatican Technical Services Department had double-glazed six of the windows of a church which, of all their extra-territorial properties, is one of the most highly treasured. Gimell Records of Oxford, tipped off by their spies in Rome, had cunningly timed their application for the road closure to coincide

with the results of the local election, which just happened to return a mayor with distinctly Green sympathies...

This unprecedented initiative was all in honour of an English choir and their record company celebrating the 400th anniversary of the death of Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina in the church in which he was trained and was maestro di cappella from 1561-5. In 1594, the chronicles of the Papal choir declared, "This morning died the most excellent musician, Signor Giovanni Pierluigi, our dear companion, and Maestro di Cappella at St Peter's Church, where his funeral was attended not only by all the



This year marks  
the 400th  
anniversary  
of the death of  
Palestrina. **Peter  
Phillips and  
The Tallis  
Scholars** were  
invited to Rome to  
celebrate the event.  
**Hilary Finch**  
reports

*Photos Gimell*

Tallis Scholars were the choir the Accademia had originally wanted to invite to celebrate the anniversary. Phillips, for his part, wanted "to do something really spectacular; because Palestrina is probably the composer we sing most, more even, than Tallis. Our style is, to a considerable extent, formed on Palestrina. The discipline which his music demands of singers is one which we feel is needed throughout the singing of Renaissance polyphony. Palestrina is our greatest guide."

So, after three years of patient planning and slicing slowly through layers of Vatican bureaucracy, The Tallis Scholars pulled off their great coup. The Pontifical Commission for Social Communications approved the enterprise (the small matter of a Welshman ruling the roost at the Basilica itself played a not insignificant part in the proceedings), and a special stage was constructed in front of the altar. Thanks to the lighting necessary for the commercial video being simultaneously made and financed by Gimell, the gentle luminosity of the fifteenth-century mosaics which line the vast nave and glow from the apse, and the brilliance of the fifteenth-century ceiling, coffered with the first gold dispatched by Columbus from the newly-discovered Americas, radiated their splendour as never before.

The music chosen for the recording of a concert attended by a vast Basilica-full of friends, Romans and countrymen—and the Bishop of Palestrina's eponymous native village himself—had to be no less magnificent. Phillips chose Palestrina's large-scale works to make the most of the spatial effects offered by the Basilica's acoustic: the motets *Surge, illumina Jerusalem, Alma Redemptoris Mater*, the *Stabat Mater* and the *Magnificat primitoni*, both for double eight-voice choir. And then the sombre *Missa Papae Marcelli*, written with the

musicians of Rome, but by an infinite concourse of people". The Tallis Scholars, Peter Phillips and Gimell Records had been invited to Rome not to bury Palestrina but to praise him.

Their reputation had gone before them. Rome—or at least the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia—had set their sights on The Tallis Scholars; and Phillips had set his sights on Rome. With 18 of Palestrina's Masses in their repertoire, seven of his Masses and countless motets already on record, the *Gramophone* Early Music Award of 1991 behind them, and the four-disc "The Palestrina 400 Collection" just released, The

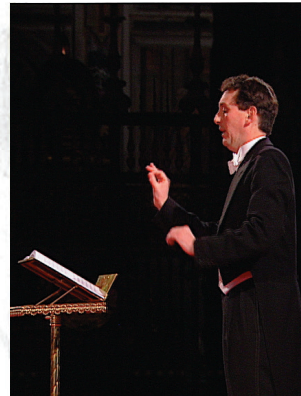




Deborah Roberts



Robert Johnston and Philip Cave



Peter Phillips

greatest economy of musical means to maximize the understanding of the words at a time when church music was being purged of its worldliness and polyphonic over-abundance.

The Mass's exceptional clarity and elegance put The Tallis Scholars on their mettle: the gentle bloom added by Santa Maria Maggiore's acoustic to an already highly concentrated sound made for a revelatory performance.

Phillips, to whom the Fondazione Palestrina made a special presentation at the end of the concert, was proud to have used editions specially prepared for the occasion from manuscripts in the Vatican Library. Lynne Gamblin prepared new editions from microfilms of the original copies: it was the first time that the second *Agnus Dei* of the Mass (separate from the rest of the Mass in some manuscripts) had been re-edited for several decades. No changes of any importance were made; but authenticity, as far as it can go in the absence of autograph manuscripts, was reaffirmed. One or two details of *musica ficta* remained to be sorted out—to flatten or not to flatten the leading note—but

Phillips maintains these must always remain a matter of taste, and he made his decisions accordingly.

Apart from work of a similarly scholarly nature in Rome itself (a formidable *Iconografia Palestriniana* and a new edition of the works of the Roman madrigalists were also presented at the Accademia's press conference for The Tallis Scholars), the Santa Maria Maggiore event was one of all too few Palestrina anniversary initiatives in Italy. Phillips knows that, despite his choir's invitation, and their warm reception, Italy is never likely to have a love affair with him on the scale of that of the French with, say, William Christie or John Eliot Gardiner. "Although the Italians are proud and fond of Palestrina, Italy is no longer a big country for polyphonic music; they're much more rooted in the operatic tradition than, say, France, Germany or Holland. It must be hard for Italian early music vocal groups to build up a tradition if the music is sung within operatic conventions attached to older styles of performance."

Phillips's views were soon confirmed in passionate interchange of opinions, between the

assembled Italian journalists, on the infighting of the clerics of St Peter's, of the disbanding of the Cappella Giulia, and of the cultural desert within the Sistine Chapel.

"Most Italians groups," continued Phillips, "approach sixteenth-century music from a nineteenth-century point of view. You simply can't hear the detail in the music because of the vibrato in the voices. You must have clarity to sing polyphony so that one piece will sound different from another. Because the harmony is not interesting.

"To some extent, we're all guilty of this approach. We're twentieth-century people, after all. Up until very recently we've approached renaissance music from, at best, a baroque standpoint. What you need to do is to go in via Gregorian chant. The vocal lines actually follow plainchant contours and that's the way it should be sung."

The follow-up concert which The Tallis Scholars gave on April 9th in the Sistine Chapel (where Palestrina had also worked) at the request of Nippon TV, to commemorate the end of the cleaning of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*, was taken live by RAI

Uno and subsequently shown in Japan.

Phillips hopes and expects to market the Gimell video recording of the Santa Maria Maggiore concert to television companies throughout the world—to Australia, Canada and the States. "I hope it will be broadcast on the BBC, but they've consistently fallen behind everyone else in sponsoring interest in what we do. France-Musique, for one, has been so much quicker to grasp the importance of our work."

Following the release of the CD and the video of the Palestrina 400 concert in Santa Maria Maggiore, The Tallis Scholars are planning to return to Rome on November 18th for another celebratory concert promoted by the Accademia Santa Cecilia. They'll perform the *Veni creator spiritus* Mass in an edition specially prepared for the occasion. And, in a performance of the motet *Prophetiae Sibyllarum*, they will also be reminding Rome that the Franco-Flemish composer Orlande de Lassus also died in 1594—"as everyone around here," murmurs Phillips from his seat below an ancient portrait of Palestrina, "is very quick to forget!"





# AWARDS 2021



## EARLY MUSIC

### WINNER Josquin Masses - the final volume

*A magnificent and triumphant conclusion to a 34-year journey*

I have voted in the Early Music category every year since the Gramophone Awards began in 1977; and I'm fairly certain there has never been a stronger short list. Every recording here seems to me a potential winner, and the two runners-up, both of books of madrigals – Les Arts Florissants with Gesulado and Concerto Italiano with Monteverdi – have both taken the Early Music prize before. (I remember one short list that seemed to contain no plausible winner.) But The Tallis Scholars and Peter Phillips won by a fairly comfortable margin. That is of course partly because, with this ninth volume, they have completed their set of Josquin Masses. Other groups have recorded a fair portion of Josquin's Masses, but The Tallis Scholars got there first.

#### THE RECORDING

**Josquin Masses Vol 9** – Hercules Dux Ferrarie;

*D'ung aultre amer*; *Missa Faysant regretz*

**The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips**

Gimell CDGIM051 (11/20)

Producer **Steve C Smith & Peter Phillips**

Engineer: **Philip Hobbs**

**70 VOTES**

#### RUNNERS-UP



**Gesualdo** Madrigali – Libri terzo & quarto

**Les Arts Florissants / Paul Agnew**  
Harmonia Mundi (4/21)

**59 VOTES**



**Monteverdi** Il terzo libro di madrigali

**Concerto Italiano / Rinaldo Alessandrini**

Naïve (5/21) **52 VOTES**

And what a journey it has been, starting back in 1987, when their *Pange lingua* and *La sol fa re mi* was voted the Recording of the Year (the first time an Early Music recording had ever taken the top prize). At the time I noted that until then they had recorded only later music; and to this day it remains true that most of what they do is later. But I also noted that there was a feeling that in the course of that recording they increasingly got the sense of what this music was about. And I have no idea how often I listened to the 'Benedictus' of *La sol fa re mi*. But it was truly magical and had a spellbinding impact on me. In any case I look forward to listening to the last 'Agnus Dei' of *Faysant regretz* equally often: it is a perfect conclusion to a long and challenging journey.

**David Fallows**



## What We Really Do: The Tallis Scholars

By Peter Phillips

The Musical Times Publications, PB, 344pp, £27.25 ISBN 978-0-954-57772-8

**T**he running gag here concerns Allegri's *Miserere*, the only piece later than their normal time-slot that The Tallis Scholars regularly perform, the piece that audiences across the world always want, perhaps the piece that has made this and similar groups financially viable. But the absurdity of the situation helps to underline that the keyword in this book – part documentation, part reminiscences, part reprints of *Spectator* columns, part serious musical observation – is 'polyphony'. For Peter Phillips, the word represents everything he has been doing for the past 40 years and plans to do until he drops, namely church music from 1450 to 1610. More than that, though, it stands for the glorification of a world before the trivialisation of the Baroque: he has a special scorn for Vivaldi and similar composers, which is another running joke.

For those who love the work of The Tallis Scholars, and probably those who hate it, the key passages here are those on interpretation and on recording. As concerns interpretation, Phillips is adamant that the main things are balance, precision, clarity and line. With those in place, more or less everything else will take care of itself. (His special hates include historical costumes, historical pronunciation, spoken introductions, candles, and any of the tricks people use to try to enliven what he views – so do I actually – as the self-sufficiency of great polyphony.) Now that there is a whole generation of younger singers who have grown up with recordings of The Tallis Scholars, it is far easier to find the sound he has always wanted. And a subtext here is that the sound of The Tallis Scholars has changed hardly at all during the four decades of their existence and the more than 300 singers who

Through almost 2000 concerts and 60 CDs, *THE TALLIS SCHOLARS* have changed the status of renaissance polyphony for millions of music-lovers. In doing so they have raised the bar for the appreciation and technique of unaccompanied singing worldwide. From undergraduates having fun, through the trials of confronting ingrained prejudices towards unfamiliar repertoire, to their eventual reception as a cappella 'rock stars' (*New York Times*), *WHAT WE REALLY DO* tells the story of this peerless ensemble. Chapters describing what it is like to be constantly on the road are supplemented by appendices quoting from Phillips's eyewitness *Spectator* articles, and a complete inventory of who has sung in the group. Peter Phillips has written a war and all account – with a little help from his friends.

WHAT WE REALLY DO  
PETER PHILLIPS

WHAT  
WE  
REALLY  
DO

THE  
TALLIS  
SCHOLARS  
second edition

PETER PHILLIPS



have taken part in this ensemble of (usually) 10 voices. Another subtext is that he has taken this music out of the church in such a way that The Tallis Scholars are at their best in a hi-tech modern concert hall. As concerns recording, he stresses that the crucial work is done in the editing suite. Here he never changes the recorded sound, but his search for the very best moments from the session is unrelenting. He likens his work there to that of the Japanese film director Yasujiro Ozu, who 'is said to have filmed 20 takes of someone placing a cup on a saucer, and then spent a week choosing the perfect version'. In this context it becomes easy to understand the famous pasting-in of the same 'Osanna' section twice in a Mass recording. And he is particularly lucid on the ways in which a recording is entirely different from a live performance, namely that nothing must get in the way of the perfection of a CD.

An earlier version of this book appeared to mark 30 years of The Tallis Scholars in 2003; the new version has a new chapter about touring and how Phillips views the future. In particular he finds himself wishing that the world of small-ensemble singing had the same ideals as the world of top-class orchestras: that the first requirement is

absolutely flawless blend and balance, and that technical shortcomings simply cannot exist. In addition there is a very illuminating selection of his columns for *The Spectator* (the inclusion of which results in a fair amount of duplication in the book) and a marvellously funny glossary of 'Singers' Argot', some of which will be known to most musicians but some of which is special to The Tallis Scholars. Appendices include a list of everybody who has ever sung or performed with them (including Paul McCartney and Sting, but also, as an entirely unexplained teaser, Claudio Abbado, apparently on either harpsichord or organ) and a full list of their recordings, which is not quite detailed enough for my liking but can easily be filled out from the web. It is all richly illustrated with well-captioned pictures of the group and of Phillips himself. All the same, the heroes that emerge from the book are not Phillips, nor the singers, nor even his long-term record producer Steve Smith, not even Josquin and Palestrina, but two English composers: Thomas Tallis, with his 20-minute motet *Gaude gloriosa*, and John Taverner, with his *Missa Gloria tibi Trinitas*, which, Phillips says, 'might be referred to as the Ninth of the early 16th century'. I like those priorities. **David Fallows** (Awards issue, 2013)



# Reviews

Click on each sleeve for a link to stream or purchase

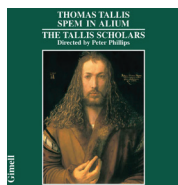
## Tallis

*Spem in alium. Salvator Mundi* (I, II).

*Sancte Deus, sancte fortis. Gaude gloriosa Dei mater Miserere nostri. Loquebantur variis linguis.*

**The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips**

Gimell CDGIM006 (42' • T/t)



New recordings of Tallis's remarkable 40-part motet *Spem in alium*

seem to appear at approximately ten-year intervals. First came the rich, mellow and still widely respected 1965 Argo version, sung jointly by the choir of King's College, Cambridge and the Cambridge University Musical Society Chorus, conducted by Sir David Willcocks. A decade later, the Clerkes of Oxenford under David Wulstan committed their radically different, high-pitched performance to record, a reading that has become equally famous for its transparency and clarity of line (CfP). For the 1985 quartercentenary of Tallis's death, Peter Phillips and The Tallis Scholars have produced a new version; and I should say at once that in many respects it is clearly the most successful of the three. Not only is the choir superb and the interpretation an intelligent one; this is also the only recording in which the eight choirs seem genuinely to sing from different positions in the stereo spread, a technical achievement that leads to some thrilling antiphonal exchanges. Above all, Phillips's reading is a confident and assertive one. Less leisurely than Wulstan's, and sung at a marginally lower pitch, the effect is more that of a plea than Wulstan's ethereal prayer, and the overall shaping is more characterful. Inevitably there are problems of balance, both at the top of the texture (several of the trebles are

given rather too much prominence) and in the middle, where in full sections the music of the inner voices sometimes blends too readily into rich chords rather than emerging as a complex web of counterpoint. But these are relatively small complaints to be made against what is frankly an outstanding achievement. This is a *Spem in alium* to be cherished.

Like Wulstan, Phillips has paired *Spem in alium* with another of Tallis's largest and most celebrated works, *Gaude gloriosa Dei mater*. Here the texture is absolutely crystal, with verse sections sung by solo voices, and again the music has been paced with great care. Although to my mind it does not quite achieve the breadth and ecstasy of the performance sung by the choir of New College, Oxford, under Edward Higginbottom on CRD, Phillips's version is certainly highly accomplished; and the same must be said of the readings of the five shorter pieces that complete the record. What a fitting tribute this is to Tallis in his centenary year. No one who cares for Tudor choral music should be without it.

**John Milson** (March 1986)

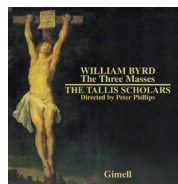
## Byrd

*Mass for five voices. Mass for four voices.*

*Mass for three voices. Motet - Ave verum corpus a 4*

**The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips**

Gimell CDGIM345 (67' • DDD • T/t)



This for me, is the sort of musical bliss which should never stop. The

Tallis Scholars let the composer's phrases flow through them and there is no trace of self-consciousness, no advertising some new-found authenticity. There is a certain matter-of-fact directness which

makes the contrapuntal lines agree without losing identity and which treats chordal passages as simultaneous counterpoint rather than a preview of close-harmony technique. John Milsom's review of the two-record LP set found the slow movements and the three-part Mass a little impersonal, a little mechanical. Well, I would not wish any more overt involvement. I find in these performances the awe and mystery I had always expected. Compact Disc treatment reveals a great degree of warmth flowing through the musical veins. Only *Ave verum corpus* remains of the three motets originally recorded but it is a haunting performance. I know of no better advocate for Byrd's music than this disc.

**Gordon Reynolds** (March 1986)

## Tallis

*The Complete English Anthems*

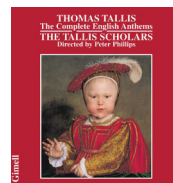
*If ye love me. Hear the voice and prayer.*

*A new commandment. O Lords, give thy holy spirit. Purge me, O Lord. Verily, verily, I say unto you. Remember not, O Lord God. Out from the deep. O Lord, in Thee is all my trust. Christ rising again. Blessed are those that be undefiled.*

*Psalms Tunes - Nine Tunes for Archbishop Parker's Psalter*

**The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips**

Gimell CDGIM007 (39' • DDD • T/t)



Ever since their first record, some ten years ago, Peter Phillips and

the Tallis Scholars have devoted much of their best music-making to the works of Tallis himself; and they have made earlier recordings of some of the pieces here. But there are several reasons why it made sense to present Tallis's complete surviving English 'anthems' as a unit. Among the large quantity of somewhat





formalised music that was composed for the earliest years of the English church, these works stand out as astonishingly vital and varied; and the spate of Tallis records issued over the past few decades has propelled him into the position of a composer whose every note can be treasured as an important and vibrant component of our musical heritage. He may have left far fewer works than Byrd or even Sheppard, but the intensity and richness of his musical message is everywhere present in what survives, even in the works that look relatively simple on paper – which, by and large, means the pieces recorded here.

Moreover, Peter Phillips really has the measure of the music. That appears not only in the phrasing and the tempos, but also in the balance and the pitch levels at which he chooses to perform the music – chosen less according to the formulas

which used to be so much in fashion, but more in line with the needs of the singers he chooses to employ. Briefly stated, a record that looks a little forbidding turns out to be riveting from end to end. There may be a slight disappointment for some in that women are used where boys would have been more appropriate, there is no attempt at appropriate pronunciation of the texts and little evidence of awareness that hymn-tunes and ensemble songs, for example, demand quite different kinds of singing. But everything is so elegantly done and so persuasive that the record positively compels you to return to it again and again.

I would imagine that *Christ rising again* really has no place here, since current scholarship rejects it (and the sleeve-note should have said so); but it is illuminating to hear the piece alongside the solidly attributed music. Perhaps it would have been

right to sing more than just a single stanza of each of those astonishing tunes that Tallis composed for Archbishop Parker's psalter, but that too is a matter of judgement: the brief statement of one tune after another gives an overwhelming impression of Tallis's inventive range in so apparently restricted a genre.

David Fallows (December 1986)

## Josquin Desprez

Josquin Desprez Missa Pange lingua.

Missa La sol fa re mi

The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips

Gimell CDGIM09 (62' • DDD • T/t)

**EARLY MUSIC AWARD 1987 &**

**RECORDING OF THE YEAR 1987**



This is absolutely superb. You need only compare the new performance



of the Mass *Pange lingua* with the Ensemble Clément Janequin LP (Harmonia Mundi) on which I heaped such superlatives last November to see how the eight singers of The Tallis Scholars are better in virtually all respects. The details are cleaner, the rhythms are more elegantly taken, the musical text they use is better (following, I think, mainly the early Vatican manuscript, CS16, whereas the French group basically seem to follow a slightly garbled German print of 1539), and the broad unfolding of the musical rhetoric is beautifully controlled by Peter Phillips. We must accept, of course, that Josquin is unlikely to have heard this music with two ladies on the top line, but they do it so well that only a fundamentalist would mark the record down for that. It should also be said that the least successful performance on the entire disc is in the opening *Kyrie* of this Mass where there is a certain brutality in the approach; and although The Tallis Scholars make more of the 'Benedictus' and the last *Agnus Dei* than the French singers, there may still be better ways of doing it. On the other hand, as just one example among many, these seem to be the first musicians to make the 'Osanna' truly successful and understand why Josquin should have chosen to compose it that way.

But actually they sing even better in the Mass *La sol fa re mi*. It is almost as though they recorded the works in the order in which they appear on the record and some special understanding of the music came to them in the course of the sessions. Again and again in the singing one has the feeling that Josquin's lines are projected with an understanding and clarity that have rarely been heard before.

This is a Mass that performers and record companies have tended to avoid, because on paper it looks as though it couldn't possibly work. The *La sol fa re mi* of the title denotes (among other things) the melodic passage which appears over 200 times in the course of the work

with its intervals unchanged – which may not seem a recipe for the kind of music one would want to hear. But Josquin treats his material with such astonishing sophistication that you are rarely aware of the melodic fragment as such; and Phillips is scrupulously careful never to emphasize the melody except in places – such as the end of the second 'Osanna' – where it is clearly intended to work as an ostinato. This performance shows that the Mass *La sol fa re mi* belongs with the greatest works of its era.

Until now The Tallis Scholars have concentrated on somewhat later music. I very much hope that they will devote more of their future energies to this earlier repertory to which they seem so well suited. Over the past 12 months there has been a surprising resurgence of interest in Josquin's music, constituting something of an annus mirabilis in his career on record: this seems much the best so far.

David Fallows (March 1987)

## Cornysh

Salve regina. Ave Maria, mater Dei.

Gaude virgo mater Christi. Magnificat.

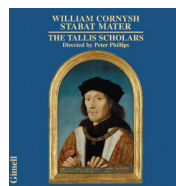
Ah, Robin. Adieu, adieu, my heartes

lust. Adieu courage. Woefully arrayed.

Stabat mater

The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips

Gimell CDGIMO14 (65' • DDD • T/t)



No one until now has mounted a serious and comprehensive retrospective of music by the composer who ranked higher than any other in the England of Henry VII and the young Henry VIII. Why Cornysh's work should be so grossly overlooked today is hard to understand. A couple of antiphons have found their way on to record, but other pieces – including the astonishing *Magnificat* – here make their first appearance in the catalogue. Full credit, then, to The Tallis Scholars, not only for putting matters to right but also for doing so in performances

that will thrill everyone who hears them.

Those who like to have their composers neatly pigeon-holed will note that Cornysh died in 1523, two years after Josquin Desprez. In practice it would be difficult to imagine a pair of contemporaneous composers (at least before the nineteenth century) more distant from one another in ideology and technique. Where Josquin's music is orderly, Cornysh's is a riot of abundant, often seemingly wild melody. Where Josquin customises his music to the meaning and sound of the words, Cornysh sets off in search of wanton, abstract, dare-devil ideas. Take for example the extraordinary conclusion to the five-part *Magnificat*, where pairs of voices, rising in turn from the lowest in the choir to the highest, are challenged with music of gradually increasing complexity, peaking in an exchange of quite hair-raising virtuosity between the sopranos – and all this just for the words 'and ever shall be, world without end'!

As far as the sacred works are concerned, The Tallis Scholars respond magnificently to Cornysh's audacious imagination. Choosing high treble pitch for the pieces with proper soprano parts, Peter Phillips has faced his women singers with what must surely have been their Waterloo, and they emerge victorious: it is a majestic and glorious sound, to be relished in full in the *Stabat mater*, a huge piece that survives incomplete and for which the late Frank Harrison composed treble parts that may even trump Cornysh himself in their sheer bravura. Marginally less striking in The Tallis Scholars' performances are the short part-songs and the carol *Woefully arrayed*, robbed as they are here of some of their latent expressiveness and strength by being sung (admittedly very beautifully) in an inappropriately resonant building, and in rounded modern English vowels rather than their brighter, more robust Tudor equivalents. But judged as a whole this record must be reckoned an

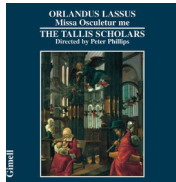


outstanding success, and a long overdue tribute to one of Britain's most exotic musical geniuses.

John Milsom (April 1989)

## Lassus

Missa Osculetur me. Motets - Osculetur me; Hodie completi sunt; Timor et tremor; Alma Redemptoris mater a 8; Salve regina mater a 8; Ave regina caelorum II a 6; Regina Coeli a 7  
**The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips**  
 Gimell CDGIM018 (49' • DDD • T/t)



Twenty years ago Siegfried Hermelink discovered a new

Mass by Lassus in a manuscript at Ljubljana. That may not have seemed a world-shaking event, since there were already 54 Masses known to be by him, most of them ignored and considered to represent the least attractive part of his output. But Hermelink offered the view that this eight-voice work, based on Lassus's own motet *Osculetur me*, was exceptionally impressive; and he even implied that it could have been one of the master's last compositions. But even that cut relatively little ice at the time.

Now Peter Phillips has pulled the Sleeping Beauty out of its hiding place and he shows us that this is indeed a most remarkable work; exquisitely paced, unusually rich in harmonic variety despite its generally sparse treatment of the two four-voiced choirs, teeming with delicate melodic invention, simply the kind of piece that should have been heard and recorded many times previously.

His performance meets the best standards of The Tallis Scholars, with every detail well controlled and everything clearly audible but at the same time a musical freedom that brings the music to life. It may be possible to suggest that certain passages could have been taken more expressively and particularly that the single *Agnus Dei* could have been taken more slowly to give it its full

power. (Certainly it is a mistake to repeat it.) But the sheer delight at discovering a completely ignored masterpiece is enough to put any small reservations very much in the background.

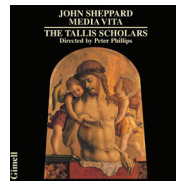
The group of motets is well chosen, several of them relatively well known. Particularly good here is the juxtaposition of two eight-voice motets, *Salve regina mater* very much in the style of the Mass, and *Alma Redemptoris mater* using much fuller textures in a luminously rich style that offers a striking contrast. And the singers cope effortlessly with the chromatic complexities of the famous early *Timor et tremor*. Once again, then, The Tallis Scholars and the Gimell label have produced something spectacularly worthwhile.

David Fallows (July 1989)

## Sheppard

Media vita. Christe redemptor omnium. Reges Tharsis. Sacris solemnis. In manus tuas I. In manus tuas II. In manus tuas III. Verbum caro

**The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips**  
 Gimell CDGIM016 (55' • DDD • T/t)



The Tallis Scholars' latest release focuses on the music of John

Sheppard, a lesser known and, as Peter Phillips points out, largely underrated contemporary of the group's namesake, Thomas Tallis. I first came across Sheppard's extraordinary and highly individual style of composition through the old Classics for Pleasure recording by the Clerkes of Oxenford directed by David Wulstan, but since then there had been little interest in his music until The Sixteen's recent compilation for Hyperion, which includes several of the items also chosen by The Tallis Scholars. The centrepiece for this recording, however, is the work that gives it its title. *Media vita*, an extended and highly elaborate setting of the poignant respond 'In the midst of life we are in death'.

For this, Phillips uses the edition prepared by Wulstan, although for most of the other works the choir sing from his own versions. He follows Wulstan in adopting the very high pitch that enhances probably the single most striking aspect of Sheppard's sound-world, the stratospheric writing for the trebles. The ear is irresistibly drawn to, and captivated by, the ethereal sound of these very high voices weaving their florid – though often chant-based – lines over the false-relation-flecked counterpoint below. The trebles here – Tessa Bonner, Ruth Holton and Deborah Roberts – deserve to be singled-out not only for the seemingly effortless, absolutely pure tone they produce, but also for their sensitive and sophisticated shaping of line.

Indeed, the choir as a whole convey perfectly the ebb and flow of Sheppard's polyphony in performances as refreshing and calming as the effect of water cascading down the side of a lakeland fell. The overall balance is generally good (the full chords that mark the end of important sections are wonderfully resonant), the lower voices providing a solid – though not inexpressive – foundation for the soaring flights of fantasy above. Personally, I find the countertenor sound a little too edgy; although it does give definition to that strand of the texture it is occasionally a little overbearing. The acoustic of the Norfolk church, now favoured by The Tallis Scholars for their recordings, is lively and clear, and contributes an aura of timelessness, especially to the chant.

While *Media vita* is probably the most striking piece on the recording (it will surely realise Phillips's hopes of confirming Sheppard's stature as a composer), the other, generally less ambitious settings of hymns and responds are no less imaginative and well constructed. I was particularly struck by the simple but effective settings of *In manus tuas* which here receive marvellously contemplative performances with a gentle, withdrawn quality that



complements the liturgical function and meaning of the text and contrasts well with the more direct accounts of the surrounding items on the disc. This is a record you will want to listen to again and again.

**Tess Knighton** (January 1990)

## Palestrina · Josquin Desprez

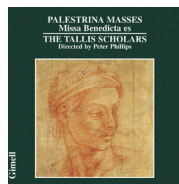
**Palestrina** Missa Benedicta es

**Josquin Desprez** Motet – Benedicta es

**Plainchant** Benedicta es

**The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips**

Gimell CDGIM001 (51' • DDD • T/t)



It is hard to think of a record label having had a more auspicious debut or

one that so clearly forecast what was to come over the next decade, in terms of both repertory and performance quality. Here are reissues from 1981 of two of the supreme masterpieces of 16th-century music, works that had been all too rarely heard; and they are preceded by the chant that lies at the basis of both – a sequence melody almost as economical as the one Josquin used for his other magnificent and influential six-voice motet of the same period, *Praeter rerum seriem*. Hearing the chant together with the motet of around 1500 and Palestrina's Mass of the 1560s illuminates all three: it is truly invigorating to hear how subtly Palestrina transforms Josquin's music to create a new and extraordinarily varied masterpiece of his own. And I only regret that they didn't use the extra capacity of the CD by adding Lassus's *Magnificat* on the same motet, though it is obvious enough that such an addition would have created major engineering problems.

Musically, however, the match would have been less difficult, even if the singers are mostly different. The performance already shows most of the qualities we associate with The Tallis Scholars: springy rhythms, marvellously bright and transparent textures in which all six voices are easily heard, fine tuning and – most important – a fluidity of tempo that

keeps the music constantly alive. True, there is the odd sudden change of gear of a kind that Peter Phillips would probably prefer to avoid now; and there are occasional moments when the voices lose their focus (for example when the tired singers are overstretched by a gloriously slow tempo for the first *Agnus Dei*). But it is a record that emphatically justifies its reissue.

**David Fallows** (July 1990)

## Palestrina

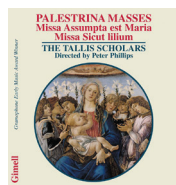
**Missa Assumpta est Maria. Missa Sicut lilium inter spinas. Motets – Assumpta est Maria a 6; Sicut lilium inter spinas I.**

**Plainchant. Assumpta est Maria**

**The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips**

Gimell CDGIM020 (72' • DDD • T/t)

**EARLY MUSIC AWARD 1991**



In his review of the Chapelle Royale's recording of Palestrina's

*Missa Assumpta est Maria* on Ricercar, DF pointed out that it was a curious omission not to have included the motet on which this work is based. Well, here it is on this new version from The Tallis Scholars – their fifth recording of Palestrina Masses – together with another parody Mass, the *Sicut lilium* with its corresponding motet. It is indeed illuminating to hear how the larger-scale compositions unfold with reference to the original motets: close study, of course, would reveal much about the compositional processes of the High Renaissance, but any listener will be able to appreciate the organic relationship between motet and Mass. In addition, Peter Phillips has here deliberately paired two sharply contrasted parody Masses: *Assumpta est Maria*, the better known, is thought to be one of Palestrina's last masses, while *Sicut lilium* dates from relatively early in his career. The former, with its major tonality and divisi high voices (SSATTB), is marvellously bright and open and is given a correspondingly outgoing performance, while the latter,

inflected with chromaticism and melodic intervals that constantly fall back on themselves, is darker-hued and more plaintive, a mood well captured here in the intensity of the singing.

However, what is perhaps most striking is the difference in compositional technique between the two works: *Sicut lilium* relies largely on imitative textures for the unfolding of its structure (though there are the customary block chords on phrases such as 'et homo factus est', performed here with magical effect), while *Assumpta est Maria* makes far greater use of vocal scoring as a formal device and thus looks forward to the contrast principle of the baroque.

The Tallis Scholars make the most of the contrasted blocks of sound here, achieving, as we have come to expect, an impressive vocal blend and balance (though I still have reservations about the countertenors when high in their range). However, I feel that some of the phrasing, particularly in the *Kyrie*, is perhaps a little too mannered and that the very beautiful *Agnus Dei* verges on the narcissistic and therefore becomes rather too static. The flow in the *Missa Sicut lilium*, though, is excellent throughout. The Tallis Scholars achieve a flexible expressiveness that cannot be rivalled by Herreweghe and the Chapelle Royale whatever the other strengths of that particular recording.

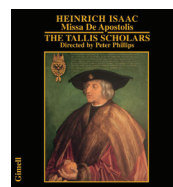
**Tess Knighton** (September 1990)

## Isaac

**Missa de Apostolis a 6. Optime pastor. Regina caeli laetare. Resurexi et adhuc tecum sum. Tota pulchra es. Virgo prudentissima a 6**

**The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips**

Gimell CDGIM023 (75' • DDD • T/t)



The Tallis Scholars' latest recording presents a Mass-setting and a handful of carefully-chosen motets by Heinrich Isaac, a composer, as Peter Phillips says in his





accompanying note, who ‘has much to prove to modern audiences’. Perhaps one reason why Isaac’s music has remained in relative obscurity up till now is that so much of it, as on this recording, contrasts short sections of polyphony with chant. Phillips has always eschewed liturgical reconstructions in his recordings and performances, but it is perhaps these that have helped to make chant more accessible and meaningful for the modern listener who had become used to hearing only the polyphonic sections of Mass-settings by Renaissance composers. The small amount of chant built into Isaac’s setting of the five movements of the Ordinary of the Mass will therefore hold no terrors now and, indeed, add to rather than detract from the broad sweep of his conception.

Allied to this goes perhaps another reason why his prolific output has been so neglected: a reliance on sonority rather than contrapuntal ingenuity for effect. This can mean

that on the page the music appears less interesting than it is when realized in sound. In fact, here Isaac’s attempt at ingenuity of musical and textual reference in the occasional motet *Optime pastor* falls rather flat, while the seemingly less interesting polyphonic sections of the *Missa de Apostolis* come to life in brief moments of sublimely sonorous music enhanced by shimmering performances from The Tallis Scholars. Their sustained singing style (which has developed over the years into something much more direct and full-blooded) is most telling in the lusciously intimate *Song of Songs* motet *Tota pulchra es* in which a characteristic feature of Isaac’s style – one voice moving more quickly than the rest – is exploited to great effect at the words ‘Flores apparuerunt’. Isaac, however, displays a wide range of styles, the extended duet textures of the marvellous six-voice motet *Virgo prudentissima* coming much closer to the flowing counterpoint of Josquin, and a feel for dramatic

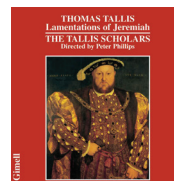
articulation of structure is apparent in the climax of this piece built on the interval of a fifth (a musical pun on the words ‘ut sol’) and the resounding rests surrounding the words ‘amica mea’ in *Tota pulchra es*.

Plenty of inspired music here, then, and given the committed and often inspiring performances we have come to expect from The Tallis Scholars. **Tess Knighton** (October 1991)

## Tallis

Lamentations of Jeremiah. Absterge Domine. Derelinquat impius. Mihi autem nimis. O sacrum convivium. In jejuniis et fletu. O salutaris hostia. In manus tuas. O nata lux de lumine. Salve intemerata virgo.

**The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips**  
Gimell CDGIM025 (68' • DDD • T/t)



The Tallis Scholars’ third recording of music by Tallis is a



worthy successor to their two earlier selections, the motets and the English anthems. It opens with the two *Lamentations* settings, which offer scope for them to display their effortless technique and their sensitivity to the text. The heightened tension of such moments as 'et ipsa oppressa amaritudine', marked by clear declamation and firm entries, is offset by other, quieter moments: the settings of the Hebrew letters – 'Beth', for example – at a gentler pace and in a calmer mood; and also the call to repentance, 'Jerusalem... convertere', which concludes each *Lamentation*. Incidentally, the first piece, like many in The Tallis Scholars' repertoire, is pitched a minor third higher than written; less usual and more debatable was to find *In jejuniu et fletu* pitched up a minor sixth.

The eight motets are presented in two groups: those labelled 'Mean' include the adventurous *Dereelinquat impius*, with its bold upward leaps of a seventh; those with the heading 'Treble' have the emphasis on the high leading soprano part. This group includes the *O salutaris* – with a surprise burst of light at the end with the major cadence, almost in the manner of Wilbye – and the ever-popular *O nata lux*, taken at a moderate tempo, with the singers indulging in a lingering false relation in the final cadence.

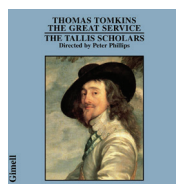
Tallis's monumental early masterpiece *Salve intemerata virgo* is the undoubted highlight of the recording. It presents any conductor with formidable problems, not least on account of the length of its text – a fully-developed doctrinal statement of belief. The Tallis Scholars, undaunted by its unwieldiness, keep it well under control: the phrasing, both of the individual melodic strands and of the whole unfolding structure is handled with care and understanding, and the planned dynamics lead naturally to a superb climax. This is a masterly performance. **Mary Berry** (May 1992)

## Tomkins

The Great Service. Anthems – Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom; Be

strong and of good courage; O God, the proud are risen against me; O sing unto the Lord; Then David mourned; When David heard; Woe is me

**The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips**  
Gimell CDGIM024 (58' • DDD • T/t)



Just as some composers enjoy inflated reputations on account of their historical position, so others can suffer undue disdain if the musical developments of their day appear to have passed them by. Such a one is Thomas Tomkins, a survivor into the second half of the 17th century for whom the Baroque might just as well have been a distant rumour. But though his music belongs securely in the late Renaissance realm of his teacher

Byrd, there is no doubting the heights it can reach. This CD presents the ten-part *Great Service*, the third of his five service settings (i.e. the canticles *Te Deum*, *Jubilate*, *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis*), a work set out on a ceremonial scale and employing a complex and constantly changing textural palette. To go with it there are seven excellent anthems – among them the deservedly famous *When David heard* – which provide further evidence of Tomkins's skill as a contrapuntist and masterful manipulator of choral sonority.

Anyone familiar with the work of The Tallis Scholars will know exactly what mastery they are capable of as well. Here, as usual, they offer perfect intonation and a clear, incisive texture, resulting in a sound of stunning, unequivocal beauty. The group ranging in size from 10 to 16 singers, delivers an impressive range of dynamics, from the intimacy of *Woe is me* or *Then David mourned* to the confident and forceful splendour of *O God, the proud are risen against me* or *O sing unto the Lord*. I suppose that at times Peter Phillips could have brought a mite more shape to Tomkins's often rather densely-woven counterpoint, or responded with more agility to the composer's odd touches of madrigalian word-

painting; but in truth, if you can perform with the sheer expertise and refinement of The Tallis Scholars, there's really little you can do wrong. This disc is eloquent proof of that.

**Fabrice Fitch** (September 1993)

## Taverner • Tye • Sheppard

**Sheppard** Mass, 'The Western Wynde'

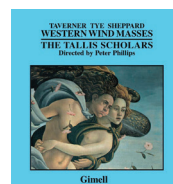
**Taverner** Mass, 'Western Wynde'

**Tye** Mass, 'Western Wynde'

**The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips**

Gimell CDGIM027 (80' • DDD • T/t).

Reviewed alongside The Sixteen and Harry Christophers's recording of Taverner for Hyperion (CDA66507)



In issuing the complete *Western Wind* Masses on one disc, The

Tallis Scholars make it possible to compare three works whose common origin belies their strikingly different natures. Taverner's work is justly famous, but many listeners will be equally impressed with the restrained, placid melodiousness of the Tye. Its ingenious concealment of the well-known tune stands in marked contrast with the elder composer's striking design; the sprinkling of dissonances and exotic cadences are carefully controlled, and its overall effect is one of classical balance and poise.

Heard alongside its fellows, Sheppard's work is bound to seem dull and one-dimensional, the harmony flat-footed, the treatment of dissonances wilful and contrived (as in the *Sanctus*). Sheppard follows Tye's example in confining the tune to one voice, but by choosing the treble rather than Tye's mean, he places himself in a contrapuntal strait-jacket which proves impossible to shake off. And whereas The Tallis Scholars perform the Tye with commendable lucidity, the Sheppard has just a hint of weariness about it – possibly the tempos might have been brisker.

The Sixteen's recording of the Taverner appears as Volume 5 of a Complete Edition of his sacred



music. Their interpretation is restrained and mellifluous, but The Tallis Scholars surpass them in rendering of detail, in structural clarity and in crispness, this despite the fact that Phillips's version is fully four minutes longer. The Tallis's full, bright acoustic seems better suited to Taverner's outgoing setting than the more subdued, atmospheric sound chosen by Christophers. Moreover The Sixteen's inner voices sound slightly uncomfortable at the limits of their registers, whereas the Tallis handle everything with an easy elegance. For the rest, both ensembles share a similar view of the work, transposing the music up a tone and using soloists in partially-scored sections. Finally, both are inconsistent in their interpretation of triple-time sections, opting at times for crotchet equivalence (in modern score), at others for a 3:2 proportion.

The Sixteen round out their disc with several lesser-known pieces, including the splendid antiphon *O splendor gloriae*: here again there is stiff competition, this time from the Taverner Choir. On balance, then, The Tallis Scholars disc offers the more rewarding programme.

**Fabrice Fitch** (September 1993)

## Rore · Josquin Desprez

**Rore** Missa Praeter rerum seriem.

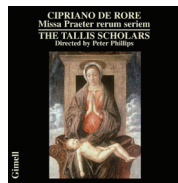
Motets – Infelix ego; Parce mihi; Ave regina; Descendi in hortum meum

**Josquin Desprez** Praeter rerum seriem

**The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips**

Gimell CDGIM029 (72' • DDD • T/t)

**EARLY MUSIC AWARD 1994**



This latest record from Peter Phillips and The Tallis Scholars begins with a magisterially concentrated and evocative account of one of Josquin's most inspired and tightly-constructed motets, the six-voice *Praeter rerum seriem*. This in turn is the starting-point for Cipriano da Rore's Mass – which takes as its cue Josquin's antiphonal approach – wherein the song on which the Mass is based is passed from the upper to

the lower voices in succession. Rore, whose piece is in one sense an act of homage to Josquin, was not only a fellow northerner, and hence one of that impressive sequence of oltramontani who made the trek across the Alps to find fame and fortune at the Italian courts; he was also, if briefly, Josquin's successor at the d'Este court at Ferrara. It is in this context that Rore's work is an act of homage in a second sense, since to Josquin's already rich texture Rore adds an additional soprano part, while the first alto voice carries throughout a cantus firmus to the text 'Hercules secundus dux Ferrarie quartus vivit et vivet'. Around this structural scaffolding the remaining voices weave an endlessly inventive sequence of carefully-worked motives reminiscent of Josquin's original.

As one would expect with a group so experienced in 16th-century repertoires, both English and Continental, this performance is characterized by great sensitivity to textual inflexion and to the many moments of that exquisite bonding of words and music that was to lead Monteverdi to credit Rore as one of the early masters of the *seconda prattica*; the tranquil beauty which descends at 'Et incarnatus est' in the *Credo*, and the gently unfolding yet powerfully lyrical opening of the *Sanctus* are just two of the passages which remain strongly etched in the memory. Nevertheless, in the end it is Peter Phillips's ability to control the overall architecture of the music, as well as its detail, that provides the basis for a reading of such conviction; his direction, combined with The Tallis Scholars' strongly-focused singing and well-balanced ensemble, results in a gripping performance of rare beauty, intelligence and power. No less fine is the group of four motets that completes the recording, and which reveals Rore as one of the greatest and last exponents of the Franco-Flemish tradition.

**Iain Fenlon** (June 1994)

## 'Live in Rome'

**Palestrina** Alma redemptoris mater.

Magnificat I toni. Missa Papae Marcelli.

**Moetets, Book 3 – Surge illuminare**

Jerusalem. Nunc dimittis. Stabat mater

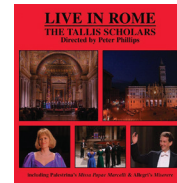
**Allegri** Miserere mei

**The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips**

Gimell DVD GIMDP903 (82' • 4:3 • PCM

stereo and 5.1) CDGIM994 (73' • DDD).

Recorded live at the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome in February 1994.



The sense of a memorable occasion is quite tangible here.

It's audible on CD alone, without the images of the video. The largely Italian audience, assembled in Palestrina's own great Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore to mark the 400th anniversary of his death, is clearly impressed by The Tallis Scholars' virtuosity: the applause, respectful from the start, rises in enthusiasm with each item, culminating (despite the presence of numerous grave and reverend Monsignors) in shouts of 'Bis!' and 'Bravi!'. No wonder: the performances throughout have the tonal beauty, the control of very long phrases and the immaculate tuning that we've become used to from Peter Phillips's choir, but must have been revelatory in choir-starved Italy.

Do The Tallis Scholars add anything special because of the place and occasion? Certainly, and here comparisons, which ought to be neither here nor there, are in fact very interesting. I was expecting the huge space of Santa Maria Maggiore to have slowed the singers down. Quite the reverse. The *Missa Papae Marcelli* is in fact a good four minutes faster than in their previous recording, made in 1980. No doubt they know the piece even better now, and no doubt Phillips has changed his view of it. But it really seems as though the building and its acoustic both had an effect, firstly in encouraging the singers really to sing out (the *Sanctus* has an extraordinary full-throated fervour), but perhaps also the knowledge that this was the very spot where Palestrina worked with his choir



prompted an even greater awareness of the music's eloquence. No matter how many pinches of salt we take with the old story that the *Missa Papae Marcelli* saved polyphony, the Counter-Reformation's insistence on verbal clarity and devout dignity is certainly at work in this Mass, and indeed all the 'late Palestrina' that complements it, but any idea that Palestrina was untouched by the delight in sonorous splendour that characterizes the more 'liberal', baroque side of the Counter-Reformation is scarcely confirmed by the magnificent music here for double choir.

The Allegri *Miserere* doesn't really belong in this collection, of course; it was written for another building entirely (the Sistine Chapel) decades after Palestrina's death. It's included, I suspect, because Peter Phillips, alongside his scholarship and his gifts as a choir-trainer, has a feeling for drama. The spatial effects of this music could not be rendered nearly so spectacularly in the Sistine (video will show you how: Choir 1 to the right of the chancel, the chant-intoning tenors to the left, Choir 2 magically distant, far away beyond the gates of the chapel of Paul V). It is stunning, with Deborah Roberts in the florid solo soprano part floating high Cs and roudades up into the vast space with luminous clarity. The Palestrina pieces have their own drama, and they are shrewdly programmed. It was good to begin with the almost rollicking jubilation of *Surge, illuminare*, wise to follow the showy *Miserere* with Palestrina at his most sublime in the *Stabat mater*. To follow that with the hymn-like, homophonic *Alma Redemptoris mater*, and that with the joyous *Magnificat* (for two choirs, but sounding like at least six, of quite different colours) is programme-building of a high order. To add the eight-part *Nunc dimittis* as an encore with its wonderful arching lines and a firework-display of counterpoint at the end, has a touch of genius to it.

The sound is splendid, the acoustic always perceptible but the singers never lost in it (they are in fact more recessed in the

halo of Merton College Chapel's reverberance in their earlier, more gravely monumental recording). On video you also see the 16 singers dwarfed but not dominated by their surroundings, the women's dresses and the red carpet they stand on, vivid splashes of colour against sombre stone and bronze; you see also the Basilica's magnificent mosaics (beautifully photographed) and you perhaps reflect that it was beneath them that Palestrina, as a 12-year-old choirboy, first realized what sounds could be made in such a noble space.

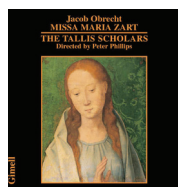
Michael Oliver (September 1994)

## Obrecht

Missa Maria Zart

The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips

Gimell CDGIM032 (69' • DDD • T/t)



This is a bizarre and fascinating piece: and the disc is long-awaited,

because The Tallis Scholars have been planning it for some years. It may be the greatest challenge they have faced so far. Normally a Renaissance Mass cycle lasts from 20 to 30 minutes; in the present performance, this one lasts 69 minutes. No 'liturgical reconstruction' with chants or anything to flesh out the disc: just solid polyphony the whole way. It seems, in fact, to be the longest known Renaissance Mass.

It is a work that has long held the attention of musicologists: Marcus van Crevel's famous edition was preceded by 160 pages of introduction discussing its design and numerology. And nobody has ever explained why it survives in only a single source – a funny print by a publisher who produced no other known music book. However, most critics agree that this is one of Obrecht's last and most glorious works, even if it leaves them tongue-tied. Rob C Wegman's recent masterly study of Obrecht's Masses put it in a nutshell: 'Forget the imitation, it seems to tell us, be still, and listen'.

There is room for wondering whether all of it needs to be quite so slow: an earlier record, by the Prague Madrigal Singers (Supraphon), got through it in far less time. Moreover, Obrecht is in any case a very strange composer, treating his dissonances far more freely than most of his contemporaries, sometimes running sequential patterns beyond their limit, making extraordinary demands of the singers in terms of range and phrase-length. That is, there may be ways of making the music run a little more fluidly, so that the irrational dissonances do not come across as clearly as they do here. But in most ways it is hard to fault Peter Phillips's reading of this massive work.

With only eight singers on the four voices, he takes every detail seriously. And they sing with such conviction and skill that there is hardly a moment when the ear is inclined to wander. As we have come to expect, The Tallis Scholars are technically flawless and constantly alive. Briefly, the disc is a triumph. But, more than that, it is a major contribution to the catalogue, unflinchingly presenting both the beauties and the apparent flaws of this extraordinary work.

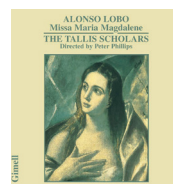
Phew! David Fallows (March 1996)

## Lobo

Lobo Missa Maruia Magdalene. O quam suavis est, Domine. Quam pulchri sunt. Ave regina caelorum. Versa est in luctum. Credfo quod Redemptor. Vivo ego, dicit Dominus. Ave Maria Guerrero Maria Magdalene

The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips

Gimell CDGIM031 (63' • DDD • T/t)



Alonso Lobo (not to be confused with his Portuguese

namesake, Duarte Lôbo) has long been recognised as one of the major contributors to the Golden Age of Iberian polyphony, but till now relatively little of his music has been available on disc. As with so many masters of the renaissance, he has mainly become known for one work,

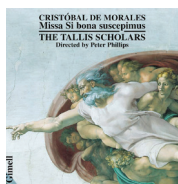


his setting of the funerary *Versa est in luctum*. This is undoubtedly a masterpiece of its kind – right up there with Victoria – but to have it placed alongside other pieces from Lobo's 1602 collection (one of the six Masses in the volume, and all seven motets) affords a welcome chance to assess his composition skills more fully. Furthermore, to have a group as internationally prestigious as The Tallis Scholars dedicate a whole CD to his music will undoubtedly boost his profile – and deservedly so.

Lobo's music is sonorous in a manner that is direct and unfussy in effect, though often highly expressive, and always structured with the utmost technical control. Take, for example, Lobo's *Ave Maria*, an 8-in-4 canon (in other words, four more voices are generated from the original quartet) which emanates a sense of absolute serenity. In fact, each of the motets explores a different aspect of the compositional techniques brought to the genre, and the Mass is equally fine, Lobo making the spacious textures of the motet *Maria Magdalene* by his teacher Guerrero a distinguishing feature of his own setting of the Ordinary. The Tallis Scholars are on superb form, the overall sound vibrant and immediate with solo sections (such as the *Benedictus*) providing contrast through a more introspective approach. Even if you've never heard of Lobo, or have never bought a CD of late-Renaissance polyphony before, try this one – you'll be bowled over. **Tess Knighton** (December 1997)

## Morales

**Morales** Missa Si bona suscepimus  
**Crecquillon** Andreas Christio famulus  
**Verdelot** Si bona suscepimus  
**The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips**  
Gimell CDGIM033 (56' • DDD • T/t)



The Tallis Scholars move into what is for them new territory: Cristóbal de Morales. He is perhaps the most admired Spanish composer of all

time, to judge from the distribution and longevity of his works. But not nearly enough of his music has been recorded: in the current catalogue he occupies only a single column, as against two for Guerrero and three for Victoria. He merits a far larger place in our musical life.

And the six-voice Mass *Si bona suscepimus* appears not to have been recorded before. It was printed in his first book of Masses (1544) and undoubtedly comes from his years in the papal chapel. At first listening, there may be something almost too serene about its flawless counterpoint that flows with effortless invention. But there is an abundance of arresting detail in here, and he uses the six voices with an astonishing variety of textures.

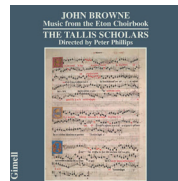
And The Tallis Scholars are up to their usual standards of magnificent sound colour, nicely judged balance and extremely pure intonation. There is nothing overtly Spanish in the performance: they simply sing what is there in the music, without imposing too much externally. They hardly ever rush or slow down severely, preferring to allow the music to unfold at its own flexible pace. That could seem bland until you compare the sound with the introductory five-voice motet of Verdelot on which the Mass is based, or indeed the marvellous Crecquillon motet that ends the disc; these immediately sound quite different (and indeed make you wonder why the Crecquillon motet passed for so long as a work of Morales).

**David Fallows** (December 2000)

## Browne

'Music from the Eton Choirbook'  
*O Maria Salvatoris mater. Salve regina. Stabat iuxta Christi crucem. Stabat mater dolorosa. O regina mundi clara*  
**The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips**  
Gimell CDGIM036 (71' • DDD • T/t)

**EARLY MUSIC AWARD 2005**



By any other name, John Browne would surely be recognised as one

of the very greatest English composers. The fact that fewer than 10 works survive intact in the *Eton Choirbook* (practically the only source transmitting his music anyway) only adds to his mysterious aura; the music sends normally dispassionate specialists reaching for superlatives. To my mind, Browne stands head and shoulders above the other Eton composers and it was high time that he was accorded an anthology of his own. The discography of early polyphonies has made such great strides that 'landmark' recordings are fewer and further between, and yet this can hardly be described as anything else.

An index of Browne's stature is the variety of scorings he deploys. His eight-voice *O Maria Salvatoris mater* was considered extraordinary enough to be given pride of place in the *Eton Choirbook*, and each of the three six-voice pieces included here is scored differently. No other Eton composer wrote so much six-voice music excluding trebles; the fact that two of Browne's pieces in this mould (*Stabat iuxta Christi crucem* and *O regina mundi*) are here recorded convincingly for the first time is one of the disc's principal attractions. Phillips's line-up of men's voices (especially on the top lines) is as superb as Browne's must have been, for an exceptional keenness of focus is needed to prevent the thick texture from becoming stodgy; as it is, the sound of six parts jostling in a compass of under two octaves is thrilling.

But the pieces with trebles have long been reckoned Browne's masterpieces; as such, they have been recorded several times before. Phillips sees Browne as a mystical figure, and his choice of tempi in the *Stabat mater* and *O Maria* reflects this. It is not a viewpoint that I quite share (the music's rhythmic intricacy seems to me more dynamic and physical), but his singers articulate it so convincingly as to suspend disbelief absolutely. I still remember with pleasure the Taverner Consort's recording of these last two pieces on EMI Reflexe 15 years ago (with



many of these singers), and would prefer Parrott's *O Maria* above Phillips, but the recorded sound here has a touch more presence and, in the detail, Phillips's *Stabat mater* is masterly (even with a distracting high pitch at the opening fermata of the *Salve regina*). I have long held that The Tallis Scholars are to be heard at their best in this repertory (remember their recording of William Cornysh?); this recording confirms that. More Eton music from them would be wonderful, and let's have the rest of Browne's output while we're at it (my only gripe here is that all these pieces have been recorded previously). Meanwhile, this is bound to be my end-of-year choice for the disc I'd give as a gift: if you don't know Browne's music, you simply must hear this.

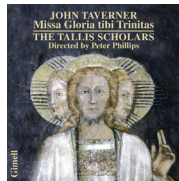
Fabrice Fitch (June 2005)

## Taverner

Missa Gloria tibi trinitas. Magnificats – a 4; a 5; a 6

The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips

Gimell CDGIM045 (79' • DDD • T/t)



Almost 30 years after their earlier recording of the work,

Peter Phillips and The Tallis Scholars return to what has to count as the most gorgeous of all early Tudor Masses. There are plenty of reasons to do so. Not just the technical improvements of the years but also Phillips's own evolution as a conductor. Of the earlier version I wrote in these pages that what I really liked was that 'Peter Phillips ... reads the work with passion, energy and individuality'. Now he and I are both older, and I far prefer the more relaxed attitude of the new version, allowing every detail to come through with clarity and precision but never pressing too hard.

To fill out the disc he has added a rarity: all three of Taverner's *Magnificat* settings. They are in four, five and six voices and make

an intriguing juxtaposition, not least because none of them shares anything with the style of the *Gloria tibi Trinitas* Mass. But even more interesting is that it looks as though Phillips has his eye on building up a new intégrale of Taverner's music. I very much hope so.

The passage that I cannot hear too often is the 'Crucifixus' of the Mass with the sopranos Janet Coxwell and Amy Howarth duetting above a single bass-line. Those two may be the key to the loveliness of this issue; and they have amply merited their photograph on the back of the booklet.

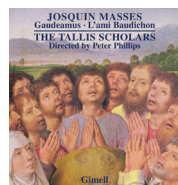
David Fallows (November 2013)

## Josquin Desprez

Missa Gaudeamus. Missa Lami Baudichon

The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips

Gimell CDGIM050 (67' • DDD • T/t)



The musical importance of Josquin Desprez (c1450/55-1521)

cannot be overstated, yet several of his Masses are still not well represented on record. This new release brings The Tallis Scholars' total to 14 and includes the seldom-heard *Missa L'ami Baudichon*. As ever, Peter Phillips and his singers bring confidence and elegance to Josquin's music; and, as Caroline Gill and I recently discussed (*Classics Reconsidered* – see page 24), the consistency of vision since their 1987 Josquin is remarkable.

This new album follows a familiar format: two Masses in contrasting styles, presented by an all-vocal consort of eight-10 singers. In fact, it's that very consistency of approach that is so useful when surveying Josquin's staggering output. In *Missa L'ami Baudichon*, often considered the earliest due to the Dufay esque use of a fragmentary cantus firmus, it's quite amazing how much material Josquin builds around a tune as simple as 'Three blind mice'. Revisiting the earlier recording by Peter Urquhart and

Capella Alamire (Dorian, 11/95) I am struck by the dominating tone of their instrumental cantus firmus (sackbut) compared to the lightness of Peter Phillips's tenors. As ever with The Tallis Scholars, interpretative gestures are subtle but flowing: listen for the deliciously well-controlled gush of excitement, a brass band climax in miniature, at Josquin's triumphal *Credo* ending, 'et vitam venture saeculi, Amen'. They find a wonderful sway in the garlands of polyphony and a sense of expectancy in the tenors' long final note.

Conversely, *Missa Gaudeamus* is almost certainly a middle-period work, and I am charmed by how the opening of the plainchant model presents a joyfully wide rising interval which permeates the polyphonic texture. The Tallis Scholars allow much light to filter through Josquin's complex textures and they clearly delight in his beautifully spacious three-part setting of 'Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua'. Their sound may have softened slightly with a new generation of singers but it suits *Missa Gaudeamus* particularly well. This disc is surely one of their best recent releases.

Edward Breen (November 2018)

## Josquin Desprez • Bauldeweyn • Brumel

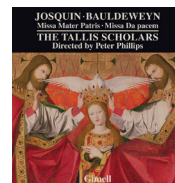
Josquin Desprez Missa Mater Patris

Bauldeweyn Missa Da pacem

Brumel Mater Patris

The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips

Gimell CDGIM052 (72' • DDD • T/t)



As one of the most important accounts of Josquin's Masses

in recent decades, Peter Phillips's albums with The Tallis Scholars continue to sparkle and inform. Already in these pages I have admired the clarity of vision and consistency of sound that this ensemble bring to his works; but with this new album there is a particular sheen to the performance



that places it among their recent best.

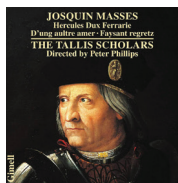
Phillips recently wrote how he feels each of Josquin's Masses has its own 'sound world' (*The Musical Times*: Autumn 2018). As we approach the end of his recording project, this comment comes into sharper focus, and particularly so in the case of *Missa Mater Patris*. One can argue that this is a late work on the grounds it is potentially a lament for Brumel, who died around 1512 and whose motet provides the model. But also, as Phillips suggests, this 'forthright' and 'bracingly simple' style could be the refinement of a lifetime's work. One could say that of this performance as well: it is scored for low voices and these singers find a warmth in the homophonic writing that blooms into an unhurried grandeur. Compared with Chanticleer (7/94) this is a much tighter ensemble in both tone and phrasing, and there are several outstandingly well-controlled spans of two-voice polyphony. Listen especially for the way these singers glide through the exotic chord-chains in the *Sanctus*: I can't help but be reminded of the confident sweep of the Andrews Sisters. This is glorious stuff indeed.

*Missa Da pacem* was once thought to be by Josquin and recorded on LP as such several times in the early '70s, until it was shown to be by the little-known Noel Bauldeweyn (fl1509-13). Phillips includes it in his cycle as an exercise in tracing Josquin's influence. It's worth it for its especially beautiful *Agnus Dei III*, which is sung here with charm and tenderness. **Edward Breen** (November 2019)

## Josquin Desprez

Missa D'ung aultre amer. Missa Faysant regretz. Missa Hercules Dux Ferrarie  
The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips  
Gimell CDGIM051 72 • T/t

**EARLY MUSIC AWARD 2021**



This ends a hugely enjoyable project begun in 1986, not originally

envisaged as a complete cycle of Josquin's Masses but which spawned consistently superb releases until completion became inevitable. This final disc is described by Phillips as 'a perfect showcase for [Josquin's] genius' and presents a trio of early-middle works offering some exquisite textures. Who better to navigate such extraordinary music than the masters of tranquillity and clarity themselves, The Tallis Scholars? Their exacting style delineates the distinctive sound world of each Mass while maintaining a consistent sonic beauty.

*Missa Hercules Dux Ferrarie* is based on eight notes derived from the vowels of the Duke's name. As Phillips explains: 'Ercole I d'Este of Ferrara ... liked to hear his name sung obviously and often.' The tenors shimmer brightly on this repeated tune while the *superius* (uppermost) line is gentle and understated. As ever, one greedily awaits the canonic passages in The Tallis Scholars' performance since their glassy serenity lends itself to such textures. The six-voice *Agnus Dei* is sublime.

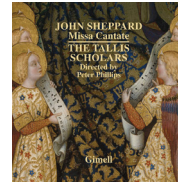
*Missa D'ung aultre amer* must be Josquin's shortest Mass, mostly syllabic, with telescoped texts creating a concise texture brightened by an attractive wide upwards leap in the top voice borrowed from Ockeghem's motet on which it is modelled. Knowing this older composer's importance to Josquin, it's a delight to hear his music infusing this final disc.

*Missa Faysant regretz* uses material drawn from an earlier rondeau by Frye or Binchois. Here the *Agnus III* is stunning: Josquin's inventiveness in creating such a finely spun texture over a repeating tenor part is extraordinary. This glossily perfect performance pings with relish and crackles with energy. A superb end to a magnificent cycle of recordings.

**Edward Breen** (November 2020)

## Sheppard

Missa Cantate. Beata nobis gaudia.  
Gaude, gaude, gaude Maria.  
Gaude virgo Christiphora. Jesu salvator  
daeculi, redemptis. Laudem dicite.  
Martyr Dei qui unicum  
The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips  
Gimell CDGIM053 • 76' • T/t



That Peter Phillips and The Tallis Scholars have – after

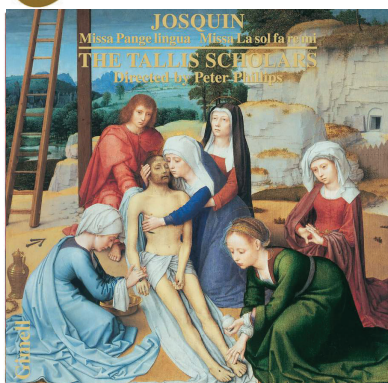
50 years of concerts – never before recorded Sheppard's Cantate Mass is an astonishing fact. This is after all the quintessential mid-century English Mass, the one that stands as the main beacon of the probably 60 years between the last Masses of Taverner and those of Byrd. And for that this new issue is all the more welcome. Welcome, of course, for all the qualities that have made The Tallis Scholars world leaders: absolute unanimity, perfect tuning, impeccable diction, stunning control and a seemingly effortless inevitability about everything they do.

Those who find themselves impatient with all that perfection will still perhaps turn to the 1996 recording by Paul McCreech with the Gabrieli Consort and the boy choristers of Salisbury Cathedral: far closer to the probable sound that Sheppard would have imagined and far more impassioned (except that The Tallis Scholars up the ante by choosing a pitch a semitone higher than McCreech).

But Phillips fills the rest of his disc with Latin service music, including the gorgeous *Gaude, gaude, gaude Maria*, with its magical middle section for four close-harmony high voices and a bass, and ending up with the glorious motet *Gaude virgo Christiphora*, not previously recorded, I think, and a truly wonderful addition to the repertory of that most idiosyncratic of 16th-century composers. **David Fallows** (October 2023)

DECEMBER 2016

## Classics RECONSIDERED



## Josquin Desprez

Missa Pange lingua

The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips

Gimell (M) © CDGIM009.

This is absolutely superb. You need only compare the new performance of the Mass *Pange lingua* with the Ensemble Clément Janequin LP (Harmonia Mundi) on which I heaped such superlatives last November to see how the eight singers of The Tallis Scholars are better in virtually all respects. The details are cleaner, the rhythms are more elegantly taken, the musical text they use is better (following, I think, mainly the early Vatican manuscript, CS16, whereas the French group basically seem to follow



**Caroline Gill** and  
**Edward Breen** discuss the  
merits of The Tallis Scholars'  
Gramophone Award-winning  
recording of Josquin's  
*Missa Pange lingua*



a slightly garbled German print of 1539), and the broad unfolding of the musical rhetoric is beautifully controlled by Peter Phillips. We must accept, of course, that Josquin is unlikely to have heard this music with two ladies on the top line, but they do it so well that only a fundamentalist would mark the record down for that. It should also be said that the least successful performance on the entire disc is in the opening *Kyrie* of this Mass where there is a certain 'brutality in the approach; and although The Tallis Scholars make more of the 'Benedictus' and the last *Agnus Dei* than the French singers, there may still be better ways of doing it. On the other

hand, as just one example among many, these seem to be the first musicians to make the 'Osanna' truly successful and understand why Josquin should have chosen to compose it that way.

Until now The Tallis Scholars have concentrated on somewhat later music. I very much hope that they will devote more of their future energies to this earlier repertory to which they seem so well suited. Over the past 12 months there has been a surprising resurgence of interest in Josquin's music, constituting something of an *annus mirabilis* in his career on record: this seems much the best so far.

**David Fallows** (3/87)

**Edward Breen** I first heard this recording on a chrome cassette (remember them?) that I bought from a cathedral gift shop when I was about 12 years old. At that time I had no particular idea who Josquin was, but as a choirboy I'd noticed that my favourite music was in *The Oxford Book of Tudor Anthems*, and so I was mistakenly drawn to this recording by the name Tallis rather than anything else. Thankfully, I loved it and soon wore the tape out by repeatedly winding back and forth to rehear the 'Pleni sunt caeli' duet (much to the relief of my parents, who by default listened to Bob Dylan in the car). Considering how little unaccompanied Renaissance polyphony had lodged in the public subconscious at that time, I wonder how many others discovered Josquin or even just the sound of professional early music vocalists through this groundbreaking Gramophone Award winner?

**Caroline Gill** I'm sure that winning Record of the Year in 1987 raised its profile, and I remember thinking at the time that it was

an incredibly radical choice. I was in my early teens when it was first released and, faced with the same choice of format you would have had, I plumped for LP rather than cassette. I still have that record. When I rationalised my collection many years ago, I sold most of my vinyl in order to replace it with CD to future-proof my listening, but I kept the *Missa Pange lingua* (along with David Hill's recording of the Victoria Requiem with Westminster Cathedral Choir) because it represented the start of my relationship with polyphony.

It was the first time I had heard chant sung with clear (but subtle) phrasing, and that brought out the pure and absolute beauty of its melodies for me in a way that was like discovering my house had a beautiful extra room that I'd known nothing about. Funnily enough, though, when I listen to this recording now I notice the imperfections in some of the tuning that I'm not sure would get past producers today – such have standards for absolute perfection in tuning and blend become

part of the identity of performance of polyphony over the past 30 years (though I think it could probably have slipped an awful lot further if its only comparator for perfect tuning was Bob Dylan!). I think that what we expect to hear now in performances of this repertoire is in great part to do with the example The Tallis Scholars set back then. And although we can hear that the sound has evolved and refined itself, it has fundamentally barely changed, despite its (albeit slow) turnover of singers: what you hear now still contains that legacy of the sound of the Clerkes of Oxenford.

**EB** I'm fascinated to hear that you thought this album was a 'radical choice' for Record of the Year in 1987 because I think I can also detect a note of the trail-blazing radical in David Fallows's review: 'This is absolutely superb' is the sort of opening line that a reviewer might only use once in a lifetime, and it is clear to me now that he had immediately grasped the importance of this release. It's true that Phillips based his





The winning Tallis Scholars team with their Gramophone Award (engineer Mike Clements, back row left, and co-producer Steve Smith, front row left)

sound on the soaring clarity of David Wulstan's performances with The Clerkes of Oxenford, something he readily admits in the second edition of his book *What We Really Do: The Tallis Scholars* (2013). However, I detect a small but essential shift from the naive, ethereal sound that Wulstan sought to the cool confidence that Phillips and his singers developed which, as you rightly say, comes right at the very beginning of these Josquin Masses with the clear phrasing of the plainsong.

Revisiting this disc after what must be a decade or so I am also struck by how little the sound of The Tallis Scholars has dated, and I find myself reflecting that Phillips and his extraordinarily talented singers had found an ur-performance style, one that is vocal without being choral or, more importantly, self-consciously singerly. By avoiding ostentatiously interpretative gestures they future-proofed themselves against the shifting tides of musical fashion. But more than that, there's something in their approach to phrasing which defines their distinctive sound.

**CG** I think it *was* a trail-blazing choice, yes – early music was given so much less credence then than it is now, and the Gramophone Award was, I think (although I may be biased!), a visionary choice. The canon of post-Renaissance music was very rarely given any pre-Bachian context, and the pure sound of the voices and technical requirements of any instrumental works were often written off as second-rate in comparison with the generally more virtuosic complexion of music written in and after the Baroque period.

So I agree absolutely that there was a steeliness in the purity of sound that The Tallis Scholars cultivated, which was totally new despite what I am sure was a conscious intention to emulate certain elements of the sound of The Clerkes. It brought to this repertoire a confidence and lack of apology that I think changed the direction of what we would now describe as 'historically informed performance' – although, equally, I'm not sure that their sound has actually changed with it. I think they try to create exactly the same sound now that they did

then, but in simply doing that they have created an identity that is entirely distinctive. The Renaissance repertoire is enormous, and they have worked their way through it over the course of 40 or so years, maintaining a sort of consistency that has been extremely helpful to the way that listeners perceive that repertoire as well as in terms of the extent to which this music has reached new enthusiasts. So I wonder if rather than saying that the sound of The Tallis Scholars hasn't dated, it's actually more of a question of it having stayed consciously the same in the face of those shifting tides of musical fashion. In which case, where does that leave this first properly high-profile disc of theirs, the *Missa Pange lingua*? I think for me it represents more than just the fact that it was the first insight into a repertoire that has probably contained more musical revelations over the past half-century than any other, or the first proper peek above the parapet for a group that is (still) unique. For me, there was a whole musical landscape waiting to be discovered at the point that this disc was released, and The Tallis Scholars came along and resolutely stuck their flag in it.

**EB** I couldn't agree more! This recording remains impressive not just because of its brilliant interpretation and beautiful sound, but also because of the coherence of those ideas; a formula that has remained valuable and rewarding to the present day. Considering how much has changed in early music, and how many more people perform and record it these days, that's no mean feat.

The original *Gramophone* review has also weathered well. The no-frills, matter-of-fact confidence with which DF began reflected the no-frills, matter-of-fact confidence of The Tallis Scholars' performance. The clean details, elegant rhythms, and broad unfolding that he highlighted is striking, since here amid their 1980s recordings he has pinpointed those very qualities that became the quintessential sound of The Tallis Scholars. It was, and still is, that particular click between Phillips's unfussy approach and the clear lines of Josquin's music that makes this disc so bewitching. So much so that I wonder why Phillips chose Tallis as his ensemble's namesake? In the 1980s I feel Andrew Parrott was leading the pack with Tallis, but when it came to Josquin Phillips was absolutely spot on.

Did you know that there is an unreleased 1978 recording of *Missa de la batalla escoutez* by Guerrero? Speaking of the early sound of this group, that would be fascinating to hear. ©



APRIL 2010

**O**ur decision to record all the Masses of Josquin des Prez was an article of faith in my terms if ever there was one. I have never believed in anthologising on record – the “complete works” of even the most famous composers never sell as well as the same number of discs of simply great music – but in this case I did think it was worth the risk. Every Mass by Josquin has its own character and sound world, each one as different from the others as Beethoven’s symphonies differ from each other, with the same sense of intellectual diversity – and there are only eight CDs’ worth of them. Many more, and I would have said no. Also, the Tallis Scholars’ recording career has been framed by Josquin Mass records. The first won the *Gramophone* Record of the Year Award in 1987 and effectively established our reputation as a world-class ensemble; the third won a Diapason d’Or and a Choc from *Le Monde de la Musique*; the fourth has just been nominated for a Grammy. The fifth is on its way.

**We have gone back to recording** all our discs in the Chapel of Merton College, Oxford. I first conducted there in 1974 when the proto-Tallis Scholars provided the “tune” to Vaughan Williams’s *Tallis Fantasia*. We started to record in this half-cathedral with its superlative acoustics in 1977 and stayed there for the next 10 years, returning in 2005. Since then I have been asked to set up a choral foundation in the college with (as of now) 18 choral scholars, two organ scholars and an assistant director as well as myself, including of course female sopranos and altos. It has been at the back of my mind that this is the perfect school for the long-term future of the Tallis Scholars, as well as being supremely valuable in itself. And I get to conduct Stainer’s *I saw the Lord*, which falls well outside what I am normally asked to do. Blair in B minor is just as wonderful.



## DIARY

## Peter PHILLIPS

**The Tallis Scholars’ founder looks back on 30 years – and 50 discs – recording the Renaissance**

I remain convinced that there is no better building for sound in all the countless buildings we have sung in.

**One of the more offbeat delights** of our job is to encounter the Latin language every working day of our lives. It is not that we speak it of course, nor necessarily understand every word that we sing of it, but it has a pedigree which will intrigue all those who are interested – as I am – in what surrounds us in Europe. And although dead, I find that Latin still has a genuinely international reach, which I suppose must include all the Chinese, Korean and Japanese people we have sung to over the years. We have given more than 100 concerts in Japan since our first tour there in 1989; and this year I shall again judge the All-Nippon “Let Your Voices Reach the Sky”

Festival in Fukushima, when I get the slightly taxing opportunity to hear 100 choirs in two days. Much of what they sing will be in Latin. However, not every culture has shown itself to be so respectful of such antiquity. A newspaper article in Louisville, Kentucky, some years ago put the title of Hassler’s motet *Dixit Maria* through the spell-check and printed it as “Dixie Maria”. This seemed oddly appropriate, given the location. Even so, we have just completed our 50th tour to North America.

**Reflecting on the 30th** anniversary of Gimell Records, I realise again what a desperate choice it was that we made in 1980. The problem we faced – apart from the fact that there were almost no independent labels in those days – was not only that the Tallis

It has always been essential that I have never had to pass my repertoire ideas past accountants

Scholars were unknown, but so also was the music we wanted to record. This was a disastrous double whammy in a market which relied on famous names in its artists and big record company publicity. It took us several years – and the invention of the CD – to get Gimell off the ground, but it has always been essential that I have never had to pass my repertoire ideas past a committee of businessmen and accountants. Quite simply this freedom has enabled me to establish Renaissance polyphony as a repertoire which could stand alongside any on the concert stages of the world. I wanted the Tallis Scholars to appear in international series, alongside string quartets, chamber orchestras and solo recitalists. To advance this I deliberately looked far and wide in what we recorded, marking the boundaries of the repertoire with masterpieces from every available tradition in Europe.

**I realise now that over the long** haul Gimell has done as much as any “major” could ever have done for a favoured artist. For 30 years there has never been any question of compromising standards, and not a single title has been deleted. Like the foundation of the Tallis Scholars in 1973, we eventually benefited from having had a good idea at the right time. It was just that we didn’t know it when we started. ●





Steve Smith and Peter Phillips in 2010  
(photo: Eric Richmond)





**[thetallisscholars.co.uk](http://thetallisscholars.co.uk)**  
**[gimell.com](http://gimell.com)**