

CONVIVIUM SINGERS



CONVIVIUM
RECORDS

PETER PHILIPS
AN ENGLISHMAN ABROAD
LATIN MOTETS 1612-1628

CONVIVUM SINGERS

ESTABLISHED IN 2009 BY ADRIAN GREEN & ALEXANDER NORMAN, CONVIVUM SINGERS IS A GROUP OF MUSICIANS WHO PERFORM A WIDE VARIETY OF VOCAL AND CHORAL MUSIC. ITS AIM IS TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG SINGERS AT THE EARLY STAGES OF THEIR PERFORMING CAREERS, AS WELL AS FOR TALENTED MUSICIANS WHO HAVE CHOSEN NOT TO PURSUE CAREERS IN MUSIC, BUT WISH TO CONTINUE SINGING TO A HIGH STANDARD. THEY CURRENTLY COMPRISE SINGERS FROM MANY ESTABLISHED CHOIRS, INCLUDING *BIRMINGHAM CONSERVATOIRE CHAMBER CHOIR*, *EX CATHEDRA*, *ARMONICO CONSORT*, *THE CHOIR OF ROYAL HOLLOWAY*, *GENESIS SIXTEEN*, *PORTSMOUTH CATHEDRAL* AND *YORK MINSTER*. THE GROUP SPECIALISES IN UNDISCOVERED OR LITTLE-KNOWN BRITISH MUSIC, AND IN THE MUSIC OF THE LATE SIXTEENTH AND EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES. WORKING WITH ITS GUEST CONDUCTOR, NEIL FERRIS, CONVIVUM SINGERS HAVE RECORDED TWO DISCS OF CONTEMPORARY CHORAL MUSIC BY JONATHAN DOVE (NAXOS – DUE FOR RELEASE IN MARCH 2012) AND HUGH BENHAM (CONVIVUM RECORDS – DUE FOR RELEASE IN NOVEMBER 2011).

CONVIVUM SINGERS HAVE GIVEN RECITALS IN THE CATHEDRALS OF COVENTRY, BIRMINGHAM AND PORTSMOUTH (AS PART OF THE PORTSMOUTH FESTIVITIES), AS WELL AS IN CHURCHES IN AND AROUND LONDON. THE ENSEMBLE CONTINUES TO BE INVOLVED WITH PORTSMOUTH CATHEDRAL'S CHORISTER OUTREACH PROGRAMME, DELIVERING AND FACILITATING WORKSHOPS AND PERFORMANCES AT SCHOOLS WITHIN THE DIOCESE OF PORTSMOUTH.

PETER PHILIPS (1560/1–1628) has long existed on the margins of English music. Resident in England until 1582, Philips spent the rest of his life in exile in the Netherlands. It is presumed that Philips's Catholicism motivated this move, as Catholics were not permitted to openly practice their faith in England at the time. As many scholars have observed, the long-term neglect of Philips's music has been partly due to his separation from England's choral tradition. Byrd, also a Catholic, did not suffer the same fate: unlike Philips, Byrd also composed English-language madrigals and Anglican church music in addition to his many Latin motets. Byrd remained linked to the English musical establishment, despite his faith. Besides keyboard music, Philips remained little-known in England. In recent years, he has begun

to enjoy the acclaim he deserves as choirs rediscover his glorious motets. The present disc is part of this rediscovery.

AFTER LEAVING ENGLAND Philips secured the position of organist at the English College in Rome, and whilst in the city, it is likely that he would have had some contact with composers such as Palestrina, Marenzio, Anerio and Victoria. Philips's vocal music is indebted to this 'Italian' style of composition, and has little in common with his English contemporaries – a further reason for its neglect. Philips resided in Rome from 1582 until 1585, when he left in the retinue of Thomas Lord Paget (another exiled English Catholic). He settled in Antwerp in 1590, teaching the keyboard and composing instrumental music. In 1597, Philips moved

to Brussels to take up the position of organist at the Archducal Court of Albert and Isabella, where he remained until his death. All of his sacred vocal music was published during this period: indeed the scholar David Smith has noted that Philips's compositional career was carefully tailored to suit his patron's needs.

THE MAJORITY OF HIS compositions on the present recording are drawn from the collection *Cantiones Sacrae Quinis Vocibus* of 1612, which contains some of Philips's greatest music. Within this collection, Philips displays both his natural ability to write in a conservative contrapuntal style, and with experimentation of texture and rhythm which places him more firmly within the mainstream of early 17th-Century composition. The motets *Viae Sion lugent*

and *Pater Noster* are excellent examples of the former approach, avoiding sharp contrasts in texture, metre and rhythm in favour of smooth, flowing lines. *Pater Noster* uses the ancient technique of composition based upon a cantus firmus (a plain-chant melody which runs through the entire motet) and is a serenely detached setting of the Lord's Prayer. *Viae Sion lugent* displays a canonic texture, but its long plangent melodies also reflect the darkness of the text, taken from the Lamentations for Maundy Thursday. The final bars are particularly moving, as each voice enters to sing the words 'and she is in bitterness.'

SIMILAR IN EMOTIONAL intensity is *Mulieres sedentes*, one of Philips's most beautiful creations. Its striking opening consists of a single major

triad, held for five bars, from which the rest of the piece seems to emerge. The two soprano parts intertwine throughout in a heartfelt lament to the entombed Christ. *Mulieres sedentes* displays Philips's mastery of the vocal medium, as he uses economy of means to achieve its effect: a mesmerising harmonic progression circles through the final stages of the motet, which ends in tranquillity.

IN MARKED CONTRAST, *Beatus vir qui inventus est*, is a complex piece which tackles a long and varied text. Philips responds with a wide variety of textures and rhythmic devices; his love of lively syncopated figures and dancing motifs is evident here! The highly intricate 'Alleluia' which ends the motet is a fine moment, as is the contrapuntal (ars perfecta) setting of 'et perfectus est.'

SIMILAR IN APPROACH is *Cum jucunditate*, which begins with a characteristic section in triple time. A clear sense of structure is in evidence in this motet, as the thoughtful setting of 'devotissime' alternates with the virtuosic 'celebramus.' More dancing syncopations return in the final section, which affirms the hope that the Virgin Mary will 'intercede for us.'

CORONA AUREA AND VENI, SPONSA CHRISTI illustrate the heavenly coronation of martyrs with sumptuous music. The text of *Veni, Sponsa Christi* uses a passage from *The Song of Songs* to compare the Virgin Martyr being accepted as the 'Bride of Christ' with the earthly union described in the Biblical love poem. The opening, set for upper voices, seems to suggest the Bride, whilst the overlapping cantus parts of

'in paradisum' create a radiant texture. This motet exhibits a clear structure, with well-defined sections and repetition of material. A similar radiance is felt in *Corona aurea*, where Philips adds an imitative 'alleluia.' More widely known is *Ave verum corpus*; we have included it on this recording because of the work's outstanding quality.

ONLY TWO PIECES FROM *Cantiones Sacrae Octonis vocibus* 1613 have been included here. It is believed that *Ecce tu pulchra* was written for the marriage of Albert, Duke of Austria to Isabella of Spain. Both set texts based upon the *Songs of Songs* and exhibit a similar use of scalic, fanfare-like figuration and chordal exchanges between the two four-part choirs. They are also similar in style to the madrigal *Qui sott'ombrosi miri*

which was written in celebration of the marriage. *Paratum cor meum, Domine probasti me* and *O Maria domina nostra* are all taken from Philips's last and largest collection *Paradisus Sacris Cantionibus*. This was the culmination of his extensive exploration of the solo/ensemble motet (the previous collections being *Gemmulae Sacrae* and *Deliciae Sacrae*). It has been suggested that these pieces may have been written because of a shortage of singers in the Netherlands and the necessary funds to pay them. Much of this music is unknown, and only a little has been published. The melodic style of *Domine probasti me* is simple but neat, full of rhetorical gestures and word-painting. In *Domine probasti me* Philips illustrates the words 'If I climb up to heaven, thou

art there: if I go down to hell, thou art there also' with aptly rising and falling phrases, whilst 'extremis' is given the highest note of the piece.

O MARIA DOMINA NOSTRA is also harmonically straightforward; much of the melodic and harmonic material is repeated in sequence (rising or falling by step), giving the soloist the opportunity to characterise each individual phrase. It features three dance-like sections in triple time, including a beautiful 'Alleluia.' *Paratum cor meum* is one of Philips's most adventurous and 'progressive' motets, scored for three tenors often singing in close imitation. There are sections in which each voice has a separate 'solo,' and the motet ends with a rousing 'Exultare super caelos.'

ALEXANDER NORMAN—

ASPECTS OF PERFORMANCE

Contemporary sources reveal that the Chapel Choir available to Philips in Brussels consisted of twelve chaplains, six boy choristers and two or three organists. It is possible that the organists would have sung with the choir. It seems likely (taking evidence such as the Calle Engraving into account) that extra singers and instrumentalists were used at least for important occasions.

IN 1617, PHILIPS'S PUBLISHER

Phalèse issued editions of the 1612 and 1613 collections with organ continuo parts. It has been argued that because the original manuscripts did not contain an organ part, and owing to the number of errors in the 1617 part, continuo accompaniment was not viewed as essential to performance. We may assume that any organist accompanying Philips's motets would already be familiar with the music, using their memory and ear as much as the written-out part! On the present recording, we felt that, in the absence of brass instruments, the organ accompaniment adds weight and grandeur to the two eight-part motets performed.



ALEX NORMAN (ARTISTIC DIRECTOR), ADRIAN GREEN (MANAGING DIRECTOR), AMBER GILL (EVENTS & FUNDRAISING ASSISTANT)

Motets from the 1612 collection have been left unaccompanied; their beauty and intimacy is such that instrumental accompaniment seems superfluous. *Corona aurea* has been recorded with smaller forces to illustrate the adaptability of this repertoire to differing ensembles.

IT IS MY BELIEF THAT there is no 'definitive' way to perform 16th- and 17th-Century vocal music and that attempts to recreate 'authentic' choral sounds are problematic. Contemporary sources suggest that musicians of Philips's day were flexible, practical and imaginative in performance. The present recording unashamedly uses a mixed-voice choir; using the resources available to us, we aimed to capture

the spirit of Philips's music, rather than an 'authentic' sound. The disc was compiled from two separate recording sessions; in both cases the numbers of singers per part range from 1 to 6.

IT HAS BEEN A PRIVILEGE TO explore Philips's music this year and a wonderful journey for Convivium Singers; we have discovered much about ourselves as musicians through this exceptional music. We hope that our commitment to and enthusiasm for Philips's music will inspire more performers to explore his rewarding repertoire.

ALEXANDER NORMAN—
With thanks to Prof. Lionel Pike (Royal Holloway, London) and Dr. David Smith (University of Aberdeen).



CONVIVIAM SINGERS RECORD PETER PHILIPS

ALEXANDER NORMAN

As Artistic Director of Convivium Singers, Alex has conducted the ensemble in many concerts in the South of England and the Midlands. He recently completed the Masters programme at Birmingham Conservatoire, specialising in Choral Conducting under the tuition of Paul Spicer. Prior to studying in Birmingham, Alex was both an organ and a choral scholar at Royal Holloway, University of London. Here he accompanied the Chapel Choir, notably for a live broadcast of Choral Evensong on BBC Radio 3, on a disc of music by Richards Dubra for Hyperion Records, and for many cathedral evensongs in England and the USA. Alex has given organ recitals in Coventry and Birmingham Cathedrals, and in local churches in his home town of Coventry. Alex is the organist at the Coventry Methodist Central Hall and accompanist to the Half-Circle Singers and Thalea (Birmingham). Alex has recently appeared as baritone soloist with the Circle Singers and Jubilee Choir, and has sung with Midlands-based chamber choirs Amici and the Armonico Consort.

ADRIAN GREEN

A graduate of Royal Holloway, London and recipient of the Dame Felicity Lott bursary, Adrian has pursued a career in both singing and recording alongside a Lay Clerk post held at Portsmouth Cathedral. Adrian founded Convivium Records in June 2009 to help composers and performers record and release their music to the highest possible standard in a cost-effective way. Adrian founded Convivium Singers with Alex Norman originally as a 'recording choir'—whilst today they receive recognition for their live performances through their participation in competitions, festivals and events.

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CONVIVUM SINGERS

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