DUNEDIN CONSORT

Thursday 27 - Sunday 30 March
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The Quality of Mercy

A cappella music inspired by the season of Lent



Nicholas Mulroy director
The singers of Dunedin Consort

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PROGRAMME

Francis Poulenc *Tristis est anima mea*
Orlando Lassus *Tristis est anima mea*
Francis Poulenc *Vinea mea electa*
Imogen Holst *Kyrie*
Vicente Lusitano *Sancta Maria*
Orlando Gibbons *Drop, drop slow tears*
James MacMillan *Miserere*
Interval
Francis Poulenc *Tenebrae factae sunt*
Sarah MacDonald *Crux fidelis*
Anna Meredith *Heal you*
William Henry Harris *Bring us, O Lord God*
William Byrd *Iustorum animae*
Ninfea Cruttwell-Reade *The Dead*
Francis Poulenc *Timor et Tremor*
Imogen Holst *Agnus Dei*
Cheryl Frances-Hoad *At the round earth's imagined corners*
John Sheppard *Libera nos* I

Nicholas Mulroy director

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Programme Note

The quality of mercy is not strain'd.
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

Portia—disguised as Balthazar—delivers this plea to Shylock in Act 4, Scene 1 of William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and gives this programme its title, as it blends the straightforwardly liturgical and the more poetic.

We open with a pair of settings of *Tristis est anima mea*—a text that recalls Christ addressing his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane in the last hours before his crucifixion. For **Orlando Lassus (1532–1594)**, there was a clear liturgical purpose for his meditative setting, composed as a so-called responsory for the service of Tenebrae on Maundy Thursday. By contrast, it was the brutal death of fellow composer Pierre-Octave Ferroud in a car accident and then Europe's darkening geopolitics in the late 1930s that prompted **Francis Poulenc (1899–1963)** to write his set of four motets for 'a time of penitence'. Although he had previously moved away from the Catholicism in which he had been brought up, these events had encouraged to him return. As he wrote to a friend while composing the set between July 1938 and January 1939, 'it is a good feeling to be supported by religious inspiration … it helps me to work as well as to get through these dreadful times'. Poulenc completed his set with the responsories for Good Friday (*Vinea mea electa*) and Holy Saturday (T*enebrae factae sunt*) as well as *Timor et Tremor*, a blend of verses Psalms 54, 56, and 60 that was also set by Lassus.

One of the most fundamental pleas for mercy comes from the opening of the Mass and the Greek text of the *Kyrie*. **Imogen Holst (1907–1984)** composed throughout her life, although she was best known as the daughter of Gustav Holst and then, alongside a prodigious career of artistic administration, as Benjamin Britten's amanuensis. The Mass is one of her earliest works, a prayerful and tender setting that belies its composition as part of a class led by Ralph Vaughan Williams at The Royal College of Music in 1927. Listening to shapes of the phrase and its modality, the influence of Vaughan Williams and his own unaccompanied mass setting of 1921 is audible but not indelible—both the *Kyrie* and *Agnus Dei* have a lapping, translucent quality as she dovetails the individual lines, bringing out the vulnerability of the pleas of the faithful.

Mercy was also sought from those who might intercede on the behalf of those praying. It is just such a text for a feast day of the Virgin Mary that **Vicente Lusitano (1520–1561)** sets. Born in Portugal, ordained in Rome, and working in Germany, he is the first published Black composer, his treatises and motets found in libraries from Stuttgart to Lisbon.

After such a such a rich vein of polyphony, both 16th- and 20th-century, we are offered a cooling balm by the combination of **Orlando Gibbons' (1583–1625)** Song 46 and Phineas Fletcher's (1582-1650) devotional poetry. Here again we benefit from the influence of Vaughan Williams—it was he who combined the music and words in his work on *The English Hymnal*, underwriting the emotional depth of the text with the poignant simplicity of Gibbons' music.

After a perfectly formed miniature, we end the first half with **James MacMillan's (b. 1959)** epic *Miserere*. Premiered in 2009, this setting of Psalm 51 is a remarkably fluid and passionate treatment of the text, filled with a thoroughly 21st century treatment of plainchant and the gentle, slightly Scottish, decoration so characteristic of MacMillan's work. From a dark beginning, there is clear progress to a place of safety as faith and the redemptive and musical arc delivers the listener to a comforting and low-lying final cadence.

Canadian organist and composer **Sarah MacDonald (b.1968)** follows another of the Poulenc motets with her *Crux fidelis*. Around what she calls 'the mantra-like repetition' of the Latin of the title, she layers words by Emily Dickinson and Emilia Lanier to tell the narrative of the crucifixion. The effect, much like a rosary, is to keep bringing the listener back to the cross, never letting us drift too far even as the story is told.

Anna Meredith's (b.1978) remarkable *Heal you* was commissioned as a love song but has all the qualities one might want to hear from someone, mortal or divine, displaying mercy —as she herself says, 'the text comes out of the texture as if emerging out of water.'

Willam Henry Harris (1883–1973) and **Cheryl Frances-Hoad (b.1980)** both offer settings of John Donne at his lyrical best in contemplating both the end of life and end of days. **William Byrd's (1540–1623)** *Iustorurum animae* homes in on the faith required to see through seeming death to the good news of ascension and resurrection, on the peace that the faithful dead have found. Following this heavenly view of death is an altogether earthier assessment—**Ninfea Cruttwell-Reade (b.1989)** sets Scottish poet Don Paterson's (b.1963) intensely peated investigation of the physicality of dead bodies and what the blooming of the plants the corpses feed means for us, the living.

We close with **John Sheppard's (c.1515–1558)** *Libera Nos I*. Although not a long work, its plea for freedom, redemption, and absolution is given an eternal quality by his decision to place the cantus firmus—the plainchant melody that runs through the piece—in the lowest voice. This slows the music's harmonic heartrate and leaves the upper voices to unfurl themselves with their support.

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Texts and Translations

Francis Poulenc *Tristis est anima mea*

Tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem:
sustinete hic et vigilate mecum,
nunc videbitis turbam quae circumdabit me.
Vos fugam capietis, et ego vadam immolari pro vobis.
Ecce, appropinquat hora
et Filius hominis tradetur in manus peccatorum.

My spirit is laden with sorrow and would die;
remain here awhile and keep watch with me.
Soon you will see a great crowd come to surround me.
You will flee, and I shall be sacrificed for you.
Lo, the time is nigh
when the Son of Man shall be given over into the hands of sinners.

Orlando Lassus *Tristis est anima mea*

Tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem:
sustinete
hic et vigilate mecum. Nunc videbitis turbam quæ circumdabit me.
Vos fugam capietis, et ego vadam immolari pro vobis.

My spirit is laden with sorrow and would die;
remain here awhile and keep watch with me.
Soon you will see a great crowd come to surround me.
You will flee, and I shall be sacrificed for you.

Francis Poulenc *Vinea mea electa*

Vinea mea electa, ego te plantavi:
quomodo conversa es in amaritudinem,
ut me crucifigeres et Barrabam dimitteres.
Sepivi te et lapides elegi ex te
et aedificavi turrim.

You are my chosen vine and by my hand you were planted;
how then have you become bitter?
You crucified me and set Barabbas free.
I guarded you with a hedge, I removed the stones from around you,
I built a tower to watch over you.

Imogen Holst *Kyrie*

Kyrie eleison
Christe eleison
Kyrie eleison

Lord have mercy
Christ have mercy
Lord have mercy

Vicente Lusitano *Sancta Maria*

Sancta Maria, succurre miseris,
iuva pusillanimes, refove flebiles;
ora pro populo, interveni pro clero,
Intercede pro devoto femineo sexu;
sentiant omnes tuum iuvamen,
quicumque celebrant tuum
commemorationem.

Holy Mary, help the wretched,
assist the faint-hearted, comfort the tearful;
pray for the people, intervene for the clergy,
intercede for the faithful female sex;
that all who celebrate your feast day
may feel your help

William Gibbons *Drop, drop slow tears*

Drop, drop, slow tears,
And bathe those beauteous feet,
Which brought from Heav'n
The news and Prince of Peace.

Cease not, wet tears,
His mercies to entreat;
To cry for vengeance:
Sin doth never cease.

In your deep floods
Drown all my faults and fears;
Nor let His eye see
Sin, but through my tears.

Phineas Fletcher

James MacMillan *Miserere*

Miserere mei, Deus: secundum magnam misericordiam tuam.	Have mercy on me, God: according to your great kindness.
Et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum, dele iniquitatem meam.	And according to the multitude of your mercies, erase my iniquities.
Amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea: et a peccato meo munda me.	Wash me completely from my iniquities: and cleanse me of my sins.
Quoniam iniquitatem meam ego cognosco: et peccatum meum contra me est semper.	For I know my iniquities: and my sins are always before me.
Tibi soli peccavi, et malum coram te feci: ut justificeris in sermonibus tuis, et vincas cum judicaris.	To you alone, I have sinned and done evil before you: that you may be fair in your speech and justified in your judgement.
Ecce enim in iniquitatibus conceptus sum: et in peccatis concepit me mater mea.	Behold, I was conceived in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceived me.
Ecce enim veritatem dilexisti: incerta et oculta sapientiae tuae manifestasti mihi.	Behold, you desire truth in the inward parts: and you teach me wisdom in the hidden places.
Asperges me hyssopo et mundabor: lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor.	Purify me with hyssop and I will be clean: wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
Auditui meo dabis gaudium et laetitiam: et exultabunt ossa humiliata.	Let me hear your joy and gladness: and my humble bones will rejoice.
Averte faciem tuam a peccatis meis: et omnes iniquitates meas dele.	Turn your face away from my sins: and erase all of my iniquities.
Cor mundum crea in me Deus: et spiritum rectum innova in visceribus meis.	Create in me a pure heart, O God: and renew your right spirit within me.
Ne projicias me a facie tua: et spiritum sanctum tuum ne auferas a me.	Do not turn me away from your sight: and do not take your Holy Spirit from me.
Redde mihi laetitiam salutaris tui: et spiritu principali confirma me.	Return your gladness and salvation to me: and uphold me with a willing spirit.
Docebo iniquos vias tuas: et impii ad te convertentur.	I will teach sinners your way: and they will be converted unto you.
Libera me de sanguinibus, Deus, Deus salutis meae: et exsultabit lingua mea justitiam tuam.	Save me from blood, God, God of my salvation: my tongue will praise of your righteousness.
Domine, labia mea aperies: et os meum annuntiabit laudem tuam.	Lord, open my lips: and my mouth will sing your glory.

Quoniam si voluisses sacrificium, dedissem utique:
holocaustis non delectaberis.

Sacrificium Deo spiritus contribulatus:
cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non despicies.

Benigne fac, Domine, in bona voluntate tua Sion:
ut aedificentur muri Jerusalem.

Tunc acceptabis sacrificium justitiae, oblationes et holocausta:
tunc imponent super altare tuum vitulos.
Psalm 51

For if thou had desired sacrifices, I would indeed have given it: with burnt offerings thou will not be delighted.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and humble heart God will not despise.

Do well before the Lord in your good pleasure to Zion:
and build the walls of Jerusalem.

Then you accept the sacrifices of righteousness in oblations and burnt offerings: then they will offer bulls on your altar.

INTERVAL

Francis Poulenc *Tenebrae factae sunt*

Tenebrae factae sunt dum crucifixissent Jesum Judaei,
et circa horam nonam exclamavit Jesus voce magna:
Deus meus, ut quid me dereliquisti?
Et inclinato capite emisit spiritum.
Exclamans Jesus voce magna ait:
Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum.

The day grew dark as the Jews nailed Jesus to the cross.
At about the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice:
'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' He bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Jesus said in a loud voice:
'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.

Sarah MacDonald *Crux fidelis*

Eclipse—at Midnight—
It was dark—before—
Sunset—at Easter—
Blindness—on the Dawn—
Faint Star of Bethlehem—
Gone down!
His harmlesse hands unto the Crosse they nailde,
Betweene two thieves, unpitied, unbewailde,
With sharpest pangs and terrors thus appailde.
To know just how He suffered—would be dear—
To know if any Human eyes were near
To whom He could entrust His wavering gaze—
Until it settle broad—on Paradise—
"Remember me" implored the Thief—
A Guest in Paradise.

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson (1830-1886)
incorporating lines from Emilia Lanier's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*

Anna Meredith *Heal you*

Come to me as if wounded
And I will bathe your face with milk
And I will heal you

William Henry Harris *Bring us, O Lord God*

Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening
into the house and gate of heaven,
to enter into that gate and dwell in that house,
where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling,
but one equal light;
no noise nor silence, but one equal music;
no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession;
no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity;
in the habitations of thy glory and dominion,
world without end. Amen.

John Donne (1572-1631)

William Byrd *Iustorum Animae*

Iustorum animae in manu Dei sunt,
Et non tanget illos tormentum mortis.
Visi sunt oculis insipientium mori,
Illi autem sunt in pace.

r.

The souls of the just are in the hand of
God, and no torment shall touch them.
They seemed, in the view of the foolish,
to be dead
But they are at peace.

Ninfea Cruttwell-Reade *The Dead*

Our business is with fruit and leaf and bloom;
though they speak with more than just the season's tongue –
the colours that they blaze from the dark loam
all have something of the jealous tang

of the dead about them. What do we know of their part
in this, those secret brothers of the harrow,
invigorators of the soil – oiling the dirt
so liberally with their essence, their black marrow?

But here's the question. Are the flower and fruit
held out to us in love, or merely thrust
up at us, their masters, like a fist?

Or are *they* the lords, asleep amongst the roots,
granting to us in their great largesse
this hybrid thing – part brute force, part mute kiss?

Text © Don Paterson

Francis Poulenc *Timor et tremor*

Timor et tremor venerunt super me,
et caligo cecidit super me. Miserere mei,
Domine,
quoniam in te confidit anima mea.
Exaudi, Deus, deprecationem meam,
quia refugium meum es tu et adiutor fortis.
Domine, invocavi te, non confundar.

Fear and trembling have come upon me
and darkness has seized my soul.
Have mercy on me, O Lord,
have mercy upon me, for in you have
I put my trust.
Hear my prayer, O my God,
for you are my refuge and my strong helper.
I have called upon you, O Lord, that
I not be confounded.

Imogen Holst *Agnus Dei*

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

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of
the world, have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of
the world, have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of
the world, grant us peace.

Cheryl Frances-Hoad *At the round earth's imagin'd corners*

At the round earth's imagin'd corners, blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scatter'd bodies go;
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,
All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance hath slain, and you whose eyes
Shall behold God and never taste death's woe.
But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space,
For if above all these my sins abound,
'Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace
When we are there; here on this lowly ground
Teach me how to repent; for that's as good
As if thou'hadst seal'd my pardon with thy blood.

John Donne (1572-1631)

John Sheppard *Libera nos*

Libera nos, salva nos, iustifica nos,
o beata Trinitas.

Free us, save us, justify us,
O blessed Trinity.

Biographies



Nicholas Mulroy

Born in Liverpool, Nicholas read Modern Languages at Cambridge and completed postgraduate vocal studies at London's Royal Academy of Music, where he is now a Visiting Professor.

He has sung Bach's Evangelists with many of the leading conductors of the day: Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Marc Minkowski, Richard Tognetti, Laurence Cummings, and Richard Egarr, and in venues including the Royal Albert Hall, Symphony Hall in Boston, the Sydney Opera House, as well as in Bach's churches in Leipzig and Weimar. He has been a frequent guest at Wigmore Hall, singing repertoire from Schubert to Stephen Hough, and from Purcell to Fauré. In opera, Nicholas has appeared at Glyndebourne, the Opera de Paris, the Opéra Comique, Toulouse, and Copenhagen.

His recorded repertoire covers seven centuries, and includes mainstream oratorios of Handel, Bach and Monteverdi, as well as Piazzolla's amazing María de Buenos Aires, and music of Gavin Bryars and Thomas Tallis.

Alongside his singing, over the last ten years, Nicholas has developed his work as a director. He has guest-directed OAE and Irish Baroque Orchestra, and, as their Associate Director, has led the Dunedin Consort in several programmes, from Monteverdi to MacMillan.



Dunedin Consort

Dunedin Consort is one of the world's leading Baroque ensembles, recognised for its vivid and insightful performances and recordings. Formed in 1995 and named after Din Eidyn, the ancient Celtic name for Edinburgh Castle, Dunedin Consort's ambition is to allow listeners to hear early music afresh, and to couple an inquisitive approach to historical performance with a commitment to commissioning and performing new music. Under the direction of John Butt, the ensemble has earned two coveted Gramophone Awards, a BBC Music Magazine Award, and a Grammy nomination. In 2021 it was the recipient of the Royal Philharmonic Society Ensemble Award.

Dunedin Consort performs regularly at major festivals and venues across the UK and abroad, and enjoys close associations with the BBC Proms, Wigmore Hall, Edinburgh International Festival and Lammermuir Festival. Alongside its performance and recording work, Dunedin Consort is committed to a wide-ranging education programme both in schools and in the wider community. In inspiring and encouraging musical participation, developing vocal skills and fostering a love of classical music, historical performance and new music, Dunedin Consort aims to develop and nurture its potential audience and to encourage the performers of the future.

Dunedin Consort is an enthusiastic champion and commissioner of contemporary music, and in recent years has premiered a new set of orchestral dances at the BBC Proms, a new opera by Errollyn Wallen at the Barbican Centre, and new choral music for its a cappella consort. In 2025 it premiered a new cantata by David Fennessy, the second instalment of a three year co-commissioning series which saw a guitar concerto by Cassandra Miller for Sean Shibe in 2024, and will see further new music by Tansy Davies in 2026.

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DUNEDIN CONSORT

Bach Matthew Passion

Johann Sebastian Bach Matthew Passion, BWV 244

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