

King's College Choir Cambridge

Tudor Masters

Taverner & Gibbons

John Taverner: Kyrie 'le roy'

Mass: The Western Wynde

Dum transisset sabbatum

& more...

Orlando Gibbons

This is the Record

of John

First Song

of Moses

& more...

alto

Although **John Taverner** is now thought of as one of the most important of England's early sixteenth-century composers, very little is known of his life and work and much of what is thought to be known about him turns out to be either speculative or inaccurate or both. For example, the opera by Peter Maxwell Davies (b.1934), which bears Taverner's name and purports to be based on his life, muddies the waters of truth more than making them clearer.

It would seem that John Taverner was born round about the year 1490 somewhere in the southern part of Lincolnshire. The first verifiable documentary evidence seems to date from 1524 when he was known to be acting as a lay clerk in the choir of the collegiate church in Tatteshall, some ten or eleven miles north west of Boston, the county town. This church had a fine musical tradition and boasted a choir of six chaplains, ten lay clerks and ten choristers. (There seems to be no truth in the assertion made by some historians that Taverner had been one of these choristers in his youth.)

In the autumn of 1525 he was invited by John Longland, the Bishop of Lincoln to take up a post at a new college which had was being founded in Oxford by Cardinal Wolsey (c1475-1530). To begin with he declined this invitation for fear of losing the opportunity of making a good marriage but, within the year he had changed his mind. Thus, by October 1526, when Cardinal College was formally opened, Taverner had become master of its choristers and had already recruited twelve chaplains, twelve lay clerks and sixteen choristers to sing in its chapel. However, his time in Oxford was not to last for long. By the end of 1529, Wolsey, who as chief minister to Henry VIII, had fallen out of favour over the King's desire to divorce his wife, Catherine of Aragon, and was thus allowing his college to run down. Taverner therefore left and, apparently, returned to his native Lincolnshire. (The Cardinal's college did survive, however, and was to become what is now known as Christ Church.)

It was while he was at Cardinal College that there had been an outbreak of Lutheranism in which Taverner was thought to be involved. Indeed, it was claimed by John Foxe (1516-87), a native of Boston and the author in 1563 of the *Book of Martyrs* which bears his name, that such was Taverner's affinity with the Protestant doctrine that he had once repented making 'songs to popish ditties in the time of his blindness'. It was this supposed heresy that formed the basis of Peter Maxwell Davies' opera. Nowadays, however, little credence is attached to Foxe's views especially as they were not expressed until several years after the composer's death.

Once back in Lincolnshire, Taverner became a lay clerk at the parish church of St Botolph in Boston, where in his pre-Oxford days, it is said that he had sometimes appeared as a guest singer. He was not long in this post either for the guild which funded the substantial choir at St Botolph's soon ran out of money and, by 1537, Taverner had left. It seems that he also gave up composing at this time and, according to some sources, concentrated instead on assisting Henry VIII's secretary, Thomas Cromwell (c1485-1540), who was busy continuing the dissolution of the monasteries begun by Cardinal Wolsey. To this end, it is said that Taverner supervised the demolition and burning of the rood screen in St Botolph's. In 1545, shortly before his death, he became one of Boston's twelve aldermen. He died on 18 October of that year and was buried at St Botolph's under its impressive bell tower, commonly known as the 'Boston Stump'.

Taverner made several settings of the Mass during his lifetime and possibly the best known of these is the one which has come to be known as *The Western Wynde*. This is based on a popular, secular tune of that name which some say could have been written by Taverner himself. It was the first time an English Mass had incorporated such a melody but, before long, two other contemporaries of Taverner - John Sheppard and Christopher Tye - had followed suit by using the same tune on which to base masses of their own.

It was customary in those days not to include the *Kyrie* in settings of the Mass but to deal with it separately. To one of Taverner's settings has been attached the term 'Le roy' which is thought to be a reference to 'Roy Henry', that is either Henry IV or Henry V. It seems that Taverner was the first English composer to set *Dum transisset Sabbatum* (When the Sabbath was past) to music, indeed he set it twice, once for five voices (the version recorded here) and once for four. It is intended to be sung at Matins on Easter Sunday. At Cardinal College, three antiphons were sung each day after Compline, one addressed to the Trinity, one to St William of York and one to the Virgin Mary. During his time there, Taverner composed *Mater Christi sanctissima* for the Virgin Mary and *O Wilhelme, pastor bone* (which has survived as *Christe Jesu, pastor bone*) for St William. These settings were later used by Taverner as material for two of his other masses.

Orlando Gibbons was born in Oxford but, as a boy, sang in the choir of King's College, Cambridge, where his brother, Edward, was Master of the Choristers. He enrolled at the University in 1599 and took his B.Mus. degree there in 1606. Sixteen years later he was to take his D.Mus. at Oxford but,

in the meantime, he had become organist at the Chapel Royal. In 1613 a collection of keyboard pieces by William Byrd, John Bull and Gibbons was published as a tribute to Princess Elizabeth, the daughter of James I, on the occasion of her marriage to Prince Frederick V, Elector Palatine of the Rhine. This was reputed to be the first music ever printed for the virginals and is said to contain some of Gibbons' best pieces for the instrument.

Gibbons was to remain in his post at the Chapel Royal to the end of his life and, for the last two years of it, he was also organist at Westminster Abbey. Indeed, one of his last duties was to play his part in the funeral of James I in March 1625. Shortly after that event he travelled to Canterbury in the company of the rest of the Chapel Royal where the new King, Charles I, was to await the arrival from France of his Queen, Henrietta Maria. Once in Canterbury, Gibbons would, no doubt, have been expected to officiate at services in the Cathedral and possibly to compose some special music for them. However, on Whit Sunday, just over a week before Henrietta Maria arrived in Canterbury, Gibbons suddenly died of apoplexy. He was buried the next day in the Cathedral where a monument to him was duly erected.

As a composer, Gibbons is justly renowned for his verse anthems, notably *This is the record of John*. He was not, however, the originator of this form of anthem as Byrd had already written similar pieces but, in the words of Edmund Fellowes (in *Orlando Gibbons and his family - The last of the Tudor School of musicians*) he was its most important pioneer. 'All praise is due to him,' according to Fellowes, 'for his enterprise in exploring new fields when he could have remained in the tried regions of polyphonic music in which he scored such splendid successes'. In a verse anthem, a solo voice alternates with the full choir, the choir generally repeating the words sung by the soloist in the previous verse. For this anthem, Gibbons took as his text verses 19 to 23 from the first chapter of the gospel according to St John. It was composed for William Laud who was president of St John's College, Oxford, between 1611 and 1621 and was later to become Archbishop of Canterbury.

Although some of Gibbons' keyboard, chamber and secular vocal music was published in his lifetime, none of his sacred music was, his two services - the so-called 'Short' and the 'Second' - not appearing in print until 1641 when they were published as part of John Barnard's *Selected Church Music*. Whereas the first of these two services contains settings of the *Venite*, the *Te Deum*,

the *Benedictus*, the *Kyrie*, the *Credo*, the *Magnificat* and the *Nunc Dimittis*, the second is made up of just four items. These are the *Te Deum* and the *Jubilate Deo* (Psalm 100), which would be sung at Matins, and the *Magnificat* and the *Nunc Dimittis*, which were intended for Evensong. As with *This is the record of John*, this service follows the verse anthem pattern with sections for solo voices being contrasted with those for the full choir.

In 1623, the poet and satirist, George Wither (1588-1667), published his *Hymnes and Songs of the Church* in which he included seventeen tunes composed by Orlando Gibbons. The first of these, originally set to the words *Now shall the praises of the Lord*, has subsequently appeared with different words in various hymn books, for example, *The English Hymnal*. Wither published another set in 1641 - *Hallelujah: or Britain's Second Remembrancer* - which includes the carol *Sweet baby, sleep!* now usually referred to as 'Wither's Rocking Hymn'.

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The Choir of King's College, Cambridge

It was King Henry VI who, in 1441, founded King's College, Cambridge, and determined that there would be a choir to sing the daily services in the magnificent chapel he was hoping to build. The intention was to have sixteen choristers who were to be under the age of twelve, of a strong constitution and able to both read and sing. As well as singing Matins, the Mass and Vespers each day, the choristers' duties also included waiting at table at meal times. The Wars of the Roses and the accession to the throne, first of Edward IV and then Henry VII, interrupted the building work on the chapel and it was not until towards the end of his reign that the latter managed to find enough money to complete it. Before long a school for the choristers was founded and, eventually, this was opened to non-singing boys. Although the chapel did not suffer the destructive fate of many other churches during the Civil War, as choristers were not being replaced when their voices broke, choral services had to be abandoned. The choir was re-formed after the Restoration and a succession of choristers has continued to sing ever since.

In 1974, Philip Ledger took over from Sir David Willcocks as the choir's Director of Music and, when he left in 1982, his place was taken by Stephen Cleobury.

David Willcocks was born in Newquay in December 1917 and, as a boy, was a chorister at

Westminster Abbey. Later he studied at Clifton College, the Royal College of Music in London and, as an organ scholar, at King's College, Cambridge. Following military service in the Second World War, during which he won the Military Cross, he returned to King's College for two years before taking up the post of organist at Salisbury Cathedral. From there he moved to Worcester Cathedral where he was not only the organist and choir master but also conductor of the Three Choirs Festival for the meetings which took place in that city. In 1957 he returned once more to King's College and became, in succession to Boris Ord, the organist and director of its chapel choir. During his time in that post, the already famous *Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols* achieved greater popularity than ever through the medium of radio and television. For these festivals, Willcocks composed and arranged countless Christmas carols which have since become an essential part of the repertoire of choirs throughout the world. For many years, he was also the conductor of the Bach Choir in London and, on his retirement from King's College in 1974, he became Director of the Royal College of Music. He was knighted three years later.

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Tudor Masters: Taverner & Gibbons

Choir of King's College Cambridge / David Willcocks

JOHN TAVERNER (Ed. Brett)

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|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. <i>Kyrie 'le roy'</i> | 3:37 |
| 2. <i>Mass: The Western Wynde</i> | 28:22 |
| 3. <i>Dum transisset sabbatum</i> | 7:43 |
| 4. <i>Christie Jesu pastor bone</i> | 3:08 |
| 5. <i>Mater Christi</i> | 7:20 |

Choir of King's College, Cambridge / David Willcocks (1961)

ORLANDO GIBBONS

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 6. <i>This is the Record of John</i> | 4:46 |
| 7. <i>Song 1: First Song of Moses</i> | 1:18 |
| 8. <i>Voluntary I: Te Deum (2nd service)</i> | 13:45 |
| 9. <i>Voluntary II: Jubilate (2nd service)</i> | 6:21 |

Choir of King's College, Cambridge, with Simon Preston (organ) and the Jacobean Consort of Viols / David Willcocks (1959)

Originally issued on Argo (1961/62)

Total Time 76:30 Produced by Tony Watts Mastered by Paul Arden-Taylor