



Bruckner & Gesualdo Motets
Monteverdi Choir Jonathan Sells

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Motets

Monteverdi Choir

Jonathan Sells

- 1 9.35 **Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina** c.1525 – 1594 (arr. Richard Wagner)
Stabat Mater
 - 2 2.59 **Carlo Gesualdo** 1566 – 1613
Illumina faciem tuam
 - 3 4.32 **Anton Bruckner** 1824 – 1896
Christus factus est, WAB 11
 - 4 4.00 **Carlo Gesualdo**
Ave dulcissima Maria
 - 5 3.00 **Anton Bruckner**
Ave Maria, WAB 6
 - 6 2.51 **Carlo Gesualdo**
O crux benedicta
 - 7 3.19 **Antonio Lotti** 1667 – 1740
Crucifixus a 8
 - 8 4.12 **Carlo Gesualdo**
Tribulationem et dolorem
 - 9 2.30 **Anton Bruckner**
Os justi, WAB 30
 - 10 2.48 **Carlo Gesualdo**
O vos omnes
 - 11 3.39 **Anton Bruckner**
Salvum fac populum tuum, WAB 40
 - 12 6.44 **Carlo Gesualdo**
Peccantem me quotidie
 - 13 3.18 **Anton Bruckner**
Vexilla regis, WAB 51
 - 14 2.57 **Carlo Gesualdo**
Laboravi in gemitu meo
 - 15 2.58 **Anton Bruckner**
Locus iste, WAB 23
- 59.24

Echoing across the centuries

Jonathan Sells

'I am, as is known, an anarchist'
'Sinning daily, and not repenting, the fear of death troubles me.
In Hell there is no redemption.'

Anton Bruckner and Carlo Gesualdo may not seem the most natural interlocutors in a musical dialogue: Bruckner, the pious constructor of monumental, proto-minimalist symphonies, and Gesualdo, famed for his murderous jealousy and twisted, intimate madrigals. Here, however, the sacred motets of these two composers, and others, 'speak' to each other across the centuries, and we find common ground that belies their surface dissimilarity. Contrast and concord, both within and between the musical pieces, illuminate the conversation and eliminate differences of time and context. We are free to reflect on the human condition, on spirituality and our struggle with it, on the moral judgement of a rules-based society, and on the creative friction generated by resistance to those rules.

United in the opening work of our programme, Richard Wagner and Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina provide a frame of reference. Bruckner hero-worshipped Wagner, and dedicated his third symphony to the elder composer as 'the unreachable, world-famous noble master of poetry and music'. Wagner was fascinated by the 'deeply stirring effect' [so wunderbar ergreifende Wirkung] that Palestrina's double-choir *Stabat mater* had generated in Rome 'back in the day', an effect which he sought to recreate through his arrangement. By adding plentiful expression markings and devising a highly sophisticated vocal 'orchestration', Wagner guides the interpreter and sets the emotionally charged words in stark relief. These words are coloured by Palestrina more through contrasting tonal areas than expressive dissonance. Wagner wrote his



Portrait of Anton Bruckner by Hermann von Kraulbach

arrangement for a concert in 1848, conducting it alongside J.S. Bach's motet *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*, Mozart's *Symphony in D major* and Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony. We believe this to be the only recording currently available.

Wagner's arrangement of Palestrina's *Stabat Mater*, which arose both from his admiration for Palestrina's music and the centrality of Christ to his own personal spirituality, links to the Cecilian Movement of the later 19th Century. This movement upheld the 'pure' style of Palestrina's church music, along with Gregorian chant, above all others. Bruckner was an organist and composed religious music throughout his career, most notably at the Upper Austrian monastery of St. Florian, and the context of the Cecilian Movement cannot

be ignored when considering his sacred *a cappella* motets. Nor can Bruckner's schooling in the Classical style, and the inclusion of Antonio Lotti's *stile antico Crucifixus*, from his otherwise very lively *Credo in F* for strings, continuo, and choir, is a nod to the Classical influence which resonates through much of Bruckner's music. Our choice to perform the *Crucifixus a cappella*, and the Gesualdo motets with a relatively large choir, adds to the sense that this whole programme could be a recreation of an imaginary 19th-century 'historical' concert.

One of the most striking features of Bruckner's motets, and especially their openings, is their clarity. He almost invariably begins with a homophonic statement, with all voices proclaiming the *incipit* of the chosen text precisely together, just as Palestrina does, for example, at the start of his *Stabat mater*. This hymn-like simplicity is arresting and commands our attention for what is to follow. It is precisely this clarity of expression and purity of tone, the lack of accompanying instruments and a perceived musical 'moral integrity' which the leaders of the Cecilian movement promoted. The homophonic style dominates almost all



Detail of portrait of Carlo Gesualdo da Venosa
by Francesco Mancini

of Bruckner's *Ave Maria* of 1861 and *Locus iste* of 1869, the openings of *Os justi* (1879) and *Christus factus est* (1884), and the processional *Vexilla regis*, his final motet (1892).

Neither Cecilian clarity of expression nor Palestrina's own style was limited to block chords – contrapuntal polyphony (voices moving independently of one another) was central, but according to strict rules of musical grammar that still form the basis of a Western musical education today. For the Cecilians, a purity of harmony completed the picture. This involved minimal chromatic alteration, no diminished triads, second-inversion chords (where the note on the 5th grade of the scale appears in the bass), nor other harmonic 'impurities'. The radical harmonic experiments of Wagner's music drama *Tristan und Isolde*, the premiere of which Bruckner attended in 1865, could not be further from Cecilian aspirations. Bruckner's motets are suspended between these two poles. Most represent a fusion of the two. *Ave Maria* and *Locus iste* contain harmonic spice and strongly chromatic melodic movement in an otherwise diatonic framework. *Christus factus est*, written 2 years after the premiere of *Parsifal*, is more avowedly Wagnerian – to consider just the opening, it begins in a mysterious D minor, resolving 20 bars later on remote D flat major, following a phrase that seems to paint the transcendence of the crucifixion in music. *Salvum fac populum tuum*, also from 1884, is a set of responses which seems to fulfil all of the Cecilian ideals, incorporating Gregorian chant in its intonations and remaining formulaic in its responses. The mood intensifies for the final section, 'Have mercy upon us, O Lord', however, and for the final phrase, 'as our trust is in thee', Bruckner pulls the harmonic rug out from under our feet, repeating the word '*speravimus*' (we trust) on a *subito pianissimo* interrupted cadence into the flattened 6th degree of the scale, demonstrating the miracle of faith, as well as Bruckner's devotion to the 'unreachable master'.

This recording presents, for the first time, Anton Bruckner's final motet, *Vexilla regis* in the form in which he conceived it. This is markedly different,

most importantly in text but also in music, from the versions available in standard commercial editions. Written for liturgical performance in St. Florian on Good Friday 1892, it was heard in the context of music by Palestrina, Victoria, and the contemporary Cecilian composer Franz Xaver Witt. The solemn opening bars remain firmly in the Phrygian mode on E, and the texture then even reduces to a short unison undulation that invokes Gregorian chant. This expands, however, through the aid of an F#, into a cadence using the 'Dresden Amen', a favourite device of Bruckner and famously used as the 'Grail Theme' by Wagner in *Parsifal*. In *Vexilla regis* this cadence is the key which unlocks the wide-ranging harmonic journey of Bruckner's four-phrase, expansive hymn setting. Pivoting on the B natural major third of the final G major chord of the first phrase, the second phrase launches off in B major for (in the first verse) the resplendence of the Cross, and all Cecilian stricture is left in tatters. The remainder of the musical setting is shaped by chromatic shifts and enharmonic modulations that reflect the mystical metaphors of the poetry and instil an appropriate sense of wonder.

Os justi is the only one of Bruckner's motets that is wholly and intentionally written according to strict Cecilian principles. Dedicated to the St. Florian choirmaster and strict Cecilian Ignaz Traumihler and marked 'alla capella' and 'lydisch' (Lydian), it follows its prescribed mode to the last semiquaver. Astonishingly for the scope of its expression and its emotional impact, it contains not a single sharp or flat sign in all its 70 bars. The chosen text is of a suitable strictness. The magical setting of the final phrase, 'his footsteps shall not be distracted', is even followed by a tutti plainchant 'Alleluia', as if to set an irredeemable Cecilian seal upon the matter. The beautiful fugato 'et lingua eius loquetur iudicium' (and his tongue will be talking of judgement) is one of the most extended passages of counterpoint in Bruckner's motets.

Os justi is the exception that proves the rule. He was open to his contemporaries about his relationship to the Cecilian movement. In a letter in this context to the St. Florian organist and Cecilian member Joseph Gruber, he explains, "I, as is

known, am an anarchist, according to Hanslick's statement. My point of view just diverges too far from the strict path." (In 1885, the music critic Eduard Hanslick had proclaimed it a mystery how Bruckner, one of the 'gentlest and most peaceful of all people', becomes an 'anarchist at the moment of composing'. His comments referred to Bruckner's third, so-called 'Wagner', symphony.)

The opening bars of *O vos omnes* by Carlo Gesualdo are born of the same anarchy. Strikingly homophonic, the first three short phrases trace a harmonic progression that uses chromatic alteration to slide from C major downwards in steps of a third, closing on D major. Gesualdo dwells longest on the final line, 'see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow'. He uses steadily rising semitone steps to ratchet up tension which then relaxes to resolve close to where it began, having traversed an astonishing range of keys. This is Bruckner's Wagnerism speaking from a different age.

Gesualdo was born in 1566, about 40 years after Palestrina. His musical language does not come from a different planet: the counterpoint and voice leading are exemplary. But they are often put to shocking harmonic ends, particularly the juxtaposition or very close proximity of 'foreign' harmonies, like magnets with the same pole that are forced together. In *Peccantem me quotidie*, for example, the 'fear of death' is portrayed by stuttering voices that sketch G minor, immediately following a cadence on E major. Although on the face of it only a third apart, the chords are so alien to each other as to transport us to the infernal realm. 'Sinning daily, and not repenting,' indeed.

Whereas Bruckner's default mode of delivery is chordal homophony, Gesualdo's standard texture is that of madrigalian polyphony (*O vos omnes* being the striking exception). Each of his other motets in this programme begins with a single voice, soon followed by the others in turn, in very close imitation. The rules of Renaissance 'points of imitation' are followed obsessively, with voices grouped sometimes in pairs, sometimes more loosely, the imitation following more closely or at a distance, expertly guiding the flow of the music as the sentiment of the

text requires. Gesualdo uses passing, contrapuntal dissonance much more forcefully than Palestrina, but it is generally short-lived.

These contrapuntal rules are followed – until suddenly they aren't, and Gesualdo uses a homophonic interruption to create a violent punctuation mark in his musical discourse. This very often coincides with a harmonic pot-hole: it is the simultaneous fracturing of rhythmic-rhetorical flow and harmonic logic that combine to give these moments their shocking impact. In *Laboravi in gemitu meo*, a burning C# minor outcry on the words 'lacrimis meis' (my tears) erupts out of the texture, succeed by an even stronger A minor declamation, which before we know it has dissolved into A major and washes away into a cadence in C. More subtle is the rhetorical flourish of 'O Domine' (O Lord) at the centre of *Tribulationem et dolorem*, with the top part pitted against the lower four, all five parts concurring a little later on the word 'misericors' ([the Lord is] merciful), an astonishing B major following the previous D, and before we have time to fathom it, the repetition of this word (and Gesualdo's longing for it to be true?) has taken us through Eb major to C.

The second half of *Ave dulcissima Maria*, with the words 'O Maria, flos virginum, ora pro nobis Jesum' (O Mary, virgin flower, pray to Jesus for us), becomes almost exclusively homophonic. On the surface this brings the piece closer to the rhetorical mode of Bruckner's *Ave Maria*, though the expressionist desperation of Gesualdo's music has a very different affect. In the final section of *Peccantem me quotidie*, an extraordinary work even by Gesualdo's standards, the music comes to a G major standstill at the recognition that 'in hell there is no redemption'. For the final, arrogant appeal, 'Have mercy upon me, Lord, and save me', in a near-homophonic mantra Gesualdo reaches for the devil's interval, the augmented fourth, followed by an audacious oscillation between sharps and flats that leads into a final passage of inexorably searing intensity.

Bruckner's motets live from an internal struggle between a perceived and potentially sanctimonious purity of expression and the 'heretical' Wagnerian

transmogrifications which seem closer aligned to his religious fervour. Gesualdo's kaleidoscopic motets operate like stained-glass, their perfect harmonic and polyphonic flow poisoned with the lead of chromatic harmony, and suddenly cut across by group outbursts. If we step back and listen to these unlikely bedfellows side by side, their frictions and tensions seem to be shared, seem to understand each other across time and space. Wagner bent the laws of harmonic language, as well as the entire concept of what an artwork could be, almost to breaking point, and we feel the same dangerous proximity to the disintegration of the harmonic system in Gesualdo's musical miniatures. As human beings we impose rules on ourselves for the benefit of civil society, but they can seem restrictive to the individual, and an urge burns in many of us to flout them, to rebel. In these complex pieces by very different composers, we are presented with human emotion in all its messy darkness and, above all, its honesty.



1 Palestrina (arr. Wagner): Stabat Mater

Stabat mater dolorosa
Juxta crucem lacrimosa
Dum pendebat filius.

The sorrowful mother stood
weeping by the cross
while her son hung there.

Cujus animam gementem,
Contristantem et dolentem,
Pertransivit gladius.

Through her sorrowful heart,
crushed with sadness and grief,
there passed a sword.

O quam tristis et afflicta
Fuit illa benedicta
Mater unigeniti;

O how sad and how afflicted
was that blessed woman,
the mother of the sole begotten;

Quae moerebat et dolebat
Pia mater dum videbat
Nati poenas incliti.

How she grieved and sorrowed
the pious mother, when she saw
the pains of her glorious son.

Quis est homo qui non fleret
Christi matrem si videret
In tanto supplicio?

What man would not weep
to see the mother of Christ
in such great anguish?

Quis non posset contristari
Christi matrem contemplari
Dolentem cum filio?

Who could not feel her grief,
to think on the mother of Christ
grieving with her son?

Pro peccatis suae gentis
Vidit Jesum in tormentis,
Et flagellis subditum.

She saw Jesus in agony
and scourged by the lash
for the sins of his people.

Vidit suum dulcem natum
Moriendo desolatum,
Dum emisit spiritum.

She saw her own sweet son
dying and forsaken,
until he yielded up his spirit.

Eja mater, fons amoris,
Me sentire vim doloris
Fac, ut tecum lugeam.

O mother, fount of love,
make me feel the force of your sorrow,
that I too may grieve with you.

Fac ut ardeat cor meum
In amando Christum Deum
Ut sibi complaceam.

Make my heart burn
with love for Christ my God,
that I may be pleasing to him.

Sancta mater, istud agas,
Crucifixi fige plagas
Cordi meo valide.

Holy mother, grant me this,
fix deep within my heart
the wounds of him, crucified.

Tui nati vulnerati,
Tam dignati pro me pati,
Poenas mecum divide.

Let me share the torment
of your wounded son,
who deigned to suffer for me.

Fac me tecum pie flere,
Crucifixo condolere,
Donec ego vixero.

Let me weep with you,
and suffer with the crucified
my whole life through.

Juxta crucem tecum stare,
Et me tibi sociare
In planctu desidero.

I yearn to stand with you beside the cross,
and join with you
in deep lament.

Virgo virginum praeclara,
Mihi iam non sis amara:
Fac me tecum plangere.

Virgin, all virgins excelling,
do not be harsh with me:
but let me mourn with you.

Fac ut portem Christi mortem,
Passionis fac consortem,
Et plagas recolere.

Let me bear Christ's death within me,
let me share his passion
and be mindful of his wounds.

Fac me plagis vulnerari,
Fac me cruce inebriari,
Et cruore filii.

Flammis ne urar succensus,
Per te, virgo, sim defensus
In die iudicii.

Fac me cruce custodiri,
Morte Christi praemuniri,
Confoveri gratia.

Quando corpus morietur,
Fac ut animae donetur
Paradisi gloria.

Anonymous

Let me be riven by his wounds,
intoxicated by the cross,
and the blood of your son.

Let me not be scorched by flames;
may I, through you, O virgin,
be defended on the day of judgement.

Let me be guarded by the cross,
defended by the death of Christ,
and strengthened by his grace.

And grant that when my body dies,
my soul may gain
the glory of paradise.

2 Gesualdo: Illumina faciem tuam
(Sacrarum cantionum liber primus, 5vv, Naples, 1603)

Illumina faciem tuam super servum
tuum,
salvum me fac in misericordia tua:
Domine, non confundar, quoniam
invocavi te.

Psalm 30: 17-18 (Vulgate)

Shew thy servant the light of thy
countenance,
save me for thy mercy's sake:
let me not be confounded, O Lord,
for I have called upon thee.

3 Bruckner: Christus factus est, WAB 11

Christus factus est pro nobis obediens
usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis.
Propter quod et Deus exaltavit illum
et dedit illi nomen, quod est super
omne nomen.

Philippians 2: 8-9; Gradual for Maundy Thursday

Christ for us became obedient
unto death, even the death of the cross.
Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him
and given him a name which is above
every name.

4 Gesualdo: Ave dulcissima Maria
(Sacrarum cantionum liber primus, 5vv, Naples, 1603)

Ave, dulcissima Maria,
vera spes et vita,
dulce refrigerium!
O Maria, flos virginum,
ora pro nobis Jesum.

Anonymous

Hail, sweetest Mary,
our true hope and our life,
O sweet relief!
O Mary, flower of virgins,
pray for us to Jesus.



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5 **Bruckner: Ave Maria, WAB 6**

Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum.
Benedicta tu in mulieribus
et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus.
Sancta Maria, mater Dei, ora pro nobis
peccatoribus,
nunc et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen.

Anonymous

Hail, Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou amongst women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

6 **Gesualdo: O crux benedicta**

(Sacrarum cantionum liber primus, 5vv, Naples, 1603)

O crux benedicta, quae sola fuisti digna
portare Regem coelorum et Dominum,
defende nos ab omni malo.

Adapted from antiphon for the Second Vespers of the Feast of the Exaltation of the cross

O Blessed Cross, which only was
worthy to bear the Lord and King of
heaven, defend us from all evil.

7 **Lotti: Crucifixus a 8**

Crucifixus etiam pro nobis sub
Pontio Pilato:
Passus, et sepultus est.

From the Nicene Creed, 4th century

He was crucified also for us under
Pontius Pilate:
He suffered and was buried.

8 **Gesualdo: Tribulationem et dolorem**

(Sacrarum cantionum liber primus, 5vv, Naples, 1603)

Tribulationem et dolorem inveni
Et nomen Domini invocavi:
O Domine libera animam meam;
Misericors Dominus et justus et Deus
noster miseretur.

Psalm 114:3b-5 (Vulgate)

I met with trouble and sorrow:
And I called upon the name of the Lord:
O Lord, deliver my soul.
The Lord is merciful and just, and our God
shows mercy.



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9 **Bruckner: Os justi, WAB 30**

Os justi meditabitur sapientiam,
et lingua eius loquetur iudicium.
Lex Dei eius in corde ipsius
et non supplantabuntur gressus eius.
Alleluia.

Psalm 37: 30-31 (Vulgate)

The mouth of the just is exercised in
wisdom,
and his tongue will be talking of judgement:
the law of his God is in his heart,
and his footsteps will not be distracted.
Alleluia.

10 **Gesualdo: O vos omnes**

(Sacrarum cantionum liber primus, 5vv, Naples, 1603)

O vos omnes, qui transitis per viam,
Attendite et videte si est dolor sicut
dolor meus.

From Tenebrae for Holy Saturday, after Lamentations 1:12

O all ye that pass by the way, behold and see
If there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.

11 **Bruckner: Salvum fac populum tuum, WAB 40**

Salvum fac populum tuum, Domine,
et benedic hereditati tuae.
Et rege eos, et extolle illos usque in
aeternum.
Per singulos dies benedicimus te.
Et laudamus nomen tuum in saeculum,
et in saeculum saeculi.
Dignare Domine die isto sine peccato
nos custodire.
Miserere nostri Domine, miserere nostri.
Fiat misericordia tua Domine super nos,
quemadmodum speravimus in te.

Verses from Te Deum

O Lord, save thy people
and bless thine heritage.
Govern them and lift them up for ever.
Day by day we magnify thee;
And we worship thy Name
ever world without end.
Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day
without sin.
O Lord, have mercy upon us, have mercy
upon us.
O Lord, let thy mercy lighten upon us
as our trust is in thee.

12 **Gesualdo: Peccantem me quotidie**

(Sacrarum cantionum liber primus, 5vv, Naples, 1603)

Peccantem me quotidie et non me poenitentem
timor mortis conturbat me,
quia in inferno nulla est redemptio.
Miserere mei, Deus, et salva me.

From the 7th Respond in the Office for the Dead, Matins, Third Nocturne.

Sinning daily, and not repenting,
the fear of death troubles me;
in hell there is no redemption.
Have mercy on me, O God, and save me.

13 **Bruckner: Vexilla regis, WAB 51**

Vexilla Regis prodeunt;
fulget Crucis mysterium,
qua vita mortem pertulit,
et morte vitam protulit.

Quae vulnerata lanceae
mucrone diro, criminum
ut nos lavaret sordibus,
manavit unda, et sanguine.

Impleta sunt quæ concinit
David fideli carmine,
Dicendo nationibus:
Regnavit a ligno Deus.

O Crux ave, spes unica,
Hoc passionis tempore
Piis adauge gratiam,
Reisque dele crimina.

Te, fons salutis Trinitas,
Collaudet omnis spiritus:
Quibus Crucis victoriam
Largiris, adde præmium.

Venantius Fortunatus (c530-c610)

Abroad the Regal Banners fly,
Now shines the Cross's mystery;
Upon it Life did death endure,
And yet by death did life procure.

Who, wounded with a direful spear,
Did, purposely to wash us clear
From stain of sin, pour out a flood
Of precious Water mixed with Blood.

That which the Prophet-King of old
Hath in mysterious verse foretold,
Is now accomplished, whilst we see
God ruling nations from a Tree.

Hail, Cross, of hopes the most sublime!
Now in this mournful Passion time,
Improve religious souls in grace,
The sins of criminals efface.

Blest Trinity, salvation's spring,
May every soul Thy praises sing;
To those Thou grantest conquest by
The holy Cross, rewards apply.

Translation: W.K. Blount (before 1667-1717)

14 **Gesualdo: Laboravi in gemitu meo**
(*Sacrarum cantionum liber primus, 5vv, Naples, 1603*)

Laboravi in gemitu meo; lavabo per
singulas noctes lectum meum:
lacrimis meis stratum meum rigabo.

Psalm 6:7 (Vulgate)

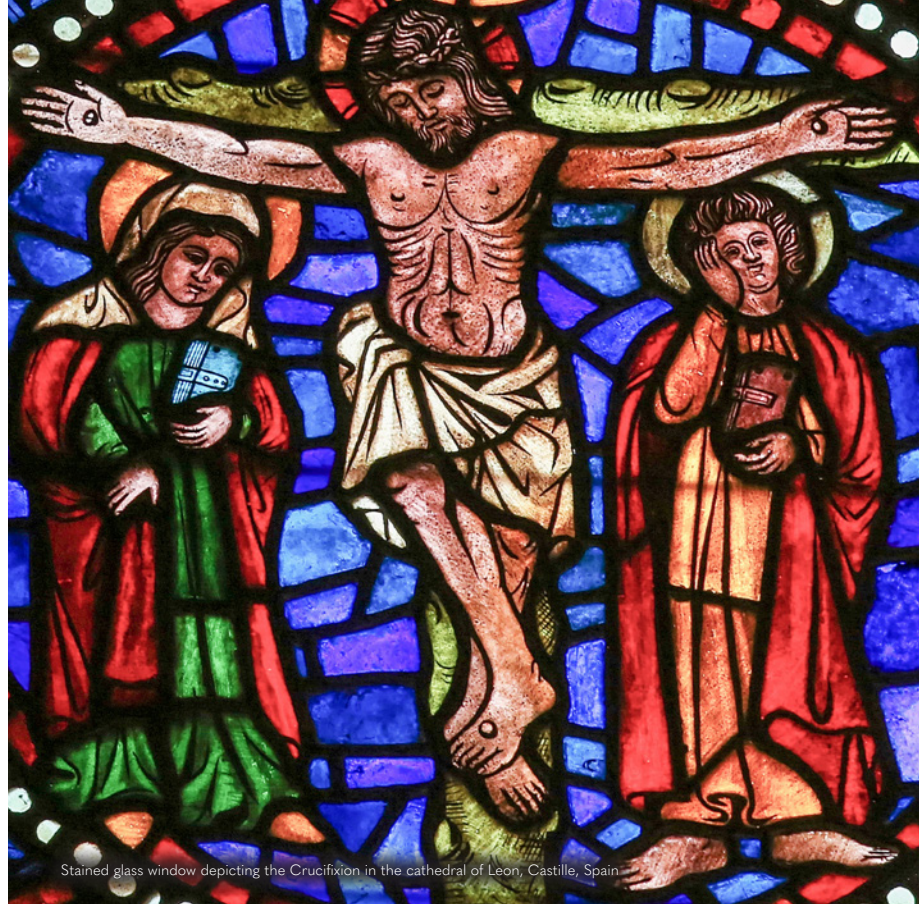
I am weary of my groaning; every night
wash I my bed:
and water my couch with my tears.

15 **Bruckner: Locus iste, WAB 23**

Locus iste a Deo factus est,
inaestimabile sacramentum
irreprehensibilis est.

Latin gradual for the dedication of a church

This place was made by God,
a priceless sacrament;
it is without reproach.



Stained glass window depicting the Crucifixion in the cathedral of Leon, Castille, Spain

Monteverdi Choir

Sopranos

Rachel Allen
Penelope Appleyard
Emily Armour*
Angela Hicks
Eloise Irving
Lucy Knight
Charlotte La Thrope
Emily Owen*
Rebecca Ramsey
Billie Robson
Cressida Sharp
Amy Wood

Altos

Francesca Biliotti*
Luthien Brackett*
Rosie Clifford
Christie Cook
Sarah Denbee
Annie Gill
Iris Korfker
Lorna Price

Tenors

Mark Bonney
David de Winter
Jacob Ewens
Jonathan Hanley*
Thomas Herford
Samuel Jenkins
Thomas Kelly
Graham Neal
Gareth Treseder*

Basses

Ed Ballard
Jack Comerford*
Peter Edge
Tristan Hambleton
Alistair Ollerenshaw
David Stuart
George Vines*
Jonty Ward

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* Soloists in Palestrina Stabat Mater

Soli Deo Gloria