

Basses

# Spem in alium nunquam habui

A motet  
for 40 voices

by

Thomas Tallis

(c.1505 – 1585)

Edited by Philip Legge

Forty-part motets from the sixteenth century are an exceedingly rare species. In July 1561 Cardinal Ippolito d'Este was ceremonially welcomed to Florence, probably the occasion for which the composer and diplomat Alessandro Striggio (senior) composed a 40-part motet, *Ecce beatam lucem*, which was first performed beneath the vast cupola of Santa Maria della Fiore, with the singers probably arrayed in a semi-circle. Striggio visited London on diplomatic business in the summer of 1567, bringing with him the Latin motet; Striggio had taken a similarly vast mass (also reputed to be in 40 parts, with a 60-voice Agnus Dei; now lost) around Europe, but which would have been inappropriate to perform in Protestant England.

It seems very likely that Striggio performed the motet in London, and that he and Thomas Tallis met. In 1981 Jerome Roche re-discovered a 1611 account by one Thomas Wateridge, a law student at the Temple. According to his account, after hearing the 40-part motet a nobleman:

asked whether none of our Englishmen could sett as good a songe [...] Tallice beinge very skilfull was felt to try whether he would undertake y<sup>e</sup> Matter, wch he did and made one of 40 partes wch was songe in the longe gallery at Arundell house.

Arundel House was the London home of Henry Fitzalan, the 12th Earl of Arundel. However his country residence, Nonsuch Palace, possessed an octagonal banqueting hall, and a catalogue of music in the library at Nonsuch, drawn up in 1596, reveals the existence of a score of *Spem in alium*. In addition to its octagonal layout the banqueting hall had four first-floor balconies, so that it is possible Tallis designed for the music to be sung not only in the round, but with four of the eight choirs singing from the balconies.

No manuscripts of the original Latin motet are known to exist; the earliest copies preserved were made in the early 17th Century during the reign of James I, when an English contrafactum of the motet was performed, firstly for the investiture of Henry, Prince of Wales, in 1610; and after his decease, the ceremony and the motet were repeated in 1616 for his younger brother, the future King Charles I. The text sung was:

Sing and glorify heaven's high Majesty,  
 Author of this blessed harmony;  
 Sound divine praises  
 With melodious graces;  
 This is the day, holy day, happy day,  
 For ever give it greeting,  
 Love and joy, heart and voice meeting:  
 Live Henry [*Live Charles*] princely and mighty,  
 Harry live [*Charles live long*] in thy creation happy.

The editors of *Tudor Church Music* in the 1920s did not have access to the earliest source, Egerton MS 3512, but used a later manuscript from the Gresham College Library (now in the Guildhall Library, G. Mus. 420). A collation of the two manuscripts indicate the Gresham MS was copied from the Egerton MS. The parts in the MS are not copied in choirs, but first all of the sopranos, numbered by the scribe 1, 6, 11, 16, 21, 26, 31, 36; then the altos, numbered 2, 7, 12, 17, 22, 27, 32, 37; and so on for the other voices, suggesting eight identically-formed choirs of five voices. The five voices (soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, bass) possess similar ranges in each choir and are notated in the G2, C2, C3, C4, and F4 clefs. There are several noteworthy additions in the MS: on the first page the scribe copied out the original Latin words (taken from the Sarum Breviary); after the 20th voice there is an unfigured thoroughbass, denoted "for ye Organ"; at the end of the 33rd voice the scribe wrote "This song was first made to a lattin ditty by Mr. Tho: Tallis; but who put in the English ditty I ame

altogether ignorant off." On the last page was inscribed "Mr. Thomas Tallis, Gentleman of King Henry the Eyghts Chapel, King Edward, Queen Mary & of her Maiesties that now is, Queen Elizabeth, the maker of this Song of fourty parts." which suggests the earlier Egerton MS was copied from a manuscript dating to Tallis' own lifetime.

For the text underlay *Tudor Church Music* used another manuscript (Royal Music MS 4 g. I) bearing the Latin text, but as this dates from the eighteenth century it probably does not preserve the word placement of Tallis' original; the editors themselves noted the underlay "is in places so perverse that it appears like an attempt on the part of an unknown editor to fit the Latin words to the English adaptation." Hence the editor of this new edition has dispensed with this text underlay and supplied his own. Text aside, the music is a direct transcription of the *Tudor Church Music* version, which as described above used the Gresham MS as a principal source; the collation of the two manuscripts indicate the scribe of the Gresham MS attempted to add some accidentals according to the rules of *musica ficta*. Though the earliest manuscript has many fewer accidentals than this edition, it is not inconceivable that the work was indeed sung with many more than are included here. Similarly the organ bass line cannot be shown to have originated with Tallis or the author of the English adaptation, and may be included or omitted in modern-day performances.

Musically, the motet is a *tour de force* on many levels, not least for Tallis' masterful exploitation of his choirs' spatial distribution. If the choirs are arranged in circular fashion sequentially by number, then the music "rotates" through the opening points of imitation on *Spem in alium nunquam habui* (choirs I to IV) and *Præter in te, Deus Israel* (choirs V to VIII). After a short interjection from choirs III and IV (which functions antiphonally as "decani" to the "cantoris" of choirs VII and VIII) Tallis completes the circle with the entry of the final bass voice of Choir VIII; shortly afterwards, at the fortieth breve of the work, all forty voices enter in the first of a series of massive welters of sound, which has been described as "polyphonic detailism". The next imitative section which follows at *qui irascaris et propitius eris* reverses the direction of rotation as new voices enter against varied countersubjects in the parts already established.

Tallis also manages to combine the exchanges between choirs in four different antiphonal arrangements, by amalgamating the singers in four groups of two choirs (as hinted at above), so antiphony can pass back between both "north" and "south", but also between "east" and "west"), but also as two groups of four choirs (*ie* one massive 20-voice choir against another) which can be arranged in two different ways (north and west versus east and south, or north and east versus south and west).

After the most intricate chordal passage so disposed between the various choirs, Tallis contrives the entire choir of 40 voices to enter as one after a pause, "upon a magical change of harmony". With the words *respice humilitatem nostram* Tallis ends with the most strikingly unhumble polyphonic passage yet heard, framed by the strong harmonic rhythms of the ensemble. The view that this might be Tallis' *opus magnum* is intriguingly suggested by Hugh Keyte's observation of a possible numerological significance in the work's duration being exactly 69 long notes: in the Latin alphabet, TALLIS adds up to 69.

Philip Legge, Melbourne, November 2004

# Spem in alium

Basses

Thomas Tallis

Bass I

Bass II

Bass III

Bass IV

Bass V

Bass VI

Bass VII

Bass VIII

Thorough bass

4

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

2

7

1 a - li - um nun - - quam ha - bu - i, spem

2 Spem

3

4

5

6

7

8

10

1 — in a - - li - um nun - quam ha - bu - i,

2 — in a - li - um nun - - quam ha - bu - i,

3

4

5

6

7

8

13

1 *spem in a - li - um, in a - li - um*

2 *spem in a - li - um nun -*

3 *Spem in a - li - um nun -*

4

5

6

7

8

16

1 *nun - quam ha - bu - i, spem in a - li - um*

2 *quam ha - bu - i, ha - bu - i, spem*

3 *- quam ha - bu - i, spem in a -*

4 *Spem in a - li -*

5

6

7

8

1 nun - quam ha - bu - i, spem in a - li - um

2 in a - li - um nun - quam ha - bu - i,

3 - - li - um nun - - quam ha - bu - i,

4 um nun - quam ha - bu - i, spem in

5

6

7

8

1 nun - - - - - quam ha - bu - i

2 ha - - bu - i

3 spem in a - - li - um... ha - bu -

4 a - li - - um nun - quam ha - bu - i

5

6

7

8

25

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

Præ - ter in

28

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

te, De - us Is - ra - - - el,

Præ - ter in te, De - - -

Præ - - - ter in te,

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

præ - ter in te, De - us Is - ra -

-us Is - ra - el,

præ - ter in te, De - us Is - ra - el,

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

præ - ter in te, De -

præ - ter in te,

- el,



1 te, De - - us Is - - ra - el:

2 - us Is - ra - el, Is - ra -

3 te, De - us Is - ra - el:

4 - us Is - - - - ra - - el:

5 el, in te, De - - us Is - ra - el:

6 De - us Is - - - - ra - el, Is - ra - el:

7 præ - ter in te, De - us Is - ra - el:

8 - - ra - - el: qui i -

1

2 el:

3

4

5

6 qui i - ra - sce - ris et pro - pi - ti -

7 qui

8 ra - sce - ris et pro - pi - ti - us e - ris,

49

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

qui i - ra - sce - ris, i -  
 us e - ris,  
 i - ra - sce - ris et pro - pi - ti - us  
 qui i - - ra - sce - ris et pro - pi - ti - us e - ris,

52

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

ra - sce - ris, qui i - ra - - - -  
 e - - - ris, et pro - pi - ti -

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

us e - - - - ris,

- sce - ris et pro - pi - ti - us e - ris,

qui i -

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

ra - - - - sce - ris et pro -

ra - - - - sce - ris et pro - pi - ti - us e -

61

1

2

3  
pi - ti - us e - - - ris, et pro - pi - - -

4  
ris, qui i - ra - sce - ris et pro -

5

6

7

8

64

1

2

3  
- ti - us e - - - ris,

4  
pi - ti - us e - - - ris,

5

6

7

8

1 et o -

2 et o -

3 et

4 et

5 et o -

6 et

7 et

8 et

et

1 - mni - a pec - ca - ta, ho - mi - num, et o - mni - a pec -

2 - mni - a pec - ca - ta ho - mi - num, pec - ca -

3 o - mni - a pec - ca - ta ho - mi - num, et

4 o - mni - a pec - ca - ta ho - mi - num, et o -

5 - mni - a pec - ca - ta ho - mi - num, et o - mni - a pec -

6 o - mni - a pec - ca - ta ho - mi -

7 o - mni - a pec - ca - ta ho - mi - num, pec -

8 o - mni - a pec - ca - ta

73

1 ca - ta ho - - mi - num in tri - bu - la - ti - o -

2 - - - ta ho - mi - num in tri - bu - la - ti - o -

3 o - mni - a pec - ca - ta ho - mi - num in tri - bu - la - ti -

4 - mni - a pec - ca - ta ho - mi - num in tri - bu - la - ti - o - ne

5 ca - ta ho - mi - num in tri - bu - la - ti - o - ne

6 num, pec - ca - ta ho - mi - num in tri - bu - la - ti -

7 ca - ta ho - mi - num in tri - bu - la - ti - o - ne

8 ho - - mi - - num in tri - bu - la - ti -

76

1 - ne,

2 ne,

3 o - ne

4

5 di - mit - tis, in tri - bu -

6 o - ne di - - mit - - - tis, in tri - bu -

7

8 o - - ne di - mit - - - tis,

1 in

2

3

4

5 la - ti - o - - ne di - mit - - tis,

6 la - ti - o - - - - ne di - mit - tis,

7

8

1 tri - bu - la - ti - o - ne di - mit - - tis,

2 in tri - bu - la - ti - o - ne di - mit - tis,

3 di - mit -

4

5

6

7

8

85

1 di - mit - tis, di - mit - tis.

2 di - mit - tis, di - mit - tis, di - mit - tis.

3 tis, di - mit - - - tis.

4 di - mit - - - tis.

5 di - mit - tis, di - mit - tis.

6 di - mit - - - tis.

7 di - mit - tis, di - mit - tis.

8 di - mit - - - tis.

88

1

2

3 Do - mi - ne De - us, Do - mi - ne

4 Do - mi - ne De - us, Do - mi - ne

5

6

7

8

1

2

3

4 De - us,

5

6

7

8 Do - mi - ne De - us, Cre -

Do - mi - ne De - us, Cre -

1

2

3

4 Cre - a - tor

5

6

7 a - tor cæ - li et ter - ræ,

8 a - tor cæ - li et ter - ræ,

97

1

2

3 
  
cæ - li et ter - ræ, et ter - ræ,

4 
  
cæ - li et ter - ræ, et ter - ræ,

5

6 
  
Cre - a -

7 
  
Cre - a -

8

100

1 
  
Cre - a - tor cæ - li et ter - ræ,

2 
  
Cre - a - tor cæ - li et ter - ræ,

3

4

5 
  
tor, Cre - a - tor

6 
  
tor, Cre - a - tor,

7 
  
Cre - a - tor

8 
  
Cre - a -

1 Cre - a - tor cæ - li et

2 Cre - a - tor cæ - li et

3

4

5

6

7 cæ - li et ter - ræ,

8 tor cæ - li et ter - ræ,

1 ter - ræ, Cre - a - - tor cæ - li et ter - ræ, re -

2 ter - ræ, Cre - a - - tor cæ - li et ter - ræ, re -

3 re -

4 re -

5 re -

6 re -

7 re -

8 re -



1 

2   
hu - mi - li -

3 

4 

5 

6 

7 

8 



1 

2   
ta - - - - - tem no - stram, no - - - -

3 

4 

5 

6 

7 

8 



121

1 re - - - spi - ce

2 stram, re - - - spi - ce

3 re - - - spi - ce

4 re - - - - - spi - ce

5 re - - - - - spi - ce

6 re - - - spi - ce, hu -

7 re - spi - ce, re - spi - ce

8 re - - - spi - ce

124

1 hu - mi - li - ta - - - tem, hu -

2 hu - - mi - li - ta - - - tem no -

3 hu - mi - li - ta - tem no - stram, hu - mi -

4 hu - mi - li - ta - tem no - stram, re -

5 hu - mi - li - ta - -

6 mi - li - ta - - - tem, hu - mi - li -

7 hu - mi - li - ta - tem,

8 hu - mi - li - ta - - - tem, hu -

1 mi - li - ta - tem no - - - stram, no - - - stram,

2 - - - stram, re - spi - ce hu - mi -

3 li - ta - tem no - - - stram, no - stram, re - -

4 spi - ce hu - mi - li - ta - tem no - stram,

5 tem no - - - stram, no - - - stram,

6 ta - tem no - - - stram, re - spi - ce

7 hu - mi - - - li - ta - - - tem no - - -

8 mi - li - ta - - - tem, hu - mi - - - li -

1 re - - - spi - ce hu - mi - li -

2 li - ta - tem no - stram, re - spi - ce hu - mi -

3 - - spi - ce hu - mi - li - ta - -

4 re - spi - ce hu - mi - li - ta - tem

5 re - - - spi - ce hu - mi - li - ta - -

6 hu - - mi - li - ta - tem no - stram, re - spi - - - ce

7 - stram, re - - spi - ce, re - spi - -

8 ta - tem no - - - stram, re - - spi - - - ce

133

1 ta - - tem, re - spi - ce hu - mi - li -

2 li - ta - - - tem no - - - stram, re - spi - ce

3 - - - - - tem no - - - - - stram.

4 no - stram, re - - - - spi - ce hu - mi - li - ta -

5 tem, hu - mi - li - ta - - - tem no - - - -

6 hu - mi - li - - ta - tem no - stram, no - stram,

7 - ce hu - - mi - - li - ta - tem no - -

8 hu - mi - li - - ta - tem no - stram, no -

136

1 ta - - tem no - - - stram.

2 hu - mi - li - ta - tem no - - - - - stram.

3 - - - - - tem no - - - - - stram.

4 - - - - - tem no - - - - - stram.

5 stram, no - stram.

6 no - - - - - stram.

7 stram, no - stram.

8 stram.