

## The Memorial Church of Harvard University Music Notes for Sunday November 6, 2022

Tomás Luis de Victoria is widely regarded as the greatest Spanish Renaissance composer, despite being less prolific than many of his contemporaries. Indeed his entire output—which comprises exclusively Latin Church music—is contained in just eleven volumes, all published in his lifetime. His musical education began at Avila cathedral, where he was a choirboy, before moving to Rome to study at the Jesuit College. He was ordained a priest in 1575 and later took chaplaincies at two Roman churches. He returned to Spain in 1587 to become chaplain to Philip II's sister, the Dowager Empress Maria, at the convent of Descalzas Reales in Madrid; he remained at the convent as organist and choirmaster for the rest of his life. Victoria wrote two settings of the *Requiem* (or *Missa pro defunctis*) and this morning's choral selections come the first of these, written in 1583 for four voices. The movements incorporate the appropriate sections of the plainchant of the Requiem Mass, which are usually heard in long notes in the soprano line. Around these chants, Victoria, whose polyphonic style was already highly developed, fashions a fluid and harmonically rich setting.

William Byrd's keyboard music has always stood in the shadow of his vocal music, notwithstanding admirers as diverse as Moscheles, Rubinstein, and Glenn Gould. Byrd masterfully combined English and Italian Renaissance traditions to create an independent musical language suitable to the refined keyboard instruments of the time. In the sixteenth century, the fantasia was still an unclassified genre containing elements from a wide variety of different styles: Thomas Morley states that a fantasia is made "when a musician taketh a point at his pleasure and wresteth and turneth it as he list." Byrd fashions a virtuosic work, combining intricate polyphony and beautiful homophony; the work is contained in the primary source of keyboard music from the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean period in England, the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*. The postlude is the majestic *Kyrie, Gott heiliger Geist*, from the third part of Bach's monumental keyboard study (or *Clavierübung*). Written in the archaic style of Palestrina's *a cappella* writing—which Bach emulated in several of his later chorale preludes—it builds up in intensity until its final unusual harmonic progression.