

The Memorial Church of Harvard University

Music Notes for October 8, 2023

William Byrd—whose 400th-anniversary occurs this year—represents the pinnacle of artistic achievement in the Tudor period. A prolific and versatile composer in virtually all contemporary English genres, Byrd's music could be heard in the great cathedrals, in private chapels, at court, and in domestic amateur music-making. Indeed, the quality of his output even transcended the bitter religious divisions of the time, and his music was admired and performed by Protestants and Roman Catholics alike.

Byrd's *Great Service* (comprising music for the Offices of Matins and Evensong, as well as a Kyrie and Creed) was virtually unknown until its 1922 discovery in Durham Cathedral library by the pioneering scholar E. H. Fellowes. It is unknown exactly when the music was written, but it was presumably intended for the Chapel Royal—one of the few institutions that could accommodate its large-scoring and musical difficulty. This morning, the Harvard University Choir sings the elaborate *Magnificat*, which displays all the trademarks of a composer at the very height of his compositional prowess.

Born into a musical family, Nicolas de Grigny was titular organist of Notre-Dame de Reims, the city's famous cathedral in which French kings were crowned. The only surviving volume of his music is the *Premier livre d'orgue*, which contains today's elegiac prelude, featuring the distinctive sound of the *Tierce* stop in the tenor register.

Keyboard music occupies a central role in the output of Johann Sebastian Bach, spanning the composer's entire creative life. In addition to charting the composer's stylistic development, these works reveal the composer's wide-ranging compositional influences: Bach was well-versed not only in the north German school, but also in the French and Italian ones. The cheerful *Toccata* BWV 564, displays an integration of techniques from the north German *Praeludium*, as well as the Italian *Concerto* form. It opens with a florid passage for the manuals, followed by an extensive pedal solo, both stylistically similar to examples found in Buxtehude, and Böhm; the manuals and pedals join together for the main body of the work, with its concerto-like alternation of ritornello and episodic passages.