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Baroque Ensembles

‘Music of forty several parts’: a Song for the Creation of Princes

Ian Woodfield

The first performance of *Sing and glorify heaven's high Majesty*, the early 17th-century English adaptation of Tallis's forty-part motet, has been the subject of interest for some years. In 1968 Pamela Willetts correctly identified the occasions of the two Jacobean performances: one was in 1610 at the creation of Henry as Prince of Wales, the other in 1616 when his younger brother Charles was similarly honored.¹ The circumstances that led to the revival of this magnificent Elizabethan motet as the musical centerpiece of the two investiture ceremonies deserve a more detailed investigation, however, if for no other reason than that the making of an English version of *Spem in alium* was very probably the decisive factor in its survival.

¹Pamela Willetts, "Musical Connections of Thomas Myriell," *Music and Letters* 49 (1968): 39-40. In a letter to the *Musical Times*, vol. 122 (1981), p. 85, Elizabeth Roche cited the views of the Reverend H. Fleetwood Sheppard, who proposed that the English version of *Spem in alium* was sung at the coronation of Charles I. In a reply, *Musical Times*, vol. 122, p. 230, Ralph Leavis identified the occasion as the 1610 creation. Denis Stevens, in "A songe of fortie partes, made by Mr. Tallys," *Early Music*, vol. 10 (1982), p. 171-81, supported Leavis's view, but was presumably unaware of the relevant information in the Willetts article.

The published reports of the festivities that accompanied the creation of Prince Henry in 1610 were made available by Nichols; they present a useful account of the part played by musicians, but there is no identifiable reference to the Tallis piece.² This deficiency was made good in 1966 with the publication of the Record of the House of Lords for the year 1610, as kept by Henry Hastings, the Earl of Huntingdon (Folger Library, V.a.277).³ In this account of the creation banquet, Hastings refers specifically to a forty-part piece, thereby confirming the exact date and location of the performance. With this crucial piece of information, it is now possible to examine the place of *Sing and glorify* in the context of the ceremony as a whole.

The week-long celebrations to mark the creation of the Prince of Wales began on Thursday 31 May.⁴ Henry left Richmond with his retinue and sailed down the Thames to Chelsea, where he was greeted by the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London. They were stationed on barges, which were gloriously decked with banners, streamers and ensigns, and furnished with "sundry sortes of loud-sounding instruments," including "drommes, trumpets, fifes, and other musikes." The Prince was escorted downstream to Whitehall. The Lord Mayor and Aldermen took their leave with "such a triumphall noyse of drommes and trumpets as made the very ayre to ecchoe." On Saturday 1 June, twenty-four gentlemen who were to be created Knights of the Bath in honor of the occasion, began their own preparations at Durham House in the Strand. Early on Sunday morning they were awakened with "musicke" and put on their habits. They walked in procession to the Chapel, with "sundry sorte of winde instruments going before them." After the service an oath was administered to each of them. Having divested themselves of their habits, they put on suits of crimson taffeta, lined with white, and rode, "trumpets sounding," the short distance to Whitehall where the King performed the ceremony of creation. They returned to Durham House for dinner. Being required by tradition not to

²John Nichols, *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities of King James the First* (London, 1828), ii, 315-62.

³Elizabeth Foster, *Proceedings in Parliament 1610* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

⁴The following details come from two published accounts: *London's Love to the Royal Prince Henrie* (London, 1610), in Nichols, *Progresses*, ii, 316-23, and *The Order and Solemnitie of the High and Mightie Prince Henry* (London, 1610), in Nichols, *Progresses*, ii, 324-34.

taste the meal that was set before them, they sat for a while "with modest carriage and gracefull abstinence" while "divers kindes of sweete musicke" was played for them. Leaving the banquet for their attendants, they rode again to Whitehall, to a service in the King's Chapel, which was celebrated with the "singing of divers antheames and playing on the organes."

On Monday 4 June, the day of the royal investiture, the newly created Knights of the Bath accompanied the Prince to Parliament. The ceremony of creation itself was a magnificent piece of pageantry. When it was over, the Lord Chancellor prorogued Parliament and the royal party returned to Whitehall, where a magnificent banquet had been prepared in the Great Hall. The Prince sat alone at the head of a long table, while the Knights of the Bath were placed at a sideboard. This was the setting for the performance of the forty-part motet. According to one source, "during the whole time of dinner, the Hall resounded with all kinds of most exquisite music."⁵ Hastings wrote that "in the middle of dinner the Prince had music of forty several parts."⁶ Henry was doubtless appreciative of the musical performances. Of his musical tastes in general, "W. H." wrote: "He loved Musicke, and namely good consorts of Instruments and voices ioyned together."⁷ Towards the end of the meal, the Garter-King-of-Arms entered with trumpets to proclaim the Prince's new title. The following day was given over to a performance of the masque "Tethy's Festival," for which musicians were employed in abundance, notably "a soft musique of twelve lutes and twelve voyces."⁸ The festivities came to an end with a tilt.

The suggestion that *Spem in alium*, with an appropriate English text, might be performed as the musical climax of the week-long investiture celebrations may well have been inspired by the recent acquisition of a manuscript of Tallis's masterpiece by Prince Henry himself. After the death of Lord Lumley on 11 April 1609, his great collection of books passed into the custody of the young Prince. On 22 October a payment was made to a Mr. Holcock "for wreating a catalogue of the librarie whiche his highnes hade of my Lord Lumley."⁹ The extant 1609 catalogue of this collection lists

⁵An anonymous letter printed in Nichols, *Progresses*, ii, 360.

⁶Foster, *Proceedings*, 98.

⁷W. H., *The True Picture and Relation of Prince Henry* (Leiden, 1634), 31.

⁸*Tethy's Festival; or the Queen's Wake* (London, 1610), in Nichols, *Progresses*, ii, 346-58.

⁹Sears Jayne and Francis Johnson, *The Lumley Library—the Catalogue of 1609* (London, 1956), 14.

among the musical works a "songe of fortie partes, made by Mr. Tallys."¹⁰ The acquisition of such an eye-catching item as a manuscript of *Spem in alium* is unlikely to have gone unnoticed in the household of the music-loving prince, and it seems improbable, to say the least, that the performance of the work a few months later was a mere coincidence.

Yet the decision to make an English version may have been taken at a very late stage indeed. Roy Strong has recently shown that James's attitude to his son's creation was marked by a certain ambivalence.¹¹ The King insisted, for example, that his son's journeys between Richmond, Whitehall, and Parliament should be made by water, apparently to avoid any possibility of the popular young Prince enjoying a triumphal entry through the cheering multitudes of Londoners. Although the masque for the creation had been in preparation since the end of 1609, a mere six days notice was given to the City of London of the manner of the Prince's entry, and it was pointedly suggested that he should be received "in such sort as is usual when the Lord Maior goeth to Westminster to take his oath"—an instruction that Strong interprets as a very deliberate slight. The pageant prepared by the City was, understandably in the circumstances, a somewhat muted affair. It is certainly possible that the forty-part motet was also a late choice.¹² If that were the case, the English text would presumably have been concocted in some haste, which might account for its shortcomings. In view of the importance of the occasion and the caliber of the musicians—Orlando Gibbons and John Bull, to name but two—who were presumably available to do the work, it is of surprisingly poor quality, even allowing for the banality that often characterizes such texts. Hawkins was scathing in his critique, describing the words as "neither verse, nor prose nor even common sense."¹³ Brett, too, commented on the "poorly fitting English words."¹⁴ In

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 286.

¹¹Roy Strong, *Henry Prince of Wales and England's Lost Renaissance* (London, 1986), 152-60.

¹²David Price, *Patrons and Musicians in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1981), 224-25, lists the musicians in Henry's household between 1610 and 1612 (as in Harleian 7009, fol. 32): John Bull; Robert Johnson; Thomas Lupo; John Miners; Jonas Wrench; Thomas Daie; Valentine Sawyer; Thomas Cutting; John Sturt; Thomas Ffoord; John Ashby; Edward Wormall; and Mathyas Johnson. See also, Andrew Ashbee, *Records of English Court Music*, iv (1991), 211-12.

¹³Sir John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (London, 1875), i, 456.

¹⁴Philip Brett, ed., *Spem in alium* (London, 1966).

its slightly flawed splendor, then, *Sing and glorify heaven's high Majesty* might be seen as encapsulating some of the conflicting undercurrents that surrounded this investiture—the magnificence of its music, an expression of the genuine love and esteem in which Henry was widely held, the ineptitude of its text, an unfortunate practical consequence of the King's coolness towards his son.

The second performance of the English version of the work took place at the creation of Prince Charles in 1616. The still painful memory of Henry's untimely death in 1612, the inclement weather, and the indifferent health of Charles himself combined to cast a shadow over the occasion. The ceremonies, however, followed the pattern established six years earlier, and Tallis's masterpiece, with the text appropriately modified, was again sung during the banquet at Whitehall. Camden's description of the performance (in Harleian 5176, fol. 225) has long been known to scholars; it was published by Nichols and cited by Willetts:

*After some musique the song of 40. parts was song by the gent. of the Chappell and others, sitting upon degrees over the Screene at the north end of the Hall which was sung agayne by the Kings commandment who stood as a spectatour in the Roome over the stayres ascending to the great chamber.*¹⁵

The most straightforward interpretation of this last observation is that James, listening from above, asked for an immediate encore of the piece. (Sir Symonds d'Ewes who was present confirms that the King did watch from a gallery above.)¹⁶ An alternative explanation is that Camden, albeit in a somewhat oblique fashion, was making a reference to the fact that the piece had been performed in 1610.

The secular spirit in which both Jacobean performances of *Sing and glorify* were conceived is clearly shown by the fact that the organizers of the creation programme, in the well established tradition of the 16th century, chose to make the "song" the centerpiece of the banquet rather than the church service. The performers were drawn from the choir of the Chapel Royal, augmented, at least in 1616, by other singers. The descriptions, which speak of the hall resounding "with all kinds of exquisite music" (1610), and of the "musique" which preceded the forty-part motet (1616),

¹⁵Willetts, "Musical Connections," 40; Nichols, *Progresses*, iii, 213.

¹⁶J. O. Halliwell, *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Sir Simons d'Ewes, Bart* (London, 1845), 91-92.

imply that large numbers of instrumentalists were present, but fall just short of allowing us to conclude with certainty that they accompanied the singers in this particular piece. Yet instrumentalists were involved at every stage of the week-long celebrations as was normal practice, and it is likely enough that they joined in at the climax on this occasion. Camden's reference to the performers having been seated upon "degrees" (i.e. steps) over the screen at one end of the hall is interesting. It suggests that the singers were arranged across the hall, quite high up, perhaps in a straight line or lines, but more likely in either a semicircular arrangement or a shallow inverted v-shape ascending the steps. Groups of instrumentalists were probably seated lower down, perhaps in front of the screen as they had been in the Masque of 1607.¹⁷ In any case, for such a major event, scaffolding would have been available to enlarge existing stairs or platforms to suit the requirements of the performance.

With firmer information about the circumstances of the two Jacobean performances of *Sing and glorify*, it is now possible to make sense of the earliest extant source of the piece, Egerton 3512.¹⁸ The inscription on this manuscript—"Mr. Thomas Tallis Gentleman of King Henry the Eyghts Chaple, King Edward, Queen Mary, and of her Ma^{ties} that now is, Queen Elyzabeth, the maker of this Song of fourty partes"—was of course copied from an earlier source—almost certainly the Prince's manuscript of *Spem in alium*. The English text transmits the names of both Henry and Charles:

Sing and glorifie heavens high Majesty,
 Author of this blessed harmony,
 Sound devyne praises
 With melodious graces.
 This is the day, holy day, happy day,
 For ever gev it greeting,
 Love and ioy hart and voice meeting.
 Lyve Henry)
) Princly and mighty,
 Long liv Charles)
 Henry lyve)
) in thy Creation happy.
 Charles lyv long)

¹⁷Thomas Campion, *The Description of a Maske* (London, 1607), fol. A4.

¹⁸The circumstances in which the British Museum acquired this manuscript are reported in Bertram Schofield, "The Manuscripts of Tallis's Forty-Part Motet," *Musical Quarterly* 37 (1951): 176-83.

Willetts and Stevens both suggest that this text was addressed jointly to the two princes because Charles was present at his brother's investiture, but on diplomatic grounds this seems most improbable.¹⁹ Much more likely is that the 1610 version had its text amended for the 1616 performance and that Egerton 3512 was a fair copy made to preserve both variants. The alignment of the alternative texts, the one half raised, the other half lowered, would accord with this view.

Several 17th-century writers claim that other English musicians composed music of forty parts.²⁰ The idea that these lost pieces were directly inspired by the Jacobean creation performances of the Tallis motet is an attractive one. Two descendants of John Milton (the poet's father) claimed that he composed such a work. Edward Phillips wrote that the poet had told him that his father "composed an In Nomine of forty parts, for which he was rewarded with a gold medal and chain by a Polish prince to whom he presented it."²¹ In his *Brief Lives*, John Aubrey, having talked to the poet's brother, gave a rather different version of what was presumably the same occasion: "I have been told that the father composed a song of fourscore parts [the inflation is probably unintentional] for the Landgrave of Hesse, for which his highness sent a medal of gold or a noble present."²² The musical interests of Maurice, Landgrave of Hesse, are well known. His keen interest in English music and musicians is exemplified by his attempts to attract John Dowland into his service—he sent a ring valued at £20 sterling to Dowland's wife in England²³—and his library, the 1613 catalogue of which includes a good selection of recently published music by

¹⁹Willetts, "Musical Connections," 39; Stevens, "A songe of fortie partes," 172.

²⁰The best known of these is Anthony Wood's almost certainly fictitious anecdote about John Bull, who is supposed to have been shown a "Lesson or Song of forty parts" by a musician at St. Omer. Challenged to add another part, Bull after a mere two or three hours work, produced "forty more parts." Having tried out the result, the musicians "burst into a great ecstasy, and sware by the great God that he that added those 40 parts must be either the Devil or Dr. Bull." Stevens, in "A songe of fortie partes," 180, argues that a copy of *Spem in alium* could have reached St. Omer in the hands of a musical Jesuit and that Wood's anecdote might have at least this basis in fact.

²¹William Parker, *Milton: a Biography* (Oxford, 1968), i, 10.

²²*Ibid.*

²³Diana Poulton, *John Dowland* (rev. ed., London, 1982), 38.

English composers.²⁴ A gift of a gold coin or chain to another English composer is by no means inherently improbable, and the idea that such a gift might have been made in the period following the 1610 creation does tie in rather neatly with the known history of the Landgrave's relations with the English court.²⁵ After 1610 the marriage prospects of James's elder children became a matter of active debate, and Maurice was one of the several minor German rulers to propose an alliance. In 1611 he sent his son Otto to seek the hand of Elizabeth. Although his suit did not succeed, Otto made an excellent personal impression and was lavishly entertained at court. It is certainly conceivable that Milton, inspired by the recent performance of *Sing and glorify* could have composed a short forty-part piece to present to the young suitor from Hesse, and it is even possible that it may have been performed for him.²⁶ The sending of a reward for a musical honor done to his son would have been fully consistent with the Landgrave's continuing diplomatic interests. In June 1612 an ambassador from Hesse was at court with gifts—including horses for the Prince of Wales—to return thanks for the favors shown to Otto during his English visit. His suggestion of a match between the Landgrave's daughter and Henry seems to have been tactfully ignored.²⁷

The other 17th-century composer to be credited with a forty-part composition was Thomas Warwick. In his *Athenae Oxoniensis* (1691) Anthony Wood wrote:

The before-mentioned Tho. Warwick, father to sir Phillip, was also one of the organists of the royal chappel belonging to K. Ch. I. and was so admirably well skill'd in the theory part of music, that he composed a *Song of forty parts*, for forty several persons, each of them to have his own part entire from the other. This song was perform'd before his

²⁴Richard Charteris, "English Music in the Library of Moritz, Landgrave of Hessen-Kassel, in 1613," *Chelys* 15 (1986): 33-37.

²⁵Parker, *Milton*, vol. 2, p. 704, also summarizes the other suggestions that have been made concerning the occasion for which Milton's 40-part piece could have been written: the visit of Albertus Alasco, Count Palatine of Siradia, a duchy in lower Poland in 1583; the visit of the Landgrave's second son in 1622.

²⁶During his visit Otto was treated to the full splendors of Jacobean court music. Foscarini, the Venetian ambassador to London, reported a dinner given for Otto and himself, after which Prince Henry appeared most insistent that they listen to his music "in various kinds of concert." *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, 1610-1613*, 194

²⁷*Ibid.*, 383.

majesty about the year 1635, by forty musicians, mostly belonging to his majesty, and, by some to certain churches, among whom Ben. Rogers of Windsor was one.

This passage raises an intriguing possibility. During the whole of the 17th century, there was only one further occasion when a royal heir was created Prince of Wales; this was in May 1638 when the future Charles II was given his own household and installed as a Knight of the Garter at Windsor. Given the coincidence of dates, it seems possible that, following the precedent set in 1610 and 1616, a forty-part piece was performed. Whether, as Wood believed, Warwick actually composed a new forty-part work in honor of the occasion must remain an open question, although the limited range of his surviving music leaves one slightly skeptical. A more likely possibility, however, is that in one crucial respect Wood got it wrong, and that the piece of music performed was not just any old song of forty parts, but "the" song of forty parts, as it was to become known. Tradition, always a potent influence on the conduct of royal ceremonial, may have determined the choice. As one of the organists of the Chapel Royal,²⁸ Warwick might well have been responsible for the preparation of the music—this time, no change of text would have been necessary—and the rehearsing and directing of the performance. Some support for the idea of a 1638 performance of *Sing and glorify* comes from the existence of a mid-17th-century manuscript in the Library of Gresham College (ms. 420). Schofield dated its handwriting to about the end of the first quarter of the 17th century,²⁹ and the authors of Supplementary Volume II to *Early English Church Music* also classify it as a mid-17th-century copy.³⁰ The use of the term "thorough bass" on the title page ("The song of 40 parts with a Thorow Base") and over the part itself ("A thorough basse to y^e song of forty parts for y^e Organ") is consistent with this date. (Such a part exists in Egerton 3512, but it is not so described.) Moreover, on the page containing the 35th part the scribe commented, "This song was first made to a latten ditty by Mr. Tho: Tallis; but who put in the English ditty I ame altogether ignorant off," an observation unlikely to have been necessary in 1616. All these factors suggest that the Gresham manuscript could have been copied around the time of a 1638 performance of *Sing and glorify*.

²⁸He succeeded Orlando Gibbons in July 1625. See Edward Rimbault, *The Old Cheque-Book or Book of Remembrance of the Chapel Royal*, Camden Society, new series, iii (1872).

²⁹Schofield, "The Manuscripts," 182.

³⁰May Hofman and John Morehen, *Latin Music in British Sources c1485-1610* (London, 1987).

The revival of interest in the song of forty parts in the early 18th century is attested by the well-known Tudway-Wanley correspondence. Tudway, himself a chorister of the Chapel Royal in his youth, seems not to have believed that the work could ever have been performed, describing it, appropriately nevertheless, as "a Memoriall of y^e great skill and abillity of y^e composer."³¹ Interestingly, he claims that he had often been told of such a work, which obviously by then had acquired its near legendary status. The manuscript shown to Tudway in 1718 by James Hawkins, organist of Ely Cathedral, was in fact Egerton 3512. Its later history is unclear. According to Sir John Hawkins, it was presented to the Earl of Oxford, a keen bibliophile,³² but at some point presumably between his death in 1741 and the sale of his manuscripts in 1753, it was lost from the collection. Burney claimed that it had been "attracted into the vortex of Dr. Pepusch," a by no means unlikely supposition in view of Pepusch's interest in early English music.³³

By this time, new copies of the work were being made. One of these written by John Immyns, founder of the Madrigal Society, contains features which suggest that an attempt may have been made to resurrect *Sing and glorify* on the occasion of the creation of George as Prince of Wales in 1751. The manuscript has unfortunately been mislaid in the British Library,³⁴ but some details were given by A. H. Mann in the preface to his edition of the work.³⁵ On the title page, written much later by Thomas Oliphant, was pasted a portion of what was apparently the original title page:

This Motett of forty parts was first composed to the Latin words following Thomas Tallis, gentleman and Master of the Chappell to K. Henry y^e 8th, K. Edward y^e 6th, Q. Mary and Q. Elizabeth supposed to be fitted to the above English words in y^e Reign of James y^e 1st by Orlando Gibbons, M.D., only at the writing over this score in y^e year 1751 y^e words [Prince Charles] were altered to [King George].

Immys, then, seems to have substituted the name George for that of Charles, and at least one 19th-century copy, presumably deriving from this

³¹Schofield, "The Manuscripts," 177-78.

³²Hawkins, *A General History*, vol. 1, p. 456.

³³Charles Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. 3 (London, 1789), 74.

³⁴Communication from Hugh Cobbe of the British Library, June 2, 1988.

³⁵A. H. Mann, *Motet for 40 Voices by Thomas Tallis* (London, 1888), vol. 2.

manuscript, preserves the text "Long live George, princely and mighty." 1751 did indeed see the creation of a new Prince of Wales, the future George III. A month after the unexpected death of Frederick, the Prince of Wales, on 20 March, George II witnessed the installation of his grandson.³⁶ Could Immyns, an ardent admirer of early English church music and a fanatical copyist, have written out *Sing and glorify*—or perhaps have amended the text of a copy that he already made—with a view to having the work performed by the Chapel Royal at the creation? And could the fact that in 1752 Immyns was appointed lutenist to the Chapel Royal, with no other qualification than his having taught himself to play from Mace's *Musick's Monument*, be interpreted as a reward for his pains the previous year?³⁷ Until the Madrigal Society copy is tracked down, such questions must remain unanswered.

Spem in alium is without question one of the crowning glories of Tudor church music, and it is entirely appropriate that in its English guise it should have come to play such an important part in early 17th-century royal ceremonial. It now remains to propose that the "song" be restored to its former position, and that, on the occasion of the next investiture, the newly-created Prince of Wales should dine, as did his Stuart forbears, to the splendid sounds of Tallis's great masterpiece.

³⁶Horace Walpole, *Memoirs of King George II*, ed., J. Brooke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), vol. 1, p. 76, reported that "Prince George kissed the King's hand on being created Prince of Wales."

³⁷Hawkins is our main source of information about Immyns. In *A General History*, vol. 2, p. 887, he gave the following account: "He [Immyms] wrote all day at the desk, and frequently spent most part of the night in copying music, which he did with amazing expedition and correctness. At the age of forty he would needs learn the lute, and by the sole help of Mace's book, acquired a competent knowledge of the instrument; but, beginning so late was never able to attain any great degree of proficiency on it." Hawkins goes on to report that Immyns lived in great poverty until, after the death of Shore, he obtained the position of lutenist at the Chapel Royal with a salary of £40 a year, through the good offices of Mr. George Shelvocke, secretary to the General Post-Office.