



Sunday 22 October, 7.30pm

St Martin's Church

MOTHER, SISTER, DAUGHTER

Musica Secreta

Laurie Stras *director*

Claire Williams *ensemble director & organ*

Yvonne Eddy, Hannah Ely, Elspeth Piggott *sopranos*

Victoria Couper, Katharine Hawnt, Sarah Anne Champion *mezzo-sopranos*

Kirsty Whatley *harps*

Alison Kinder *viols*

Celestial Sirens

Anonymous Verona 761, c.1495

Anonymous Verona 759, c.1480

Antoine Brumel c.1560–after 1512

Anonymous attr. Leonora d'Este 1515–1575

Maistre Jhan c.1485–1538

Interval

Missa de Beata Virgine

Vespers of St Lucy:

Orante Sancta Lucia

Lucia virgo quid a me petis

Per te Lucia virgo

Soror mea Lucia

Tanto pondere

Mater patris et filia

Virgo Maria speciosissima

Ecce amica mea



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Marguerite de Navarre 1492–1549	Avés poinct veu la malheureuse
Martha Baerts d. 1560	Aen mijn Suster Betken
Anonymous attr. Juan Anchieta 1462–1523	Mater Christi cooperto capite
Anonymous attr. Leonora d'Este	Vespere autem sabbati
Anonymous Brussels 27766, c.1560	Second Vespers of St Clare (excerpts): Psalm Antiphon 1: Post vitae Clarae terminum Psalm Antiphon 5: Laudans laudare studeat Hymn: En praeclara virgo Clara Magnificat Antiphon: Salve sponsa Dei
Joanna Marsh b. 1970	The Veiled Sisters

This project is supported by:

The Leche Trust

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The Ambache Charitable Trust is active in raising the profile of women composers.

The lives of women in Renaissance Europe were shaped by their family ties: every path they might pursue would be defined by whose daughter, sister, or mother they were, whether in the city, at court, or in a convent. Women learned to be women from the Bible and liturgy, and from the communities of women around them. Storytelling and music were direct ways of connecting the lived experiences of listeners with the lives of holy (and unholy) women.

While there is no hard evidence linking a set of late 15th-century choirbooks now held in the Biblioteca Capitolare in Verona with nuns, the *Missa de Beata Virgine* which opens MS 761 is adorned with illuminations of Saint Lucy and Benedictine nuns, clustered around a choirbook and singing a Kyrie. The settings of the psalm antiphon texts of the *Vespers of St Lucy* from MS 759 are freely composed what Canadian scholar Julie Cummings calls “the community motet” style. Their simplicity allows the story to be heard clearly: a dialogue between Lucy and St Agatha, in which Lucy prays to the saint to heal her mother.

The Lucy Vespers is almost unique in the Renaissance repertoire. Only one other complete set of Vespers psalm antiphons exists, also for a female saint: Clare. It, too, is found in a convent manuscript, Brussels MS 27766. Dated 1560, the Biffoli-Sostegni manuscript is so called after the nuns whose names are embossed on the leather bindings: Agnoleta Biffoli and Clemenzia Sostegni. I have recently shown that it originated in the Florentine convent of San Matteo in Arcetri, the home of Suor Maria Celeste Galilei, daughter of Galileo Galilei – who four years before her death became responsible for teaching the novices plainchant and for the day-to-day running of the choir.

The *Vespers of St Clare* are more extensive than Lucy's, with two separate liturgies – tonight we perform a shorter version of the Second Vespers. Written for four high voices, like most equal-voice polyphony of the early 16th century they exploit dissonance and sounding parallel intervals. Clare's office tells of her determination to take holy vows; the establishment of her order; of her death and that of her sister Agnes soon afterwards, and their ascent to Heaven.

Even in spaces where formal compositional skills were lacking, Renaissance women found ways to adapt music to tell their stories by writing new words to existing music. *Mater Christi cooperto capite* is found in Verona MS 760. The motet, now attributed to Juan Anchieta, was copied as *Rex autem David*, but "Rex autem David" and "Absalon" have been pasted over with "Mater Christi" and "Jesu Christe." David's grief is turned into the Virgin's grief over the body of her dead son, creating the musical equivalent of a *Pietà*.

The two songs in vernacular languages come from women at opposite ends of the social scale, yet united in their reformist views. Marguerite, Queen of Navarre, was a prolific poet and composer of spiritual songs. *Avés poinct veu la malheureuse*, sung to the traditional tune *La peronnelle*, is like a Hilaire Belloc cautionary tale describing the fate of she who clings to misery and turns away from God's grace.

Martha Baerts directed her song, *Aen mijn Suster Betken* to the daughter of her employer Lady Soutken van den Houte. Soutken and Martha were beheaded in November 1560 for their Anabaptist beliefs. Martha urges Betken to remember she went to her death willingly. Her song borrows the tune *Wel hem de Godes vrede staet* (itself based on a bawdy secular song).

We may assume that Suor Leonora d'Este, daughter of Alfonso I d'Este of Ferrara and Lucrezia Borgia, was the intended recipient of the extensive *Ecce amica mea*, by Maistre Jhan. The motet subtly changes the familiar text of from the Song of Songs, so that instead of the male lover looking in at his beloved through the lattice, she is gazing out at him.

We have included two works attributed to Suor Leonora, a gifted musician. *Vespere autem sabbati*, tells the story of the women running to the tomb on Easter morning – Mary Magdalene and the "altera Maria," Mary Salome, sister of the Virgin Mary. *Virgo Maria speciosissima*, may be a student work demonstrating mastery of specific techniques, as it has a five-note *soggetto ostinato* in the Cantus, and it incorporates the opening phrase of the *Mater patris et filia* by Antoine Brumel in its second part.

After thirty years of performing music of women from the past, we wanted something of our own to add to the repertoire, so we commissioned *The Veiled Sisters*, by British composer Joanna Marsh. The work weaves together past and present in two texts, by Norfolk poet Esther Morgan (b. 1970) and 17th-century poet Alessandro Francucci (fl. 1620). Morgan's poem is spoken from the point of view of a woman looking from a dark interior outward at another in the sunlight; Francucci's praises a young, beautiful singer who is making a parallel but opposite journey, entering a convent for a life in enclosure. The texts echo the perspectives of our historical women and the works they inspired: Suor Leonora, peering from behind the grille in Maistre Jhan's work, Clare joyously entering her cloistered life.

The performers

Musica Secreta is the most established female-voice early music ensemble in the UK. For over thirty years, they have performed, taught, and recorded music written by and for women from the 15th to the 17th centuries. The musicians, all women, have performed with major ensembles including the Tallis Scholars, The Sixteen, Tenebrae, Magnificat, Siglo d'Oro, Ensemble Plus Ultra, the BBC Singers, Joglaresa, and the Rose Consort. They have made nine albums, four of which are of music exclusively by historic women composers. Their pioneering research has been recognised by awards from the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women and the American Musicological Society. Their 2019 recording, *From Darkness Into Light* (Obsidian CD 719) was shortlisted for the *Gramophone* Early Music Award, 2020. Their most recent release, *Mother, Sister, Daughter* (Lucky Music), was selected by the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker* as one of the top classical albums of 2022.

musicasecreta.org

Laurie Stras is Emeritus Professor of Music at the University of Southampton, and a passionate advocate for female-voice polyphony in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. She is a regular contributor to print and broadcast media, and has published extensively on women singers in early music and popular music. She is currently preparing a Cambridge Element on the Biffoli-Sostegni manuscript, San Matteo in Arcetri, and Suor Maria Celeste Galilei, for which she has been awarded a 2023–2024 Leverhulme Emeritus Fellowship.

Celestial Sirens is a South Coast-based amateur and student women's voice choir dedicated to exploring a wide range of music associated with convents in the 16th and 17th centuries. The choir works frequently both on its own and also alongside Musica Secreta in a wide range of venues; one particular highlight was performing Sacred Hearts with Sarah Dunant at the Latitude Festival, clad in habits and wellies and appearing in a tent!

The texts

Missa de beata Virgine

Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy;
Lord, have mercy.

Gloria in excelsis Deo. Et in terra pax
hominibus bonae voluntatis. Laudamus te.
Benedicimus te. Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.
Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam
tuam. Domine Deus, Rex coelestis, Deus Pater
omnipotens.

Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace to
men of good will. We praise Thee. We bless Thee.
We adore Thee. We glorify Thee.
We give Thee thanks for Thy great glory.
O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father
almighty.

Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe.
Spiritus et alme orphanorum Paraclite.

O Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son.
O Spirit and kind comforter of orphans.

Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris.
Primogenitus Mariae Virginis matris.

O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father. *First-*
born of the Virgin Mother Mary.

Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.

Who takest away the sins of the world, have

Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe
deprecationem nostrum. *Ad Mariae gloriam.*
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere nobis.

Quoniam tu solus Sanctus, *Mariam*
sanctificans.

Tu solus Dominus, *Mariam gubernans.*

Tu solus Altissimus, *Mariam coronans* Jesu
Christe.

Cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris. Amen.

mercy on us. Who takest away the sins of the
world, receive our prayer, *to the glory of Mary.*
Who sittest at the right hand of the Father, have
mercy on us.

For Thou only art holy, *sanctifying Mary.*

Thou only art the Lord, *ruling Mary.*

Thou only art most high, *crowning Mary,*
O Jesus Christ.

Together with the Holy Ghost in the glory of God
the Father. Amen

Vespers of St Lucy

Orante sancta Lucia, apparuit ei beata
Agatha, consolabatur ancillam Christi.

While Saint Lucy prayed, the blessed Agatha
appeared unto her, and consoled the
handmaiden of Christ.

"Lucia virgo, quid a me petis quod ipsa poteris
praestare continuo matri tuae?"

"O virgin Lucy, why do you ask of me what you
can so easily obtain for you mother?"

"Per te, Lucia virgo, civitas Syracusana
decorabitur a domino Jesu Christo."

"Through you, O virgin Lucy, the city of Syracuse
shall be made glorious by the Lord Jesus Christ."

"Soror mea, Lucia virgo, deo devota, quid a
me petis quod ipsa poteris praestare
continuo matri tuae?"

"Lucy, my sister, you, virgin consecrated to God,
why do you ask of me what you can so easily
obtain for you mother?"

Tanto pondere eam fixit spiritus sanctus, ut
virgo domini immobilis permaneret.

With such power did the Holy Spirit fix her to the
ground, that the virgin of Christ remained
immovable.

Mater patris et filia

Mater patris et filia,
mulierum laetitia
stella maris eximia,
audi nostra suspiria.
Regina poli curiae,
mater misericordiae,
in hac valle miseriae
Maria, propter filium
confer nobis remedium.
Bone Jesu, Fili Dei,
nostras preces exaudi;
et precibus nostris
dona nobis remedium. Amen.

Mother and daughter of the Father,
delight of women,
wondrous star of the sea,
hear our sighs.
Queen of the court of the heavenly vault,
Mother of mercy,
in this valley of distress,
Mary, by means of your Son,
bring us healing.
Good Jesus, Son of God,
hear our prayers,
and by our prayers
grant us healing. Amen.

Virgo Maria speciosissima

Virgo Maria, speciosissima,
coelorum regina,
triumphatrixque nobilissima,
fons rivus, ros et lira,
rosa liliium, dux melodia,
norma decus, flos et via.

Virgo Maria, preciosissima,
stella maris praefulgida
candor, virtus, et omnia,
tu parisi in saecula salvatorem.
Alleluia.

[*Secunda pars*]

Virgo Maria, virga lesse florida,
nostra mater et domina,
Virgo Maria, mater patris et filia,
nos quaesumus aure pia
exaudi, Virgo Maria.

Ecce amica mea

Ecce amica mea, columba mea, speciosa
mea, formosa mea, venit
saliens in montibus,
transiliens colles.
Similis est dilecta mea capree himnuloque
cervorum.

En ipsa dilecta mea, formosa mea stat post
parietem nostrum
respiciens per fenestras,
prospiciens per cancellos.
En dilectus meus loquitur mihi:
Surge propera, amica mea, columba mea,
formosa mea, et veni.
Iam enim hyems transiit,
imber abiit et recessit.
Veni, columba mea, veni.

[*Secunda pars*]

Flores apparuerunt in terra nostra,
tempus putationis advenit;
vox turturis audita est in terra nostra,
ficus protulit grossos suos,
vineae florentes dederunt odorem suum;
surge, amica mea, propera, speciosa mea,
et veni, columba mea, in foraminibus petrae,

Virgin Mary, the most special,
Queen of heaven,
She who triumphes, and most noble
Source of rivers, the dew and the banks
Rose, lily, the leader of the melody,
the standard of grace, the flower and the way.

Virgin Mary, most precious,
Star of the Sea, outshining
brightness, strength, and all things,
you brought the Saviour into the world.
Alleluia.

Virgin Mary, the flowering branch of Jesse,
our mother and mistress,
Virgin Mary, mother and daughter of the Father,
we beseech that your holy ear
may listen, Virgin Mary.

"Behold my love, my dove, my beauty, my fair
one, she comes
leaping upon the mountains,
skipping upon the hills.
My beloved is like a roe or a young hart.

And she, my beloved, my fair one, stands behind
our wall,
looking through the windows,
showing herself through the lattice."
And my beloved said to me,
"Arise, hurry, my love, my dove, my fair one, and
come away.
For, lo, the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.
Come, my dove, come."

"The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of the singing of birds is come,
and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;
the fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the
vines with the tender grape give a good smell;
arise, my love, hurry, my beauty,
and come away, my dove, in the clefts of the

in caverna maceriae.
Ostende faciem tuam mihi,
sonet vox tua in auribus meis;
vox enim tua dulcis,
et facies tua decora.

Avés pointt veu la malheureuse

Avés pointt veu la malheureuse,
Que tous ennuis viennent chercher,
Qui de nul bien n'est desirouse,
Et ne veult de joye approcher?

Ne la cherchez pointt en la plaine
De propre delectation;
Elle s'en va sur la montaigne
De toute tribulation;

Le rossignol, ny la callandre,
L'estourneau, la pie et le jay
Ne font pointt là leur chant entendre,
Ne aussy le doux papegay.

Et en lieu de douce musique
Sont reynes et chauves souris,
Et à son pleur melancolique
Prent plus de plaisir qu'en son ris

Mais sy Dieu tout bon la dellaisse
En ce rocher plus dur que fer,
Tristesse, qui son cueur abaisse,
Le menera jusqu'en enfer.

En luy trouve telle armonie,
Que d'homme et d'oyseaux fuit les chants;
Du monde veult estre bannie,
Pour estre avec luy seule aux champs.

Aen mijn Suster Betken

O Godt ghy zijt mijn Hulper fijn
verlost my van de eewige pijn
O Heere wilt my bewaeren,
voor den Draec met zijn scharen.

Die verleyders quellen my so seer
om my te trecken van Godes leer
die en wil ick niet ghelooven,
want sy soecken my te verdooven.

rock, in the secret places of the stairs.
Let me see your face,
let my ears hear your voice;
for your voice is sweet,
and your face is lovely."

Have you ever seen the unhappy one
for whom all the troubles come,
who is desirous of no good
and does not want to draw near to joy?

Don't look for her on the plain
of her own delight;
she goes off to the mountain
of all tribulation.

Neither the nightingale, nor the lark,
the starling, the magpie, and the jay
ever make their song heard,
nor also the sweet popinjay.

And in place of sweet music
are foxes and bats,
and at her sad weeping
they take more pleasure than in her laugh.

But if the God of all good abandons her
in this rocky place harder than iron,
Sadness, who debases her heart
will lead her to Hell.

In him she finds such harmony,
since she flees from the songs of men and birds,
She wants to be banished from the world
to be with him alone, in the fields.

O God, thou art my Helper good,
reserve me from eternal pain;
O Lord, I pray thee to protect me
from the Dragon and his hosts!

The tempters torment me so much
to separate me from God's creed;
but yet, believe them I will not,
for to ruin me they seek.

Mijn Vrienden doen my ooc vermaen
dat ick soude mijn Geloof afgaen,
O neen dat wil ick behouwen,
totter doot al sonder flouwen.

Doe seyden sy al metter spoet,
daeromme sult ghy inder hellen gloet
dat eewige Vyer beerven,
het Rijcke Godts sult ghy derven.

Doe seyde ic haer met koelen moe,
dit Oordel hoort den Heere toe,
hoe derft ghy dat uut spreken,
het quaet sal hy wel wreecken.

Doe seyden sy du snoode Beest,
in Oudenaerde is noyt geweest,
gheene so quaet bevonden
ban sulcken boosen gronden.

Al versmaet my de werelt quaet,
die Heere is mijn toeverlaet,
ick hoope hy sal my stercken,
ende crachtich met my wercken.

Die dit Liedeken heeft gemaect
by die Blindeleiders is sy geraect
sy en brochtense niet gevanghen
maer quam van haer selfs gegangen.

My Friends, too, do admonish me,
that my faith I should renounce;
Oh no! to that I will hold fast,
up until death - I will not flag!

Next they said, with sharp impatience:
"For that you will in hell's hot glow,
earn that everlasting Fire,
And God's Kingdom you'll forgo!"

I answered them, in spirit calm:
"Such Judgement is the Lord's alone.
How dare you utter loud such thoughts?
Most surely evil he'll avenge!"

Then they replied: "You lowly Beast!
In Oudenaard' there's never been
anyone so wicked found
with such an evil core!"

And should the evil world despise me,
the Lord, he will my refuge be.
I trust that he will strengthen me
and work in me so powerfully.

The one who this Song did write,
arrived at those Leaders Blind;
not as a captive was she brought,
but of her own free will she came.

Translation: Hermina Joldersma and Louis Grijp

Mater Christi cooperto capite

Mater Christi cooperto capite incedens,
lugebat filium, dicens:
Jesu Christe, fili mi, fili mi Jesu Christe,
quis mihi det ut ego moriar pro te, fili mi Jesu
Christe?

The mother of Christ, went with covered head,
mourning her son, saying,
"Jesus Christ, my son, my son, Jesus Christ!
who will grant me that I might die for you, my
son, Jesus Christ!"

Vespere autem sabbati

Vespere autem sabbati,
quae lucescit in prima sabbati:

venit Maria Magdalene, et altera Maria,
videre sepulchrum. Alleluia.

Now late on the Sabbath,
as it began to dawn toward the first day of the
week,
came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary
to see the sepulchre. Alleluia.

Second Vespers of St Clare – excerpts

Post vitae Clarae terminum
Clara cum turba virginum
ad caelos evolavit
suum complexa Dominum
regnat in regno luminum
quo Dominus regnavit.

Laudans laudare studeat,
In laudem semper prodeat
Plebs ista salvatoris
Quam tanta ditat sanctitas,
Non cesset ipsa civitas
A laude conditoris.

Hymn: En praeclara virgo Clara
regnat in regno luminum
quam amasti desponsasti
Jesu, corona virginum.

Mundo spreto, corde laeto,
Francisci magisterio
carnem terit et te quaerit
Jesu nostra redemptio.

Per te solem parit prolem
sanctarum gregem pauperum,
quas tu ditas et maritas
conditor alme siderum.

Puritate, paupertate
mater et eius agmina
tu sectantur, imitantur
O gloriosa Domina.

Finit cursum, scandit sursum
Claret multo prodigio
annotatur, comprobatur
in caelesti collegio.

Virgo pura, nostri cura
fac tibi sit in curia
sint optata per te data
beata nobis gaudia. Amen.

Salve sponsa Dei
virgo sacra planta minorum
tu vas munditiae
tu previa forma sororum

After the end of Clare's life,
Clare, with the multitude of virgins,
flew to the heavens
into the Lord's embrace.
She reigns in the realm of light
where the Lord has reigned.

Praising strives to praise
advances ever in praise
this saviour's people,
to her whom holiness has so enriched
this community itself will not cease
its founder's praise.

So the illustrious virgin Clare
reigns in the kingdom of light;
when you loved her, you were betrothed.
Jesus, crown of virgins!

The world, having been rejected;
the heart, having been made happy;
through the office of Francis she sheds her flesh
and seeks you, Jesus, our redemption.

Through you, the sun gives birth to offspring,
the flock of the poor female saints,
whom you enrich and marry,
creator of the stars.

By purity, by poverty,
the mother of her flock;
we follow and imitate you,
O glorious Lady.

She finished the journey,
she climbed upwards,
she shone through many miracles,
inscribed and approved in the heavenly college.

Pure virgin, our guardian,
make yourself to be in our house.
Your gifts are to be desired,
our blessed joy. Amen.

Hail bride of God,
sacred virgin, flower of the Minorites;
you, the spotless vessel;
you, the predecessor of the body of sisters,

Clara tuis precibus
duc nos ad regna polorum.

Clare, with your prayers,
lead us to the heavenly realm.

The Veiled Sisters

Half Sister, Esther Morgan (2005)

I watch you from my dark house,
how the sun tilts your face towards me,
Your smile blossoming in the warmth.

I leave this house rarely
wrapped in white layers like a bee-keeper
to protect me from the swarms of light,

or like the veiled princess
whose throat was so translucent
the swallowed wine showed through.

Do you sense the thinness of my skin,
how, exposed, it would simmer like milk?
Do I arouse a cruelty in you or tenderness?

Last night I offered my sleeplessness to you,
my body glowing like a candle
under the magnolia's gloved hands.

Alessandro Franzoni "Nel Monacarsi della
Sig.ra Erminia Abelli, bella cantatrice" (c.1620)

Costei, che il bello col suo bello, abbellà;
onde d'Abelli li serva bel nome
sotto l'incarco di corpore some
vive fatta à Dio sposa, e come Ancella.
Al'hor, che elessa solitaria cella
con Forbice crudel troncò le chiome
e fè novo stupor, ch'io non sò come
cadere l'oro dal terra, in vaghe anella.
Quivi romita et à compagna giace
romita al Mondo, accompagnata à Dio
sprezzando humili più superbi Mostri.
Quivi in fiamme d'amore suo cor si sface,
e col dolce cantar pone in oblio
l'humane cure, e imparadisa i Chiostri.

Esther Morgan *The Silence of Living in Houses*
(Bloodaxe Books, 2005)

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She, that beautifies Beauty with her beauty,
so that Abelli is a good name for her,
under the bond of fleshly duties
lives made into God's bride, and handmaiden.
Now she has chosen the solitary cell,
with cruel shears she cut her hair
and made a new wonder, that I don't know how
[to relate] as the gold fell to the floor in a ring.
Now enclosed and frozen to marriage,
shut away from the world, wed to God, scorning
all humble and prouder demonstrations.
Here in flames of love she turns her heart, and
with sweet singing puts into oblivion human
worries, and makes the cloisters into a paradise.