

Liverpool
Renaissance
Singers

Director: Liam Owens

*Living Fires of
Passion:
Songs of Ecstasy
and Song of Songs*

*Guerrero, Victoria and
Palestrina*

Wednesday 9th July 2025

7.30pm

Liverpool Parish Church

L2 8GW

A Journey Through Sacred Desire and Divine Beauty

2025 marks the 500th anniversary of Palestrina's birth (1525-1594).

Our programme this evening uses sections of Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina's setting of the Song of Songs, titled *Canticum Canticorum*, a collection of 29 motets published in 1584. Dedicated to Pope Gregory XIII, the works are considered to be one Palestrina's finest achievements.

The *Song of Songs*, one of the most enigmatic and sensual books of the Bible, burns with the language of love—earthly, spiritual, and eternal. Its poetry, long embraced by composers, speaks of longing and union, of beauty glimpsed and pursued, of passion that transcends the merely human. Our programme, ***Living Fires of Passion***, explores this fervent landscape through the sacred choral settings of Renaissance masters who saw in the Song of Songs not only romantic yearning, but the soul's ecstatic desire for the divine.

Our journey begins with **Palestrina's** "*Introduxit Me Rex*", a tender invocation in which the soul is led into the chambers of the beloved. From here, we wander the spiritual gardens of this poetic scripture; **Guerrero's** luminous "*Ego Flos Campi*" for double choir captures the blooming mystery of divine beauty, while **Palestrina** returns with "*Ecce, Tu Pulcher*", marvelling at the beloved's perfection.

Victoria's "*Vidi Speciosam*", radiant and resplendent, offers a vision of the immaculate soul in procession, echoing with Marian devotion. In "*Laeva Eius Sub Capita*", **Palestrina** sets a verse of intimate protection and peace, where divine love becomes shelter.

Rivaflecha's rare and deeply expressive "*Anima Mea*" gives voice to the soul's trembling longing, whilst **Ceballos's** "*Hortus Conclusus*" paints the beloved as a sealed garden—sacred, fragrant, and hidden. In **L'Heritier's** sensuous "*Nigra Sum*", beauty is claimed and love rises above judgment.

As we near the end of this evening's concert, **Palestrina's** "*Fasciculus Myrrhae*" presents a symbol of sacrifice and sweetness—myrrh resting upon the heart. Finally, in **Victoria's** stunning and impassioned "*Vadam et Circuibō*", the soul roams through city streets, searching for the one whom it loves.

These works, drawn from the rich tradition of Renaissance polyphony, illuminate the Song of Song's paradoxes: desire and restraint, sacred and sensual, presence and absence. They echo with a timeless truth—that love, divine or human, is a fire that is all-consuming.

Interspersed with plainsong from *Liber Usualis*, our concert this evening is a contemplation of those living fires of passion.

Liam Owens (*Musical Director*)

Programme

Antiphon: Dum Esset Rex

Dum esset Rex in accubitu suo, nardus mea dedit odorem suavitatis. Alleluia.

While the king was at his repose, my spikenard sent forth the odour thereof. Alleluia

Introduxit Me Rex

Palestrina (1525-1594)

Introduxit me rex in cellam vinariam, ordinavit in me charitatem.
Fulcite me floribus, stipate me malis; quia amore languero.

*He brought me into the cellar of wine, he set in order charity in me.
Prop me up with flowers, compass me about with apples: because I languish with love.*

Ego Flos Campi

Guerrero (1528-1599)

Ego flos campi et lilium convallium.
Sicut lilium inter spinas, sic amica mea inter filias.
Sicut malus inter ligna silvarum, sic dilectus meus inter filios.
Sub umbra illius quem desideraveram sedi, et fructus ejus dulcis gutturi meo.
Introduxit me Rex in cellam vinariam ordinavit in me charitatem.
Fulcite me floribus, stipate me malis quia amore languero.

*I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valleys.
As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.
As the apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons.
I sat down under his shadow with great delight: and his fruit was sweet to my taste.
He brought me into the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.
Prop me up with flowers, compass me about with apples, because I am sick with love.*

Antiphon: Speciosa Facta Es

Speciosa facta es et suavis in deliciis tuis, Sancta Dei Genitrix. Alleluia.

Thou art beautiful and sweet in thy delights, holy Mother of God. Alleluia.

Ecce, Tu Pulcher

Palestrina (1525-1594)

Ecce tu pulcher es dilecte mi et decorus.
Lectulus noster floridus,
tigna domorum nostrarum cedrina,
laquearia cupressina.
Ego flos campi et lilium convallium.

Behold thou art fair, my beloved, and comely. Our bed is flourishing. The beams of our houses are of cedar, our rafters of cypress trees. I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valleys.

Vidi Speciosam

Victoria (1548-1611)

Vidi speciosam sicut columbam ascendentem desuper rivos aquarum: Cuius inaestimabilis odor erat nimis in vestimentis eius.
Et sicut dies verni, flores rosarum circumdabant eam, et lilia convallium. Quae est ista, quae ascendit per desertum sicut virgula fumi, ex aromatibus myrrhae et thuris? Et sicut dies verni, flores rosarum circumdabant eam, et lilia convallium.

I saw the fair one rising like a dove above the streams of water, whose incomparable fragrance clung to her garments; and as on a spring day, she was circled about by roses and lily of the valley. Who is that who arises from the desert like pillars of smoke from incense of myrrh and frankincense? And as on a spring day, she was circled about by flowers of roses and lily of the valley.

Antiphon: Laeva Eius Sub Capite

Laeva eius sub capite meo, et dextera illius amplexabitur me. Alleluia.

His left hand is under my head, and his right hand shall embrace me. Alleluia

Laeva Eius Sub Capite

Palestrina (1525-1594)

Laeva eius sub capite meo et dextera illius amplexabitur me.
Adiuro vos, filiae Jerusalem, per capreas cervosque camporum, ne suscitatis neque evigilare faciatis dilectam, quoadusque ipsa velit.

His left hand is under my head, and his right hand shall embrace me. I adjure you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and the harts of the field, that you stir not up, nor make the beloved to awake, till she please.

Anima Mea

Anima mea liquefacta est ut dilectus locutus est. Quaesivi et non inveni illum: vocavi et non respondit mihi. Adjuro vos, filiae Jerusalem: si inveneritis dilectum, ut nuntietis ei quia amore langueo.

Rivaflecha (1470-1528)

My soul melted when my beloved spoke. I have sought him and not found him, I called and he did not answer me. I beseech you, daughters of Jerusalem: if you find my beloved, tell him that I am languishing for love.

Hortus Conclusus

Hortus conclusus soror mea, sponsa mea, et fons signatus. Aperi mihi, O soror mea, amica mea, columba mea, immaculata mea. Surge propera amica mea et veni. Veni speciosa mea, ostende mihi, faciem tua. Favus distillans labia tus, mel et lac sub lingua tua. Veni, sponsa mea, veni coronaberis.

Ceballos (1525-1591)

A garden enclosed is my sister, my bride, and a sealed fountain. Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled. Arise my love and come. Come my fair one, let me see your face. Your lips distil nectar, honey and milk are under your tongue. Come my bride, and you shall be crowned.

Interval

***Antiphon:* Nigra Sum**

Nigra sum sed formosa filiae Jherusalem

I am a dark-skinned but comely daughter of Jerusalem

Nigra Sum Sed Formosa

L'Héritier (1480-1552)

Nigra sum sed formosa filia Jherusalem
Ideo dilexit me rex et introduxit me in cubiculum suum.

I am a dark-skinned but comely daughter of Jerusalem; therefore have I pleased the Lord and he has brought me into his chamber.

Fasciculus Myrrhae

Palestrina (1525-1594)

Fasciculus myrrhae dilectus meus mihi,
inter ubera mea commorabitur.
Botrus cypri dilectus meus mihi,
in vineis Engaddi.
Ecce tu pulchra es, amica mea,
ecce tu pulchra es, oculi tui
columbarum.

*A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me,
he shall abide between my breasts.
A cluster of cypress my love is to me, in
the vineyards of Engaddi.
Behold thou art fair, O my love, behold
thou art fair, thine eyes are as those of
doves.*

Vadam et Circuibo

Victoria (1548-1611)

Vadam et circuibo civitatem: per vicos et
plateas quaeram quem diligit anima
mea; quaesivi illum, et non inveni.
Adiuro vos, filiae Jerusalem, si
inveneritis dilectum meum, ut
annuntietis ei quia amore langueo.

Qualis est dilectus tuus, quia sic
adiurasti nos? Dilectus meus candidus
et rubicundus, electus ex milibus.
Talis est dilectus meus, et est amicus
meus, filiae Jerusalem.
Quo abiit dilectus tuus, o pulcherrima
mulierum? Quo declinavit? et
quaeremus eum tecum. Ascendit in
palmam, et apprehendit fructus eius.

*I will rise, and will go about the city: in
the streets and the broad ways
I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I
sought him, and I found him not.
I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
if you find my beloved, that you tell him
that I languish with love.*

*What manner of one is thy beloved, that
thou hast so adjured us?
My beloved is white and ruddy, chosen
out of thousands. Such is my beloved,
and he is my friend, O ye daughters of
Jerusalem.
Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou
most beautiful among women? whither
is he turned aside, and we will seek him
with thee? He goes up into the palm
tree, and takes hold of the fruit thereof.*

About our conductor

Liam took on the role of Musical Director of the Liverpool Renaissance Singers in January 2025. Prior to becoming MD, he sang with the choir for a number of years. He first joined in early 2020 shortly before you-know-what put an end to music-making across the country for a number of months; what he lacks in perfect pitch, he makes up for in impeccable timing...

Liam's first experience of the Renaissance repertoire was singing works by Tallis and Victoria in the school Chamber Choir; he was captivated by the beauty of the writing, the depth of the emotion and the power of the voice, and the music has remained a part of life ever since. After studying music in Liverpool, Liam spent 15 years as the Musical Director of the Oriel Singers where the repertoire was varied and highlights included Poulenc, Bernstein, Tippett and Britten, with a bit of Byrd thrown in when no one was looking.

Liam says, "The first six months with this brilliant group of passionate and committed singers has been an absolute privilege and I'm really looking forward to us exploring more of this fabulous repertoire together over the coming years. We've got some really exciting programmes planned which I hope will enthuse singers and audiences alike."

Liam has a type of musical sound-colour synaesthesia. As he spends more time with the choir he hopes they become increasingly less confused when he tells them to sound 'more green'...

Choir members

Sopranos

Anna Cumbers
Jean Cunningham
Alison Edis
Sarah Lea
Chris Lloyd
Valerie Pedlar
Helen Strickland
Victoria Sumner
Barbara Vogel
Karen White
Lis Winder

Altos

Joy Buchanan
Elfriede Derrer
Brigitte Jurack
Malu Prates
Lorna Randall
Chris Smale

Tenors

Simon Blundell
John Davies
Will Hadwen
Philip Josling
Ken Lowe
Coby O'Brien
John Ridyard

Basses

Steve Ash
Stephen Henders
John Huthnance
Donal Sarsfield
Chris Turnbull
Kirsten Wu

If you are interested in joining the choir or wish to find out more about us, please join us for an open rehearsal in St Nick's from 7.15 until 9.15pm on Wednesday 17th September, when we shall sight-read the pieces for our recital in December. If you cannot manage that, please contact the chair, Chris Smale (postmaster@thesmales.plus.com or 0151 648 4944).

With thanks to the churchwardens and PCC of Liverpool Parish Church for allowing the Liverpool Renaissance Singers to use St Nick's.

Date for your diary

Our Christmas recital, *O Great Mystery: the Word Made Flesh*, will take place on Saturday 6th December 2025 at 7.30 pm in Liverpool Parish Church:

If you would like to be kept informed of all the Liverpool Renaissance Singers' future concerts, please make sure that you hand in your contact details at the entrance desk.