the RIPIENO choir

The voice of melody

Gibbons at 400

St Mary's Ewell
23 November 2025

Orlando Gibbons (1583 – 1625)

Conductor: **Patrick Allies** Organist: **Jonathan Holmes**

Programme

O Lord in thy wrath	Orlando Gibbons
Jesu, grant me this I pray	Edward Bairstow
The silver swan	Orlando Gibbons
The silver swan	Bob Chilcott
Organ prelude on Gibbons	C. V. Stanford
Drop, drop slow tears	Gibbons arr. Christian Forshaw
Great King of Gods	Orlando Gibbons
Nay let me weep	Orlando Gibbons
O praise the Lord	Thomas Tomkins
Almighty and everlasting God	Orlando Gibbons
Almighty and everlasting God	Roupen Shakarian
O clap your hands	Orlando Gibbons
Drop, drop slow tears	Kenneth Leighton
Organ Solo - Fantasia	Orlando Gibbons
Magnificat from 2nd service	Orlando Gibbons
What is our life?	Orlando Gibbons
Hosanna to the Son of David	Orlando Gibbons

Interval 15 minutes

Please join us for tea or coffee and cake after the concert

Next concerts

Hey for Christmas!
Saturday 3 January 2026 7pm

The Ripieno Choir is joined by singers from Siglo de Oro and players from the Spinacino Consort to celebrate the twelve days of Christmastide seventeenth century-style.

Tickets:
£18 (£12 for Gibbons ticket holders)
£5 for 18 to 30 year olds
Accompanied under 18s free entry

Supported by the R C Sherriff Trust

Concert Spirituel
Saturday 9 May 2026 7.30pm

The luxuriousness of the seventeenth century French court comes to life with the dynamic and elaborate music of Charpentier, Lully and Rameau.

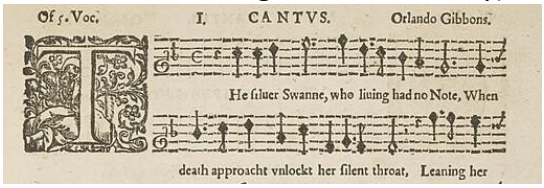
For more information and tickets use this QR code or visit ripienochoir.org.uk/concerts

Programme Notes

With an anniversary date only two years after that of William Byrd, and with a smaller body of works surviving, **Orlando Gibbons at 400** has flown somewhat under the radar. What makes Gibbons' music worth celebrating?

1. Music that brings to life the most poignant of texts

Gibbons' first set of madrigals, and their melancholic material, was prompted by the sudden death of Henry, Prince of Wales in 1612, aged just 18. Gibbons' ***The silver swan*** epitomises this, creating both an elegant memorial and a comment on the lack of wisdom in today's society (as true in Jacobean England as it is today).



What is our life? fully embraces the popular madrigalian style, using surprising chromatic harmonies and exquisite clashes between overlapping lines to conjure up profound sentiments. Perhaps most affecting of all is Nay let me weep, sung here by solo voice and organ. This text is attributed to Walter Raleigh, written while he was languishing in the Tower of London**.**

2. A flair for choral and solo textures

Gibbons excelled in the verse-chorus structure of his day, where solo parts in the ***Magnificat*** of his Second Service could be given complex and dramatic melodies (watch out for the rising lines at 'He hath scattered the proud') before giving way to fulsome sections for the whole choir. ***Great King of Gods***, written for James I's return to Scotland, offers graceful solo lines and choral sections of royal grandeur, building to an emphatic 'Amen'.

3. Composers have continued to borrow from his music.

In this programme we have Bairstow's consoling adaptation of a Gibbons hymn tune***, Jesu, grant me this I pray***, and Roupen Shakarian's gentle response to Gibbons' motet ***Almighty and everlasting God***. More radical is Christian Forshaw's arrangement of ***Drop, Drop Slow Tears***, which adds a stratospheric soprano solo. **Bob Chilcott** also takes Gibbons' spacious music as the foundations of his response, adding a murmuring funerary tribute that passes through the voices. And **C.V. Stanford** adds his own late Romantic idioms to Gibbons' hymn-writing.

4. A voice of melody

Schooled in the Renaissance counterpoint of his youth, Gibbons wrote music that was technically superior but nevertheless constructed of singable, memorable vocal lines. His ***Hosanna to the Son of David*** and ***O clap your hands*** both exemplify this, with vibrant imitation between the six and eight parts respectively, designed to illuminate the meaning of the text. This same talent could be set to darker subjects, as it is in his ***O Lord in thy wrath, rebuke me not***, which presents a sinner's plea with evocative dissonance. Gibbons' ***Keyboard Fantasia*** achieves the same polyphonic flair, realised by a single pair of hands.

In terms of musical style, Gibbons closest contemporary working in England was Thomas Tomkins, whose ecstatic 12-voice setting of ***O Praise the Lord*** we have included. From a much more recent era, Kenneth Leighton's ***Drop, drop slow tears*** not only takes on a text close to Gibbons' heart, but sets it in a way he would have appreciated: with a combination of crisp, independent vocal lines that pack an emotional punch.