



Liverpool
Renaissance
Singers

Director: Liam Owens

In the Midst of
Life:
Songs of Farewell
and Reflection

A meditation on
mortality and hope
through five centuries
of sacred choral music
featuring:

Howells' Requiem and
works from Byrd,
Sheppard, Taverner,
Mundy and Parsons

Liverpool Renaissance Singers

In the Midst of Life
Songs of Farewell and Reflection

Wednesday 18th March 2026

Our Lady & St Nicholas Church

Liverpool

Dedication

This concert is dedicated to the memory of

Dr John Ridyard

1942 – 2025

John was a founder member of the Liverpool Renaissance Singers, and remained a singer and friend of the choir until September 2025.

In the Midst of Life:

A meditation on mortality and hope through five centuries of sacred choral music

This evening's programme brings together music of deep emotional resonance; a contemplation of death, grief, and consolation. *In the Midst of Life* takes its name from one of the central works on the programme — John Sheppard's monumental *Media Vita* — and serves as both a musical and spiritual journey through the rich traditions of English sacred music.

Howells Requiem: A Private Grief, A Public Lament

At the emotional centre of this evening's concert is Herbert Howells' Requiem, a work of luminous beauty and sincerity. Composed in 1932 in the shadow of personal loss — and a precursor to his later masterpiece *Hymnus Paradisi* — the Requiem was not published or performed publicly until 1980. It is widely understood to have been written as a response to the tragic death of his nine-year-old son, Michael, and its restraint and intimacy suggest that it was written as a deeply private expression of mourning.

Unconventionally structured, the Requiem alternates movements from the traditional Latin Requiem Mass (including two settings of *Requiem Aeternam*) with psalm texts in English from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. The Psalm movements — “The Lord is my shepherd” and “I will lift up mine eyes” — radiate a serene trust in divine protection, while the final movement, “I heard a voice from heaven”, offers a vision of eternal rest that is both radiant and profoundly still.

By using Howells' Requiem movements, interspersed with corresponding Renaissance works throughout the programme, the concert allows his quiet voice of consolation to interact with the more ancient, often more dramatic, expressions of mortality and supplication that surround it.

Renaissance Reflections on Mortality

The Renaissance repertoire this evening consists of music by English composers of the 16th and early 17th centuries — figures who, like Howells, were deeply immersed in the spiritual language of their time, composing music for liturgical use, often in turbulent religious and political contexts.

Robert Parsons' *Libera Me, Domine* sets a key text from the Responsories for the Dead, a haunting plea for deliverance on the Day of Judgement. Parsons' life was cut short when he drowned in the River Trent — a perhaps poignant fact when hearing this setting's urgent appeal for mercy in the face of death.

John Sheppard's *Media Vita in Morte Sumus* (*In the midst of life, we are in death*) is among the most powerful and extended works of the Tudor period. Likely composed in response to a plague outbreak, the piece combines intense harmonic language and austere beauty with hypnotic repetition of the antiphon. Its solemn tolling and pleas for deliverance ("Holy and merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death") form one of the most profound meditations on mortality in the choral repertoire.

William Byrd's *Circumdederunt Me*, from his *Cantiones Sacrae* of 1589, is a vivid depiction of the soul beset by sorrow, surrounded on all sides by the "snares of death". Byrd, a recusant Catholic writing under Protestant rule, infused his sacred works with a deeply personal sense of spiritual yearning and resilience.

John Taverner's *Quemadmodum*, an elegant and restrained setting of Psalm 42, captures the soul's deep thirst for God, "as the hart longs for the water brooks." Though incomplete, the surviving portion showcases Taverner's sensitivity to line and harmony, drawing the listener into an intimate spiritual dialogue.

William Mundy's *Sive Vigilem*, less frequently performed, is a gem of Elizabethan polyphony. Its text speaks of God's omnipresence, whether we wake or sleep, echoing the psalmic trust found in Howells' own settings.

A Dialogue Across Time

As the movements of Howells' Requiem return throughout the concert, they offer a modern yet timeless voice — one that neither denies sorrow nor succumbs to despair. Each reappearance seems to offer a response to what has come before: an answer to Parsons' plea, a balm for Sheppard's stark litany, a stillness after Byrd's torment.

The programme concludes with "I heard a voice from heaven", Howells' setting of words from Revelation 14. The simplicity and luminosity of this final movement — "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord... they rest from their labours" — offers a resolution, not through triumph, but through quiet release and stillness.

In this journey through grief and solace, ancient text and modern response, *In the Midst of Life* reminds us that whilst grief is perhaps universal, so too can music be a vessel of remembrance and consolation.

In the Midst of Life
Songs of Farewell and Reflection

Programme

Psalm 39 (vs5-15)

after Purcell

Lord let me know mine end and the number of my days:
That I may be certified how long I have to lie.

Behold thou hast made my days as it were a span long:
And mine age is even as nothing in respect of thee, and verily
Every man living is altogether vanity.

For man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain:
He heapeth up riches and cannot tell who shall gather them.

And now Lord what is my hope: Truly my hope is even in thee.

Deliver me from mine offences: And make me not a rebuke unto the foolish.

I became dumb and opened not my mouth: for it was thy doing.

Take thy plague away from me: I am even consumed by the means of thy heavy hand.

When thou with rebukes dost chasten man for sin, thou makest his beauty to consume
away, like as it were a moth fretting a garment: every man therefore is but vanity.

Hear my prayer O Lord, and with thine ears consider my calling:
hold not thy peace at my tears.

For I am a stranger with thee: and a sojourner as all my fathers were.

O spare me a little that I may recover my strength:
before I go hence and be no more seen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the son: and to the Holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be: World without end. Amen.

Part 1

Requiem I: Salvator Mundi

Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

O saviour of the world, who by thy cross and thy precious blood has redeemed us, save us and help us, we humbly beseech thee, O Lord.

Libera Me Domine

Robert Parsons (1535-1572)

Libera me, Domine, de morte æterna in
die illa tremenda:
Quando cæli movendi sunt et terra:
Dum veneris judicare sæculum per
ignem.

*Deliver me, O Lord, from eternal death,
on that fearful day when the heavens and
the earth are moved, when you will come
to judge the world through fire.*

Tremens factus sum ego, et timeo,
dum discussio venerit, atque ventura ira.
Quando cæli movendi sunt et terra.

*I am made to tremble, and I fear, when
the desolation shall come, and also the
coming wrath.*

Dies illa, dies iræ, calamitatis et miseræ,
dies magna et amara valde.
Dum veneris judicare sæculum per
ignem.

*That day, the day of wrath, calamity, and
misery, that terrible and exceedingly
bitter day*

Requiem II: The Lord is My Shepherd (Psalm 23)

Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

The Lord is my shepherd; therefore can I lack nothing.

He shall feed me in a green pasture, and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.

He shall convert my soul and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; thy rod and thy staff comfort me.

Thou shalt prepare a table for me against them that trouble me.

Thou hast anointed my head with oil and my cup shall be full. But thy loving kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Media vita. Nunc dimittis servum tuum
Domine secundum verbum tuum in pace.
Quia viderunt oculi mei salutare tuum,
quod parasti ante faciem omnium
populorum.
Lumen ad revelationem gentium,
et gloriam plebis tuæ Israel.
Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto,
sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper,
et in sæcula sæculorum.
Amen.

Media vita in morte sumus.
Quem quærimus adiutorem nisi te,
Domine,
qui pro peccatis nostris iuste irasceris?

Sancte Deus, sancte fortis, sancte et
misericors Salvator, amarae morti ne
tradas nos.

Ne proicias nos in tempore senectutis;
cum defecerit virtus nostra
ne derelinquas nos, Domine.

Noli claudere aures tuas ad preces
nostras.

Qui cognoscis occulta cordis,
parce peccatis nostris.

*In the midst of life. Lord, now lettest thou
thy servant depart in peace according to
thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy
salvation, which thou hast prepared
before the face of all people. To be a light
to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory
of thy people Israel. Glory be to the
Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy
Ghost: As it was in the beginning, is now
and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen.*

*In the midst of life we are in death: of
whom may we seek for succour, but of
thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly
displeased?*

*O Lord God most holy, O Lord most
mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour,
deliver us not into the bitter pains of
eternal death.*

*Cast us not away in our old age when our
strength faileth, neither forsake us, O
Lord, God most holy.*

*Shut not thy merciful ears to our prayer, O
Lord most mighty.*

*Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our
hearts; pardon our sins.*

Pause

*There will be a short pause at this point in the programme, so the singers can take a
break. Refreshments will be served in the Narthex at the end of the concert.*

Part 2

Requiem Aeternam I

Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine. Et
lux perpetua luceat eis, Domine.

*Rest eternal grant unto them. And may
light perpetual shine upon them. Rest
eternal grant unto them, O Lord*

Circumdederunt Me

William Byrd (1540-1623)

Circumdederunt me dolores mortis, et
pericula inferni invenerunt me.
Tribulationem et dolorem inveni,
Et nomen Domini invocavi. O Domine,
libera animam meam.

*The sorrows of death have compassed
me: and the perils of hell have found me. I
have found tribulation and sorrow: And I
called upon the name of our Lord. O Lord,
deliver my soul.*

Requiem IV: I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes (Psalm 121)

Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

*I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.
My help cometh even from the Lord, who hath made heaven and earth.
He will not suffer thy foot to be moved, and he that keepeth thee will not sleep.
Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord himself is thy
keeper; he is thy defence upon thy right hand; So that the sun shall not burn thee by day,
neither the moon by night.
The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: yea, it is even he that shall keep thy soul. The
Lord shall preserve thy going out, and thy coming in, from this time forth and for
evermore.
I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.*

Quemadmodum

John Taverner (1490-1545)

Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad
fontes aquarum, ita desiderat anima mea
ad te, Deus.
Sivit anima mea ad Deum fortem,
vivum; quando veniam et apparebo ante
faciem Deo.

*As the deer pants for the water brooks, so
pants my soul for You, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God:
when shall I come and appear before
God?*

Requiem Aeternam II**Herbert Howells (1892-1983)**

Requiem aeternam, dona eis Domine. Et
lux perpetua luceat eis, Domine.

*Rest eternal grant unto them. And may
light perpetual shine upon them. Rest
eternal grant unto them, O Lord*

Sive Vigilem**William Mundy (1529-1591)**

Sive vigilem, sive dormiam, sive edam aut
bibam, semper videor mihi audire sonum
tubae et voce angeli clamantis et
dicentis:
Surgite mortui, et venite ad iudicium.
Vigilemus et oremus, quia nescimus
diem neque horam quando Dominus
veniet

*Whether I am awake or whether I sleep,
whether I eat or drink, I always seem to
hear the sound of the trumpet and the
voice of the angel calling and saying:
Arise, ye dead, and come to judgement.
Let us keep watch and pray, for we know
not the day or the hour when the Lord will
come.*

Requiem VI: I Heard a Voice from Heaven**Herbert Howells (1892-1983)**

Revelation 14: 13

*I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write: From henceforth blessed are the
dead which die in the Lord: Even so saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours*

Liverpool Renaissance Singers

Musical Director – Liam Owens

Baritone Soloist – Damian O’Keeffe

Sopranos	Altos	Tenors	Basses
Deborah Casewell Anna Cumbers Alison Edis Chris Lloyd Jane Lockyer Jenny Long Katherine Owens Valerie Pedlar Helen Strickland Victoria Sumner Barbara Vogel Elisabeth Winder Karen Whyte	Helen Altshul Joy Buchanan Kirsten Butcher Jean Cunningham Elfriede Derrer-Merk Brigitte Jurack Soledad Kuczala Malu Prates Lorna Randall Chris Smale Anne-Marie Storey	Simon Blundell John Davies Will Hadwen Philip Josling Peter Kahn Ken Lowe Andy McGinn Coby O’Brien	Barry Butcher Stephen Henders John Huthnance Charlie Peacock Donal Sarsfield Chris Turnbull

Musica Caelesti

Sopranos	Altos	Tenors	Basses
Oritsema Ejuoneatse Sian Davies	Sarah Harding Sian Snelling Nina Ward	Stephen Davies Matt Bright	Kenderick Horne Phil Snelling

With thanks to the Rector, churchwardens and PCC at Liverpool Parish Church for allowing the Liverpool Renaissance Singers to use Our Lady and St Nicholas

The Liverpool Renaissance Singers celebrated their 60th anniversary in 2025.

We rehearse in St Nick's (Liverpool Parish Church) on Wednesdays from 7:15-9:15pm.

If you are interested in joining the choir or wish to find out more about us, please contact renaissancesingersliverpool@gmail.com or see our website: www.liverpoolrenaissancesingers.org.

Dates for your diary

Our Summer 2026 recitals will take place on Wednesday 8th July at 7.30 pm in Liverpool Parish Church and on Saturday 11th July at 7.30 pm in St Cuthbert's Church, Halsall.

O Taste and See: The Flemish School (music by Arcadelt, Isaac, Josquin, Lassus, Vaet and Sweelinck).