In ieiunio et fletu

Respory for the First Sunday in Lent

Thomas Tallis

Text: Joel 2: 12a, 17b; original notated a fourth lower
Spare, O Lord, spare your people,
and give not your inheritance to destruction.
Between the porch and the altar the priests wept, saying,
Spare your people.

parce populo tu o, parce populo tu tes, parce populo tu o, populo tu tes, parce populo tu o, parce populo tu tes, parce populo tu o, parce populo tu o, parce populo tu o, parce populo tu o, parce populo tu o, parce populo tu o,
In ieiunio et fletu and Derelinquat impius are almost certainly among the last works that Tallis composed. They are markedly experimental settings of Lenten, penitential texts which can be read as especially apposite to the plight of the recusant Catholic community. In ieiunio et fletu tells of weeping priests who beg to save their heritage from destruction whilst Derelinquit impius is a plea for the sinful to return to the Lord. In the second work Tallis was clearly preoccupied with the expressive possibilities of modulation and of denying the gravitational pull of a ‘tonal centre’, a concern signalled at the outset by an imitative exposition in which voices enter on unexpected degrees of the scale. The work is harmonically conceived, with much of its interest achieved by chromatic means. In ieiunio et fletu takes this tendency further, dispensing with standard imitative techniques altogether and replacing them with canon and repeating blocks of texture; in addition the nominal ‘tonal centre’, G, is not established until the closing bars, thereby creating a disorientating aural effect. Both motets take their texts from the Tridentine Matins on the first Sunday of Lent. They are the third and fifth responds respectively, and it is surely no coincidence that in Cantiones Sacrae they appear with William Byrd’s setting of the fourth respond, Emendemus in melius. Perhaps the two composers intended them for use by the recusant Catholic community.