

## Music and St. Mark's

During the Sixteenth Century, a number of distinguished musician-composers were appointed to the role of Organist and Composer in the Basilica of St. Mark's, Venice. Of the composers whose works are being performed this evening, Andrea Gabrieli was there from 1566 until 1585, his nephew Giovanni from then until 1612, to be followed by Claudio Monteverdi.

During this period the development of the characteristic flavour of Baroque music began. In Venice, the idea of splitting choirs into antiphonal groups comprising both voices and instruments was fully exploited. This style is known as *Cori Spezzati* [split choirs] and it makes excellent use of the architectural properties of a magnificent building such as St. Mark's. The pieces in this programme in 12 and 16 parts show this latter technique at its best with the music passed between the various 'choirs' of four part instrumental and choral forces. The instrumental Canzonas and Sonatas were very much developed from choral templates. These too feature '*spezzati*' properties.

Monteverdi is of course more famous for his output of madrigals and operas than he is for his church music. However his *Vespers* of 1610 are one of the towering masterpieces of Baroque choral music. He wrote these while still in Mantua – and they might not necessarily have been intended for performance as a unit. Scholars feel that he wrote this music to bring his skills to the attention of the 'powers-that-be' in Venice and remind them of his ability to hold the post in St. Mark's. The *Ave maris stella* is a seven verse hymn that uses three different vocal combinations linked by a sprightly *ritornello* from the instruments. The *Sonata Sopra Sancta Maria* is written in the mode of one of the Gabrieli models but has a *cantus firmus* over the top with the Sopranos singing the plainsong *Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis*. The two motets *Adoramus te* and *Cantate Domino* were written during his time at St. Mark's.

## Michael Smedley

Michael Smedley has been associated with choral music all his life, having been a boy chorister at Southwell Minster and then singing as an adult counter-tenor in New College Choir, Oxford and the Clerkes of Oxenford. However, conducting has always been his first love. He founded the Oxford Pro Musica Singers in 1977 and has conducted them ever since. He is Director of Music at City of London School.



## Oxford Pro Musica Singers

Oxford Pro Musica Singers has a large and varied repertoire ranging from early music to new commissions from young English composers, and from sacred music to pop and jazz standards. This broad repertoire has won Michael and the choir an award from the Performing Rights Society for innovative programme-planning.

As well as giving an average of 12 concerts a year in Oxford, the choir performs in London and other cities and has won prizes in festivals and competitions in several countries. They enjoy the challenge of making CD's and have now made seven.

In September 2005, the choir had the honour of giving the first performance of "The Kestrel Road" by Peter Maxwell Davies, Master of the Queen's Music, on the occasion of the composer's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. This performance was broadcast live on Radio 3, and since then the choir has recorded the piece, and copies may be downloaded from [www.maxopus.com](http://www.maxopus.com).

The choir website can be found at [www.opms.org.uk](http://www.opms.org.uk). Look out soon for a new re-launched version, complete with details of all our CDs and forthcoming events.