

HOWELLS: HYMNUS PARADISI



**THREE CHOIRS
FESTIVAL 2025**
HEREFORD 26 JUL – 2 AUG

Herbert Howells
Paradise Rondel 10'

Arthur Bliss
Mary of Magdala 27'

Interval

Herbert Howells
Hymnus Paradisi 50'

Rebecca Hardwick *soprano*
Sarah Connolly *mezzo-soprano*
Michael Bell *tenor*
Malachy Frame *baritone*
Three Choirs Festival Chorus
Philharmonia Orchestra
Adrian Partington *conductor*

Supported by the Elmley Foundation
Performance of Howells' works supported by The Howells Trust
Performance of Mary of Magdala supported by The Bliss Trust

Mary of Magdala

It is the 'third day', and the morning is still dark; but now that it is past midnight, the Sabbath is over, and the bereaved, till then forbidden by law to perform the last offices for the dead, may return to their duty.

Chorus

Ashen the sky, uncertain, grey.
The hour is neither night nor day.
Darkness and dawn are midway met,
And a mist hangs over Olivet.
Hebron stirs the muttering stones;
The watchman stands with stiffening bones;
And nothing moves on the cobbled way—
Only the feet of Mary running,
running to the Sepulchre:

Mary awake ere the waking day.
Laden with purple Tyrian dye,
The ships of Tyre at anchor lie;
A wind goes breathing from hill to hill,
But the winches on Sidon wharf are still.
Hush'd are the shrubs of Gethsemane,
Where the pallor spreads from tree to tree.
And nothing moves on the trodden way—
Only the feet of Mary running,
running to the Sepulchre:
Mary awake ere the waking day.

Mary (with ardent expectation)
At last the Sabbath is over!
Sorrow may seek him, Duty attend him;
I may go to him, touch him, befriend him.
At last the Sabbath is over!
And Love may draw near him.
(with compassion) Ah, where he is lying
Hard is the rough-hewn rock and senseless,
And his head defenceless—
So harsh was the way he went, so bitter the dying!
Loveliest rose of all the roses of Sharon.
Trampled and broken,
Wasted, withered away—

With a vial of tears I come, and the spices of love too deep to be spoken,
Hastening to gather your petals, weep for the winter, and pray.
Tree of the forest, lord of the cedars of Lebanon,
Ravaged, brought low.
I am come as a bird to your fallen branch,
As a bird to sing her lament on her wonted spray.
—Once more I bring sweet unguents for your head—
Which now lies dead! . . .
I remember the feast where first I found him,
Where he tenderly called me by name.
—There were voices raised in derision—

C.H.

GUESTS at the remembered feast are heard muttering scornfully.

Chorus

Look there, look there, that woman, a stranger with an alabaster box!
Who let that woman enter the house?
We know her for a shameless harlot.
Drive her away, drag her hence, bid her be gone.
Look at that alabaster box—that box alone would fetch two talents.
It should be sold and the cost given to the poor.
What prodigal waste! What shameful squandering!
How dare she touch him! How can He let her touch Him!

C.H.

Christus (sternly)

Why trouble ye her? Let her alone. Against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you, but me ye have not always.

Friends and Disciples express their thoughts.

Chorus

The proud Aegyptian Queen, her Roman Guest,
(To express her Love in height of State and Pleasure)
With Pearl dissolv'd in gold, did feast,
Both Food and Treasure.
And now, dear Lord, thy Lover, on the fair
And silver Tables of thy Feet, behold! —

Pearl in her Tears, and in her Hair
Offers thee Gold.

Edward Sherburne, 1651

Mary has reached the Sepulchre.

Mary
Surely this was the place, and here the Sepulchre.
There stands the sentinel tree—
And there the steps where we carried him down.
(in horror) Ah! how quick were the robbers to plunder!
It is only the second, no, it is only the third day,
Yet finding no gold, they have ravish'd his body away!
He was nothing to them, who was the world's treasure to me!
(calling) Peter! John!

She sees two strange figures.

(in awe)—But what are those two strangers, white and shining,
seated at the head and feet where we laid him?
—Ah, terrible spirits of the dead!
This garden is a haunted garden!

(a pause)

The Two Angels
Woman, why weepst thou?
Why these tears of grief and pain?
There is no cause for sorrow now.
This is no time for tears of grief.

Mary
—Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where
they have laid him.

She turns and sees a man whom she supposes to be the gardener.

—But who is that yonder, standing so still—
A robber? Ah no, he seems to be tending the vine.
It must be the gardener, early at work.
(addressing him) Sir. . . Oh Sir. . .

If you have borne him hence, tell me where you have laid him,
and I will take him away.

Christus (speaking quietly)
Mary.

Mary (with a great cry)
Rabboni! Master!

Christus
Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father, but go to
my brethren, and say unto them I ascend unto my Father and
your Father, to my God and your God.

Mary
Rabboni! Master!

Chorus
Mary, Mother, was the pleasant bower
Where, still unborn, he waited out his hour.
At birth, his quiet garden was the womb,
At death, he chose a garden for his tomb.

Mary
He is the Gardener still, and knoweth how
To make the Lilies and the Roses to grow.

Chorus
He trims, ties back, the spray that wandereth wild
Pruning to make the truant nature mild.
Oh let my heart Thy shadowy corner be.
Come, walk, dear Lord, or sit and rest with me.

Mary
He is the Gardener still, and knoweth how
To make the Lilies and the Roses to grow.

Chorus
Holy Mary Magdalen, pray for us.

Mary
She that was once besmirched in deed and word,
She was the first to see the risen Lord.
No contrite tear was ever shed in vain,
And Magdalen tears are richer than the rain.

He is the Gardener still, and knoweth how
To make the Lilies and the Roses to grow.

Chorus & Mary
Rabboni! Master!

*Christopher Hassall, freely adapted from 'The Gardener' by Rowland
Watkins, 1662*



Hymnus Paradisi

I. Preludio

II. Requiem aeternam

Requiem aeternam dona eis
et lux perpetua luceat eis.

*Grant them eternal rest,
and may perpetual light shine on them.*

III. The Lord is my shepherd (Psalm 23)

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.

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

Thou shalt prepare a table before 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 for ever.

IV. Sanctus (Psalm 121)

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus,
Dominus Deus Sabaoth,
Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua.

*Holy, Holy, Holy,
Lord God of Sabaoth.
Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.*

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: the Lord 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 for evermore.

V. I heard a voice from heaven (from The Burial Service)

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.

VI. Holy is the true light (from the Salisbury Diurnal)

Holy is the true light, and passing wonderful,

Lending radiance to them that endured in the heat of the conflict.

From Christ they inherit a home of unfailing splendour

Wherein they rejoice with gladness evermore.

Alleluia.

Requiem aeternam,
Requiem dona eis sempiternam.

*Rest eternal,
Requiem dona eis sempiternam.*