

# *Ave Verum Corpus*

A motet for the Feast of Corpus Christi  
composed by  
William Byrd (1543-1623)

(Edition by Drew Collins)

The conversion of England from the Roman Catholic church to the Church of England by King Henry VIII (and later Queen Elizabeth I) forced those who wished to practice Catholicism to do so covertly, as penalties included fines, scrutiny, torture or death. All vestiges of the "old religion" were summarily prohibited, including the use of Latin (only English was permitted).

In this highly volatile and oppressive atmosphere, Byrd played a dangerous game. Refusing to conform to the new religion, he composed music for use in Catholic services (held secretly in private residences), more often than not in Latin. He managed this rebellion without loss of life or livelihood, due in part both to his exemplary musical skill and by frequently dedicating publications to the Queen.

It is widely accepted that Byrd intended his Latin motets for use either in these underground Masses, or for publication in books for use in homes, much like madrigals. Either way, the music was most likely performed 1 or 2 singers/players per part, and with female sopranos.

*Some of Byrd's contemporaries:*

- William Shakespeare (1564-1616)
- Galileo Galilei (1564-1642)
- John Donne (1573-1631)
- G. P. da Palestrina (c1525-1594)
- Thomas Morley (1558-1602)
- Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

# Ave Verum Corpus

SATB a cappella

Pope Innocent III or IV

William Byrd (1543-1623)

ed. Drew Collins

$\text{♩} = 30-44$

2 3 4 5 6

Soprano (SUPERIUS)  
Alto (MEDIUS)  
Tenor (TENOR)  
Bass (BASSUS)

A - ve ve - rum cor - pus, na - tum de Ma - ri -

A - ve ve - rum cor - pus, na - tum de Ma - ri -

A - ve ve - rum cor - pus, na - tum de Ma - ri -

A - ve ve - rum cor - pus, na - tum de Ma - ri -

7 8 9 10 11 12

a Vir - gi ne, Ve - re pas - sum, im - mo - la - tum in

a Vir - gi ne, Ve - re pas - sum, im - mo - la - tum

a Vir - gi ne, Ve - re pas - sum, im - mo - la - tum in cru -

Vir - gi - ne, Ve - re pas - sum, im - mo - la - tum in

13 14 15 16 17 18

cru - ce pro ho - mi - ne: Cu - jus la - tus per - fo - ra - tum,

in cru - ce pro ho - mi - ne: Cu - jus la - tus per - fo - ra - tum, un -

ce pro ho - mi - ne: Cu - jus la - tus per - fo - ra - tum,

cru - ce pro ho - mi - ne: Cu - jus la - tus per - fo - ra - tum,

19 20 21 22 23 24

un - de flu - xit san - gui - ne, san - gui - ne. Es - to no - bis prae - gu -  
 de flu - xit san - gui - ne, san - gui - ne. Es - to no - bis prae - gu -  
 un - de flu - xit san - gui - ne. Es - to no - bis prae - gu -  
 un - de flu - xit san - gui - ne. Es - to no - bis prae - gu -

25 26 27 28 29 30

sta - tum in mor - tis ex - a - mi - ne. O dul - cis, O pi -  
 sta - tum in mor - tis, in mor - tis ex - a - mi - ne. O dul - cis, O  
 sta - tum in mor - tis ex - a - mi - ne. O dul - cis, O  
 sta - tum in mor - tis ex - a - mi - ne. O dul - cis, O

31 32 33 34 35

e, O Je - su Fi - li Ma - ri - ae;  
 pi - e, O Je - su Fi - li Ma - ri - ae;  
 pi - e, O Je - su Fi - li Ma - ri - ae;  
 pi - e, O Je - su Fi - li Ma - ri - ae;

36 37 38 39 40

mi - se - re - re me - i, mi - se - re - re

mi - se - re - re me - i, mi - se - re - re mi - se - re - re me - i, mi - se -

mi - se - re - re me - i, mi - se - re - re me - i, me -

mi - se - re - re me - i, mi - se - re - re me - i, mi -

41 42 43 44 45 46

me - i, me - i, O i, A - men.

re - re me - i, i, A - men.

i, mi - se - re - re me - i, i, A - men.

se - re - re me - i, i, A - men.

SOURCE: Gradualia, revised edition, 1610 (originally pub. 1605)

CRITICAL NOTES: Note values halved, bar lines added (mensurstriche), slurs added. Tenor (m.39), Alto (m.40-41): text underlay uncertain. Bass (m.37): Rhythm of beats 3 & 4 altered. Final bar omitted (previous pitches were tied over).

TEXT and TRANSLATION:

*Ave verum corpus, natum de Maria Virgine,  
vere passum, immolatum in cruce pro homine:  
Cujus latus perforatum, Unde fluxit sanguine.  
Esto nobis praegustatum in mortis examine:  
O Dulcis, O pie, O Jesu fili Mariae,  
miserere mei. Amen.*

-Pope Innocent III or IV  
(Sequence Hymn for the Feast of Corpus Christi)

Hail true body, born of the Virgin Mary.  
Truly suffering, was sacrificed on the cross for all,  
From whose pierced side flowed blood,  
Be for us a foretaste in the final judgment.  
O sweet, O merciful, O Jesus, Son of Mary,  
Have mercy on me. Amen.