

01. *Audivi vocem*

(c. 1530)

John Taverner
(c. 1490-1545)
arr. William Melton

Taverner, John

(born c. 1490 in south Lincolnshire; died Oct. 18, 1545 in Boston, Lincolnshire)

The details of John Taverner's youth are obscure until he entered the historical record in 1526, with his appointment by Cardinal Thomas Wolsey to be master of choristers at Cardinal College (later Christ Church), Oxford. Four years later he was named lay clerk of the choir of St. Botolph (Boston, Lincolnshire), and in 1537 was elected to the Boston Guild of Corpus Christi, which he later served as treasurer. 1545 saw a comfortable Taverner, now retired from music, appointed a town alderman. He died soon thereafter and was buried in St. Botolph's. The memory of Taverner, who Edmund Fellowes judged "without question pre-eminent among the English composers of his own day," has been aided by the appearance of three modern biographies (C. Hand, 1978; D. S. Josephson, 1979; H. Bentham, 2003), which did much to dispel old fabrications (that he was a spy for Thomas Cromwell or was jailed for heresy).

More tangible than such fables was Taverner's compositional talent, which made itself known in 8 Masses, 3 Magnificats, a Te Deum, and the more than 20 motets that formed the backbone of his output. "*Audivi vocem*" is a motet that Taverner set for 4 voices about 1530 (as did Thomas Tallis somewhat later). It is traditionally used as the 8th responsory at Matins for All Saints, but also often appears at Advent due to its text, originally from Jeremiah 40:10 and Matthew 25:6.

*Audivi vocem de caelo venientem:
venite omnes virgines sapientissime;
oleum recondite in vasis
vestris dum sponsus advenerit.
Media nocte clamor factus est:
ecce sponsus venit.*

*I heard a voice that came from heaven:
come all wisest virgins;
fill your vessels with oil,
for the bridegroom approaches.
In the middle of the night there was a cry:
behold the bridegroom comes.*

The performer and academic Denis Stevens wrote of Taverner's musical style, "There is little in the way of padding in his gracious and limpid melismata: each phrase is imbued with a life of its own, each sequence has an artistic climax and a graceful cadence." Cambridge scholar Roger Bowers concurred, finding that "it was Taverner who enriched and transformed the English florid style [... and] was able to use his experience and maturity to produce simpler works of the greatest poise and refinement."

Text by William Melton