

DAVID SAINT REVIEW: Sacred Music Concert St Chad's Cathedral , 14 March 2026



Professor David Saint is an organ recitalist and choir director. He was Principal of the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire from 2010 to 2015 and is Organist and Director of Music at St Chad's Cathedral in Birmingham. He is a past Chair of the Royal College of Organists and Incorporated Society of Musicians and current chair of the Incorporated Association of Organists, the Young Organ Scholars' Trust and the Bromsgrove International Music Competition. David is a Fellow of the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, the Royal School of Church Music and the Royal College of Organists.

With its neo-gothic architecture and large crucifix hanging over the sanctuary, St Chad's provided a highly appropriate backdrop for this concert of sacred music for Lent and Passiontide. The first half consisted entirely of Gesualdo's *Tenebrae Responsories for Holy Saturday*, interspersed with four readings beautifully given by Archbishop Bernard Longley.

Gesualdo's music is not for the faint-hearted and the *Responsories* are intense and passionate. The music is often highly chromatic and contains many surprising harmonic progressions, key changes, chromaticism and word painting at its most vivid. For the most part, the choir handled the music brilliantly and exploited the drama and text to great effect. The full throated exclamations of 'Jerusalem' and 'Salvator' in *Jerusalem surge* will stay long in the memory, as will some gorgeous singing by the small 'versus' ensemble. Whilst there were just a couple of slightly uncomfortable moments, the overall impression was of a highly committed performance, delivered with a passion matched that of the music itself and had the large audience gripped.

The concert's second half consisted of shorter motets where the choir was on absolutely top form. Lotti's *Crucifixus* tugged at the heart with its marvellous suspensions, sung with impeccable tuning; and the cooler style of Byrd's *Miserere mei* was equally satisfying. Among so many 'goodies', the highlight for me was the last piece, Phinot's *Incipit oratio Jeremiae prophetae*. What a wonderful work! The double choir writing and interweaving parts were skilfully executed and brought this excellent concert to a perfect conclusion.

Mention must also be made of Martyn Rawle's refined organ playing of music by Byrd and Titelouze. His handling of the pulse, clarity of touch and exquisite ornamentation really brought this difficult music to life.

In conclusion, this was a rather wonderful evening, especially for me as it took place in the very special building where I have been Director of Music for 48 years.