

On Saturday afternoon, 25 May 2025 at 2:30 pm, the Newcastle University Choir (NUC) will perform a distinctly Italian-focused choral concert, at The Great Hall, University of Newcastle. The music features *Gloria in D Major* by Vivaldi; *Stabat Mater* by Pergolesi, and *Lamento della Ninfa* by Monteverdi.

Conducted by Dr Christopher Allan, the Newcastle University Choir will be supported by a string ensemble plus trumpet and continuo. Soloists will be Marion Moroney, Soprano and Anthea Harrington, Mezzo-Soprano.

Tickets are \$40 adult, \$35 Concession, \$25 Student, and can be obtained from www.TryBooking.com or by scanning the QR Code (next column).

Antonio Lucio Vivaldi was born in 1678 in Venice, and died in 1741 in Vienna. One of the greatest of the Italian Baroque composers, he was also a Roman Catholic Priest. He wrote compositions for a range of instruments, the most famous of which today is *The Four Seasons*. Vivaldi perfected the concerto into its currently accepted format. He also wrote more than 50 operas, and several sacred choral works. He was regarded as an exceptional violinist. Aside from writing music, he taught for 30 years at an orphanage in Venice (the famous Ospedale della Pietà), until he moved to Vienna to the court of Charles VI.

Vivaldi's most well-known choral work is *Gloria in D Major* arguably the most famous sacred choral work of the Venetian Baroque. The composer wrote at least 3 versions of this work, but RV589, written in 1715, is most performed by modern choirs. The work is written for Soprano and Alto solos and SATB choir. It is a setting of the Gloria of the Latin Mass, traditional to the Catholic Church in this period. Originally, the work would have performed in the Church of the Pieta.

There are eight choruses and 12 movements. Highlights include the joyous energy of "Domine Fili Unigenite," the soul-full soprano solo "Domine Deus," the lyrical duet "Laudamus te," and the somber choral writing in "Qui tollis peccata mundi." Vivaldi skillfully alternates between grand, extroverted passages and more intimate, introspective moments, offering both variety and cohesion across the work.

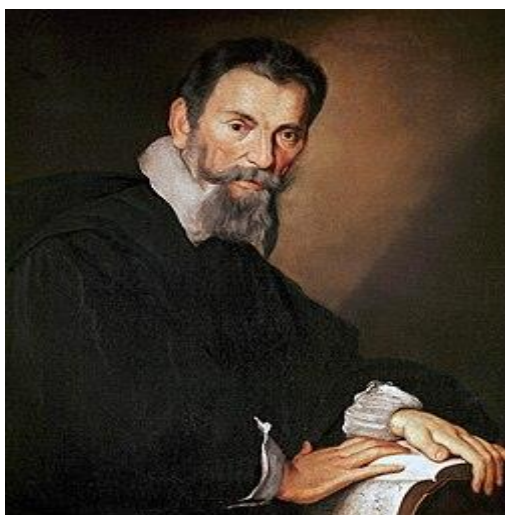
The music is lively and uplifting both for the singers and the audience. Unsurprisingly for this period, there is borrowing from and modification of earlier versions created by Vivaldi, plus other composers of the day. RV 589 remained unpublished during Vivaldi's lifetime and was rediscovered in the 20th century, sparking renewed interest in his sacred music.



Giovanni Battista (Draghi) Pergolesi was a contemporary of Vivaldi, living between 1710 and 1736. He was born in Jesi, in the Province of Ancona. Pergolesi was a nickname developed from the Pergola area where he lived. His early death at 26 was due to tuberculosis (although there seems to be some debate about this). A leading figure in Baroque music, he was an organist and violinist. He was very prolific, writing several operas, and becoming an important composer of Opera Buffa in Europe. A very popular example is *La serva padrona* (*The Maid Turned Mistress*).

He wrote sacred music, oratorios, masses and motets, the best known of which is *Stabat Mater* composed in 1736. Originally written for Soprano and Alto soloists, plus string orchestra and basso continuo, our performance also includes two-part female choir. The choir will sing sections 1 ("Stabat Mater" – standing mother grieving); and the tonal fugues 8 ("Fac ut ardeat cor meum" – make my heart burn) and 13 ("Amen"). Duets and Solos comprise the rest of the work. The music, known for its lyrical beauty and emotional immediacy, evokes the sorrow of the Virgin Mary standing beneath the cross where Christ was hung. Pergolesi's elegant melodic lines and sensitive harmonies elevate the sacred text without excessive ornamentation and exemplifies the Neapolitan 'galant' style – a transitional style between the complexity of the high Baroque and the simpler Classical style which followed.

Stabat Mater was commissioned by Confraternita dei Cavalieri di San Luigi di Palazzo, for Good Friday meditation in honour of the Virgin Mary. Pergolesi completed the choral work just before his early death.



The tenors and basses of the choir will take part in a madrigal by **Claudio Monteverdi** (1567 – 1643). Writing a century before Vivaldi and Pergolesi, Monteverdi's style and approach to composition was quite different. Born in Cremona, and after initial musical training, he became attached to the court of Mantua. In 1614, he moved to the San Marco Cathedral in the Republic of Venice, to take up the coveted post of Choir Master.

While he composed both secular and sacred music, he was an important pioneer of opera (*i.e.* *L'Orfeo*, 1607). Monteverdi is considered an important transitional composer between the Renaissance and Baroque Periods. Indeed, his eight books of 'madrigals' published during his lifetime take us from Palestrina-like polyphony to intense pieces full of dissonance which portray the emotional integrity of the text – called by Monteverdi *Seconda Pratica* (the Second Practice to distinguish it from the earlier Renaissance style which became known as First Practice)

This piece is one of the gems of the early Baroque and was published in 1638 as part of his *Eighth Book of Madrigals*, subtitled *Madrigali guerrieri et amorosi* ("Madrigals of war and love"). The work exemplifies Monteverdi's mature style and

his embrace of dramatic expression through music. The Soprano soloist, joined by the tenors and basses will sing *Lamento della Ninfa* (Nymph's Lament). The work blends narrative and lyricism in a deeply moving portrayal of abandoned or betrayed love. The story focusses on the emotions surrounding this eternal problem.

Divided into three sections, the middle section features the Soprano. The tenors and basses represent shepherds; the soloist, the Nymph, lamenting her fate, even wanting to die. The choral setting initially sets the scene and portrays sadness, sympathy and understanding somewhat in the nature of the commentary by a Greek chorus.

The lament is entirely composed over a short 4 note descending bass line – (a tetrachord). The solo Soprano line allows for both consonance and dissonance against the constancy of the repeated bass part and Monteverdi skillfully draws the intensity of the emotion from the complicated play of the solo line against the bass.

Howard Bridgman, Editor
Dr Christopher Allan, Artistic Director