

# Libera nos

Edited by Jason Smart

Thomas Tallis (c.1505–1585)

Treble

Mean

Countertenor

Tenor

Bass

[Li - be -

[Li - be - ra - - - - - be - -

[Li - be - ra - - - - -

Detailed description: This block contains the first system of a musical score for five voices: Treble, Mean, Countertenor, Tenor, and Bass. Each voice part is shown on a separate staff. The Treble and Mean parts begin with a whole note G4. The Countertenor part begins with a whole note G3. The Tenor part begins with a half note G3. The Bass part begins with a half note G2. The system concludes with a measure of rest for all parts, followed by the start of the vocal line. The lyrics are: [Li - be -

4

- ra - - - - - nos, sal - va - - - - -

[Li - be - ra - - - - - nos,

- ra - - - - - nos,

- ra - - - - - nos, sal - - - - - va

nos, li - be - ra - - - - - nos,

Detailed description: This block contains the second system of the musical score, starting at measure 4. It continues the vocal lines from the first system. The lyrics are: - ra - - - - - nos, sal - va - - - - - [Li - be - ra - - - - - nos, - ra - - - - - nos, - ra - - - - - nos, sal - - - - - va nos, li - be - ra - - - - - nos,

8

nos, sal - va nos, sal - va  
 sal - va  
 sal - va nos, iu - sti - fi -  
 nos, iu - sti - fi -  
 sal - va

12

nos, iu - sti - fi - ca nos, iu -  
 nos, iu - sti - fi - ca nos, iu - sti - fi - ca  
 - ca nos, iu - sti - fi - ca  
 - ca nos, O

nos, iu - sti - fi - ca

16

- sti - fi - ca nos, iu - sti - fi - ca  
 nos, iu - sti - fi - ca nos, O be - a - ta Tri -  
 nos, iu - sti - fi - ca nos, iu - sti - fi -  
 be - a - ta Tri -  
 nos, iu - sti - fi - ca nos, O be - a -

20

nos, O be - a - ta Tri - ni - tas, O be - a - ta Tri - ni -  
 - ni - tas, O be - a - ta Tri - ni - - - -  
 - ca - nos, O be - a - ta Tri - ni - - - -  
 - - - - -  
 - ta Tri - ni - - - - - tas, O be - a -

24

- tas, O be - a - ta Tri - ni - - - - - tas.]  
 - tas, O be - a - ta Tri - ni - - - - - tas.]  
 - tas, O be - a - ta Tri - ni - - - - - tas.]  
 - ni - - - - - tas.]  
 - ta Tri - ni - - - - - tas.]

## Translation

Free us, save us, absolve us, O blessed Trinity.

## Editorial Conventions

The original clef, staff signature, mensuration symbol and first note of each part are shown on the prefatory staves at the start of the piece.

The following are editorial:

Accidentals placed above the note

Dotted ties

All underlay

## Source

London, British Library, Add. MSS 37402–6 (early 17th cent.).

37402	(Tr)	f.51 <sup>v</sup>	at end: talles
37403	(Ct)	f.50 <sup>v</sup>	at end: talles
37404	(M)	f.71	at end: talles
37405	(T)	f.50	at end: talles
37406	(B)	f.54 <sup>v</sup>	at end: talles

## Commentary

The source in which this composition uniquely survives is of unknown provenance and uncertain date. Whether the attribution to Tallis is correct is questionable. The counterpoint shows little of the shapeliness apparent in even the least consonant of Tallis's works and the harmonic control is also well below his usual level. The best that can be said is that there are elements in the style that have echoes in some of his liturgical keyboard music. It could perhaps be an authentic, early work by Tallis, the consecutive octaves in bars 14 and 17–18 notwithstanding.

All the voice-parts have the title 'Libera', but no further text. Given the absence of underlay, the composition may have been intended for instruments, or for wordless vocalising or solmisation, but it is not unknown for vocal compositions of this era to be copied without their texts. There are several such examples in the cited source.

The title and the plainsong cantus firmus in the Tenor both suggest that the piece may originally have been a setting of an antiphon for Trinity Sunday in the Use of Sarum (although probably for votive rather than ritual use). The words fit easily enough, but the cantus firmus is not entirely identical to the Sarum chant. The incorporation of the beginner's incipit into the polyphony is not typical of Tallis's liturgical music.

There is one error in the source: in the Countertenor at bar 18 the second G and the A are, respectively, A and B flat (producing an unlikely chain of consecutive fifths as well as an improbable exposed fourth).