

# Absalon fili mi

?Josquin des Prez (c.1450–1521)

?Pierre de la Rue (c.1452–1518)

London, British Library, MS Royal 8 G. vii [Brussels/Mechelen, c.1513–25]



**SUPERIUS**  
Ab - sa - lon fi - li mi, fi - li mi,

**CONTRA-TENOR**  
Ab - sa - lon fi - li mi,

**TENOR**  
Ab - sa - lon fi - li

**BASSUS**  
Ab -

7  
Ab - - sa - - lon, fi - li  
fi - - li mi, fi - li mi, Ab - sa -  
mi, fi - - li mi, Ab - - sa - lon, fi -  
sa - lon fi - li mi, fi - li mi,

13  
mi, Ab - sa - lon, fi - li mi, Ab - sa -  
lon, Ab - sa - lon, fi - li mi,  
li mi, Ab - sa - lon, Ab - sa - lon, fi - li  
Ab - sa - lon, Ab - sa - lon, fi - li

19  
lon, Ab - sa - lon fi - li mi, Ab -  
Ab - sa - lon fi - li mi, Ab - sa - lon  
mi, Ab - sa - - lon, fi - li mi, Ab - sa - lon,  
mi, Ab - - sa - lon,

25

sa - lon, Ab - sa - lon fi -

fi - li mi, Ab - sa - lon

Ab - sa - lon, Ab - sa - lon

Ab - sa - lon fi - li mi, Ab - sa - lon,

30

li mi, Ab - sa - lon, Ab -

fi - li mi, Ab - sa - lon

fi - li mi, Ab - sa - lon

Ab - sa - lon, Ab - sa - lon

35

sa - lon, quis det ut mo - ri - ar

fi - li mi, Ab - sa - lon, quis

Ab - sa - lon,

fi - li mi, quis det ut mo - ri -

40

pro te, ut mo - ri - ar pro te,

det ut mo - ri - ar pro te, pro

quis det ut mo - ri - ar pro

ar pro te, ut mo - ri - ar pro

45

fi - li mi Ab - sa - lon,  
 te, fi - li mi Ab - sa - lon, non  
 te, fi - li mi Ab - sa - lon, non vi -

51

non vi - vam ul - tra, non  
 vi - vam ul - tra, ul - tra, non  
 - - - - - vam ul - tra,  
 non vi - vam ul - tra,

57

vi - vam ul - tra, sed de - scen - dam  
 vi - vam ul - tra, sed de - scen -  
 ul - tra, sed de - scen - dam in  
 ul - tra, sed de - scen -

63

in in - fer - num plo - rans,  
 dam in in - fer - num plo - rans,  
 in in - fer - num plo - rans,  
 dam in in - fer - num plo - rans,

68

rans, non vi - vam ul - tra, non  
non vi - vam ul - tra, non  
rans, non vi - vam ul - tra,  
non vi - vam ul - tra,

74

vi - vam ul - tra, sed de - scen - dam  
vi - vam ul - tra, sed de - scen -  
ul - tra, sed de - scen - dam in  
ul - tra, sed de - scen -

80

in in - fer - num plo - rans.  
- dam in in - fer - num plo - rans.  
in - fer - num plo - rans.  
dam in in - fer - num plo - rans.

Ábsalon fili mi, quis det ut móriar  
pro te, fili mi, Ábsalon?  
Non vivam ultra, sed descéndam in inférnum plorans.

*Absalom, my son, would that I had died  
instead of you, my son, Absalom!  
I shall live no more, but go down into hell, weeping.*

[from 2 Samuel 18:33, Job 7:16, and Genesis 37:35]

The manuscript held in the British Library — believed to have been copied by the Netherlands court scribe Petrus Alamire — is the earliest known source of this work. Though it has long been attributed to Josquin, recent scholarship has suggested its authorship more appropriately belongs to his Franco-Flemish contemporary, Pierre de la Rue. This setting of David's lament certainly bears the hallmarks of Josquin's supreme mastery of counterpoint and imitation, the most striking example of which is surely the vivid word painting of the final phrase, descending 'to hell' through the circle of fifths to D-flat major and G-flat major (at original pitch). The use of five (let alone six!) flats is highly unusual in early 16th-century polyphony.

#### Editorial Notes:

This edition is set at the original pitch. The complex key signature has been retained, and the implied B flat in the key signature of each of the lower two parts has been restored without further editorial acknowledgement (all Bs in those parts are unmodified in the source). Otherwise, editorial accidentals are indicated above the note, with precautionary accidentals in parenthesis. Original note values are retained, thus — consistent with 16th-century convention — the  $\text{C}$  mensuration sign and its modern-equivalent  $\text{C}$  time signature signify a semibreve tactus. Bar lines are added only to aid reading and direction: 'strong' and 'weak' beats implied by their position should never take precedence over phrasing or word stress. Ligatures and coloration in the source are acknowledged with overarching square brackets and open brackets respectively. Word underlay has been freely adjusted, given the ambiguity of the source: addition or reiteration of text not explicit in the source is indicated in *italic*.