

William Byrd (1539-1623), John Merbecke (1510-1585), Thomas Tallis (1505-1585),
musicians

Observed 21 November

Byrd, Merbecke, and Tallis are storied names in the history of English church music. They lived in the turbulent 16th century when differences of ecclesiology and theology frequently led to execution or war. John Merbecke was a thorough Protestant and wrote many theological tracts in addition to his music. He is notable for providing musical settings for all the services in the first Anglican Book of Common Prayer, some of which continues in use today (such as the setting for the Great Litany in the hymnal.) His concordance to the English Bible (the first of its kind) which nearly got him killed when the Catholics were in ascendance, was published under the reign of Edward VI and proved very useful.

Neither Byrd nor Tallis joined in the Reformation, but both continued to work under successive regimes of changing loyalties. They both explored and employed various new musical forms of the Renaissance in ways that greatly enriched the music of English churches. Both composed pieces for use in services (motets, anthems, etc.), setting English texts as was appropriate for the new liturgies. It was a difficult time to be part of the church but not part of the controversy, but both men remained focused on their music as a means of praising God and drawing the faithful together in worship. Three of Tallis' tunes are used for hymns in the current hymnal and Byrd's pieces for choir still enrich the worship of countless congregations.

All three men left legacies of transcendent beauty, that can still lift our spirits above the chaos of human controversy to the realm of heavenly joy.

Tallis



Byrd



Lessons I Chronicles 15:16,19-25,28; Psalm 47; Revelation 15:1-4; John 15:1-8

Collect O God most glorious, whose praises are sung night and day by your saints and angels in heaven: We give you thanks for William Byrd, John Merbecke and Thomas Tallis, whose music has enriched the praise that your Church offers you here on earth. Grant, we pray, to all who are touched by the power of music such glimpses of eternity that we may be made ready to join your saints in heaven and behold your glory unveiled for evermore; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.