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# Monteverdi

VESPERS (1610)

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JOHN WHENHAM

CAMBRIDGE MUSIC HANDBOOKS

**Monteverdi: Vespers (1610)**

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Vespers (1610)



John Whenham

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The English translations of Latin liturgical texts quoted in Appendixes 1 and 2 are from Dom Gaspar Lefebvre, *Saint Andrew Daily Missal, with Vespers for Sunday and Feasts* (Bruges, 1954) and are used with permission.



## *Abbreviations*

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A	Alto/Altus
<i>AM</i>	<i>Antiphonale Monasticum</i>
B	Bass/Bassus
Bar	Baritone
BCP	The Book of Common Prayer
Bg	<i>Bassus generalis</i>
Bt	Monteverdi, <i>Vespers</i> (1610), ed. Clifford Bartlett, revised edn, Autumn 1990 (King's Music, Redcroft, Banks End, Wyton, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE17 2AA, England)
C	Cantus
Ct	Counter-tenor
<i>GB-Bu</i>	Great Britain, Birmingham University Library
<i>GB-Lbl</i>	Great Britain, London, British Library
<i>LU</i>	<i>Liber Usualis</i>
MS(S)	Manuscript(s)
Ms	Mezzo-soprano
Q	Quintus
R	Monteverdi, <i>Vespro della Beata Vergine</i> , ed. Jerome Roche (London &c.: Eulenburg, 1994)
S	Sextus
Sop	Soprano
St	Monteverdi, <i>Vespers for Soloists, Double Choir, Organ and Orchestra</i> , ed. Denis Stevens (London: Novello, 1994)
T	Tenor

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*Introduction*

With its mixture of the splendid and the intimate, the sensual and the sublime, the music of Monteverdi's *Vespro della Beata Vergine* (*Vespers of the Blessed Virgin*), often called the '1610 Vespers' for short, has gained widespread and enduring popularity. It was published, together with a Mass setting, in the *Missa ... ac Vespera ... cum nonnullis sacris concertibus* (*Mass and Vespers, with some Sacred Concertos*), which Monteverdi issued at Venice in 1610 (publication at Venice signifies not that it was a Venetian work, but that Venice was the main centre of music publishing in early seventeenth-century Italy). Like most late Renaissance publications of church music, this was a volume intended to serve a number of purposes. At one level, of course, it was a vanity publication, a portfolio of the composer's work gathered together for the world to admire, and the unprecedented way in which Monteverdi set out his Vespers music in the volume – as a set of music for Vespers of the Madonna interspersed with motets and the 'Sonata sopra Sancta Maria' – may have owed something to a wish to make the best possible show with a relatively small collection of settings.<sup>1</sup> At another level, however, it was intended as a resource book for choirmasters, who would have used as many or as few of the settings as they required or their singers could manage. With their needs in mind Monteverdi provided two paths for performance through the Vespers music: one requires a group of expert instrumentalists in addition to the vocal ensemble and organist; the other allows performance with organ alone. For this latter type of performance Monteverdi provided a second, six-part Magnificat in addition to the magnificent seven-part setting with instruments that is most often heard nowadays. As we shall see in Chapter 2, the 'sacred concertos' – the motets and the 'Sonata sopra Sancta Maria' – could have formed part of the celebration of Vespers in the seventeenth century, but equally they could have been omitted