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## Doraly Gill, cello and voice

Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 2024 | 8.00pm

Trinity College Chapel

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PROGRAMME

NICOLAS GOMBERT    Lugebat David Absolon (performed by  
(c. 1495–c. 1560)    **King Henry's VIII**)

SARAH HENDERSON    Absalom  
(2002–)                    the centre cannot hold;  
  
                                 Achitophel

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PERFORMERS

Doraly Gill.....cello, mezzo-soprano

### King Henry's VIII

Rosamund Elias Turner, Sarah Henderson ..... soprano

Max Entwisle, Abigail Horton ..... alto

Ryan Court, Nathan Green.....tenor

Benedict Randall Shaw, Sam Gray ..... bass

Written by Sarah Henderson, composer

*Absalom* is a setting without words of the passage often known as ‘When David heard’ from the Bible (2 Samuel 18:33). An extraordinarily emotive passage where King David expresses his grief at his son Absalom’s death at the hands of one of David’s own men, it stands out as one of the most striking examples from the Bible of familial love and loss.

This piece is divided into 6 short movements, each titled with consecutive lines from ‘When David Heard’. The setting aims to convey the experience David’s grief in a very raw manner, largely without the aid of speech or narration to soften it. However, motifs from polyphonic renaissance settings of ‘When David heard’ by Weelkes and Tomkins, and of ‘Lugebat David Absalon’ (the Latin equivalent of the text) by Gombert, are used frequently throughout as small reminders of the original text.

*the centre cannot hold*; is an introspective piece for voice and cello, loosely inspired by W.B. Yeats’ “The Second Coming” from which the piece derives its title. Based solely on one core melody or ‘mask’, the piece gradually transforms its emotional implications from a place of innocence to something like a confession. The piece is also accompanied by a short poem written by the composer for the performer’s benefit. Indeed, the score is devoid of markings of expression beyond those indicating volume, leaving the performer free to derive their own emotional journey and interpretation of the piece through their reaction to the poem and the music.

*Achitophel* is follow-up piece to *Absalom* – the titular biblical characters of the two pieces both betrayed King David and fought against him in a rebellion documented in 2 Samuel. Absalom was David’s son, whilst Achitophel was one of his most trusted advisors. Indeed, both characters go on to die as a result of the rebellion: Absalom is killed by one of David’s guards, leading to a heart-breaking description of David’s grief, whilst Achitophel commits suicide upon realising that the rebellion will fail.

Though dealing with the same broad subject, the pieces have vastly different intentions. Where *Absalom* aims to express a father’s raw emotion at losing his son, *Achitophel* aims to open a dialogue into how we judge morality and whether the traditional tone of condemnation towards the title character is fair. Why is it that Absalom is generally depicted relatively mercifully, as a good man with misplaced ambition, whilst Achitophel is denounced as a traitor, despite committing the same crime? Is it possible to give credit to a narrative in which Achitophel is viewed equally mercifully, as ‘led astray’ rather than as ‘evil’?

## Nicolas Gombert – Lugebat David Absalon

### Prima pars

Lugebat David Absalon, pius pater filium,  
tristis senex puerum:  
Heu me, fili mi Absalon, quis mihi det ut moriar,  
ut ego pro te moriar, O fili mi Absalon!  
Rex autem David filium, cooperto flebat capite:  
Quis mihi det ut moriar, O fili mi, O fili mi!

*David mourned for Absalom, a pious father for his son,  
a grieving old man for his boy:  
Ah me! My son Absalom, would God I had died for thee,  
O my son Absalom!  
King David wept for his son with covered head:  
Would God I had died for thee, O my son!*

### Secunda pars

Porro rex operuit caput suum  
et clamabat voce magna:  
Fili mi Absalon, O fili mi.

*Then the King covered his head  
and cried with a great voice:  
O my son Absalon, O my son!*

## Sarah Henderson – Achitophel

### Villain 1

And one told David, saying, Achitophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.

Moreover Achitophel said unto Absalom, Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night: And I will come upon him while he is weary and weak handed, and will make him afraid: and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only:

*(2 Samuel 15:31, 17:1-3)*

### Victim 1

Achithophel was a very young man, at the time of his death not more than thirty-three years old.

To this dire course of action he was misled by astrologic and other signs, which he interpreted as prophecies of his own kingship, when in reality they pointed to the royal destiny of his granddaughter Bath-sheba.

And great as was his wisdom, it was equalled by his scholarship.

*(from 'Legends of the Jews', pp 62-67)*

## Villain 2

And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom.

And Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Go in unto thy father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the house; and all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father: then shall the hands of all that are with thee be strong.

*(2 Samuel 16:23, 16:20-21)*

## Victim 2

And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father.

— It is the first deliberate suicide on record, and was prompted by mortification at the rejection of his counsel; by the chagrin of baffled ambition; by the conviction that now the rebellion would inevitably fail, and that he would only live to suffer a traitor's death.

*(2 Samuel 17:23; extract from 'Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges')*

### Villain 3

Of these the false Achitophel was first:  
A name to all succeeding ages curst.  
For close designs, and crooked counsels fit;  
Sagacious, bold and turbulent of wit:

Great wits are sure to madness near alli'd;  
And thin partitions do their bounds divide:

In friendship false, implacable in hate:  
Resolv'd to ruin or to rule the state.

That false Achitophel's pernicious hate,  
Had turn'd the plot to ruin church and state:

*(from 'Absalom and Achitophel', by John Dryden)*

### Friend

12 For it is not an open enemy that hath done me this dishonour;  
for then I could have borne it;

13 Neither was it mine adversary that did magnify himself against me;  
for then peradventure I would have hid myself from him;

14 But it was even thou, my companion,  
my guide, and mine own familiar friend.

15 We took sweet counsel together,  
and walked in the house of God as friends.

*(Psalm 55)*

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