

# GAMBA MUSIC CLUB

GIOVANNI PIERLUIGI  
da PALESTRINA  
1525/6-1594

**Two Motets from**  
***CANTICUM CANTICORUM***  
**Osculetur me**  
**Fasciculus myrrhae**

**Tr T T T B**

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## Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (b. Palestrina 1525/6; d. Rome 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb 1594)

Italian composer. The exact date of his birth is uncertain, but at his death he was probably nearing seventy. It is thought that as a child Palestrina was a chorister at the Cathedral of Saint Agapit in his home town. He is thought to have been a chorister at Santa Maria Maggiore from 1537 and remained there even after his voice broke. In the autumn of 1544 he accepted the post of *organista e maestro di canto* at the cathedral. He was to play the organ on feast days and help the choir at daily services, to instruct the canons in singing, and teach music to the junior boys of the choir. He remained at the cathedral until 1551 by which time he had married Lucrezia Gori. This was a good marriage for which he received a dowry that included a vineyard, meadows, a house and some cash. They had two sons, Rudolfo and Angelo.

In 1551 Palestrina was appointed, by Pope Julius III, the master of the Capella Juliana, the choir responsible for the services at St. Peters. He repaid the Pope's patronage by composing a mass in his honour. The Pope was so pleased by this he made Palestrina a member of the select pontifical choir, which aroused the animosity of the other singers. On the death of Julius III, Pope Marellus was appointed and he believed that church music should be purged of all sensual and impure elements, all secular forms and unedifying language. In Palestrina's second book of masses he states that he 'endeavoured to adorn the mass with the music of the new order'.

The death of Pope Marellus in 1555 brought a radical change of fortune for Palestrina due to the succeeding Pope ordering that any married men in the choir should be pensioned off. Palestrina found a job as musical director at St John Lateran, but he was not happy there. He remained there until 1560, but left abruptly after a disagreement. In 1561 he went back to Santa Maria Maggiore where circumstances were more favourable. Palestrina considered leaving the services of the church to work in the secular field, but when the director of the Julian choir at St Peters died Palestrina was offered the post. In 1578 he was appointed as Master of Music at the Vatican Basilica.

Then tragedy beset Palestrina and his family. Two of his sons, his wife and two brothers all died in sweeping epidemics. During this time of grief Palestrina decided to become a priest and this was granted in 1580. However he soon met a well-to-do widow, Virginia Dormuli, and secretly married her in 1581. He continued to write music and carry out his duties at St Peters. In 1593 Palestrina considered a return to his native home, but when preparing to leave he fell ill and died in January 1594.

### Notes and Translations

These two motets form part of 29 adaptations from 'The Song of Songs'. They were originally published in 1584.

'Osculetur me': Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth; for your love is better than wine. For your ointments have a lovely fragrance; your name is like ointment poured out; therefore the virgins love you.

'Fasciculus myrrhae': A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me; he shall lie all night between my breasts. My beloved is to me like a cluster of henna flowers in the vineyards of Engedi. Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are as those of doves.