

A note on the instruments and pitch

Modern stringing, especially on the violin, prioritises the higher registers by giving higher tension to the E string, reflecting the modern aesthetic preference for brilliance and virtuosity; before around 1750, however, musicians recommended spreading the tension evenly across the four strings, resulting in a richer tone quality, especially in the lower registers, and a more blended ensemble sound. This is the way all the instruments were strung for this project. Furthermore, only plain uncovered gut strings were used.

Shorter bows (two made especially for the recording) with fixed length hair and clip-in frogs were employed, rather than longer style bows that developed as the eighteenth century progressed. Of the three tenors (violas in modern parlance), two were copied from particularly large originals; the increased cubic capacity of the body giving greater resonance to the lower notes. The three bass violins were a large seventeenth-century English original, a faithful copy of the same instrument, and a reproduction of the largest surviving bass violin (part of the collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II).

Pitch standards changed significantly during Blow's long career, from the high 'Chapel Royal' pitch of the 1670s ($A \approx 473$ cps) to a much lower standard in the first decade of the eighteenth century ($A \approx 400$); at no point in Blow's lifetime was the current scale of standard pitches (based on $A=440$) in use in England. Nevertheless, we decided that the most pragmatic solution to the problem posed by a survey of anthems that were originally heard at a wide variety of pitches was to adopt a single pitch, roughly in the centre of the range. All the music on this recording is thus presented at $A=440$; voices were allotted to verse parts on the basis of their individual range and tone quality.

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