



**KEMF
2026**

KEBLE EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL

**24 - 28
FEBRUARY**

Christian Wilson

Director

Mahan Esfahani

Patron



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keble.ox.ac.uk/kemf



DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

Welcome to the 2026 Keble Early Music Festival!

A warm welcome to the 2026 Keble Early Music Festival – the 12th edition of Oxford's premier dedicated early music festival. 2026 marks the 150th anniversary of the construction of Keble Chapel, which provides a grand and ambient setting for so many of our festival events, not least our opening concert of English music performed by **The Brabant Ensemble** and friends, featuring two versions of **Tallis's** monumental and rarely heard, 40-voice motet ***Spem in alium*** – a work composed for Elizabeth I's 40th birthday. Stringed instruments are at the heart of this year's festival with a return visit from **Vivaldi** experts **La Serinissima** for an uplifting 'Crossing Borders' programme centred around that composer. Thursday evening provides a more intimate concert dedicated to Biber, given by Illyria Consort, led by star violinist **Bojan Čičić**. The festival also marks the 400th anniversary of the death of England's greatest lutenist-composer, **John Dowland** with a series of lute-dedicated events on the Friday, including a special talk given by the world's leading luthier **Michael Lowe**, followed by a recital celebrating Dowland performed by world-renowned lutenist **Jakob Lindberg**. Friday and Saturday evenings feature two of **JS Bach's** most celebrated works

as we welcome back our patron, harpsichord virtuoso, **Mahan Esfahani** for a performance of the composer's swansong contrapuntal collection, ***The Art of Fugue***, then on Saturday evening, **Keble Chapel Choir** are joined by the **Instruments of Time & Truth**, and a host of star soloists, with **Gwilym Bowen** (evangelist) in a performance of the ***St John Passion***.

As always, there is a strong educational motivation within the festival, expressed through our schools **Baroque String Workshop** and Bach event with **Thames Valley Early Music Forum**. Oxford University students take part in several free lunchtime events including Keble's graduate singers on Wednesday, **The Bate Collective** (directed by Jonathan Williams) on Thursday, and members of **Ancient Music at Oxford** on Saturday. We also invite a selection of Choral Scholars from around the university to expand The Brabant Ensemble's forces for ***Spem in alium*** on Tuesday evening.

I hope that there is something to satisfy every taste!

Details of all events can be found, along with booking links, at keble.ox.ac.uk/kemf.

We hope to see you there!

24 TUESDAY

FEBRUARY



CHORAL EVENSONG

Keble College Chapel | Free (retiring collection)

Sung by the Choir of Keble College

6 PM



THE BRABANT ENSEMBLE directed by Stephen Rice

Keble College Chapel | £35/£25/£10 students

Spem in Alium and other Tudor Treasures

Tallis's monumental work 'Spem in alium' features in two versions, bookending a concert of sacred greats from sixteenth-century England, performed by The Brabant Ensemble and directed by Stephen Rice. Focussing on the pre-Reformation period and the reign of Queen Mary I, the programme includes some of the most sumptuous Tudor polyphony by Taverner, Tallis, Mundy, Sheppard, and Byrd.

7.30 PM

25 WEDNESDAY

FEBRUARY



VOCAL SHOWCASE

Keble College Chapel | Free (retiring collection)

Keble's Graduate musicians entertain in a programme of solos and duets for voice with organ and theorbo.

1 PM



LA SERENISSIMA

Keble College Chapel | £35/£25/£10 students

Crossing Borders

La Serenissima return to Keble Early Music Festival to play a new orchestral Crossing Borders programme, featuring music by Vivaldi and contemporaries. The group has twice won the Gramophone Award for Baroque Instrumental music and topped the UK Classical Chart in 2018 and celebrated 30 years of "whipping up a storm with Vivaldi" (The Telegraph) with a residency at London's Wigmore Hall during 2024-2025.

7.30 PM

26 THURSDAY

FEBRUARY

THE BATE COLLECTIVE

directed by Dr Jonathan Williams

Keble College Chapel | Free (retiring collection)

A varied programme of baroque delights from France and Germany presented by Oxford students, performed on historic instruments from the Bate Collection.

1 PM



Bojan Čičić (violin & director)
Steven Devine (continuo)
Susanne Heinrich (viola da gamba)

THE ILLYRIA CONSORT

Keble College Chapel | £35/£25/£10 students

Viennese Treasures

The violin sonata in 17th-century Austria

Leader of the Academy of Ancient Music and a host of other period ensembles, Bojan Čičić has received plaudits across the globe for his staggering virtuosity and musicianship. He is joined by the Illyria Consort in a contemplative programme of violin music from 17th century Vienna, drawing on Bohemian, German and Italian influences.

7.30 PM

27 FRIDAY

FEBRUARY

LUNCHTIME LUTE SONG from Renaissance Italy

Keble College Chapel | Free (retiring collection)

Performed by Matthew Pope (tenor), William Prior (alto),
Theo Nisbett (viol), with James Tomlinson (lute).

1 PM



THE LUTE AND THE LUTHIER Lecture with Michael Lowe

O'Reilly Theatre | £10/£5 students

Widely considered the greatest living luthier, Michael Lowe discusses the dark art of lute making and the relevance of the instrument in its historical context through an illuminating and informative lecture.

4 PM



JOHN DOWLAND 400 Jakob Lindberg

O'Reilly Theatre | £20/£7 students

Marking the 400th anniversary of the death of the great lutenist performer/composer, the world's most celebrated living lutenist performs a tribute programme celebrating the genius of John Dowland (1563-1626) 'whose heavenly touch upon the lute doth ravish human sense'. Performed on an 8-course lute built by Michael Lowe.

5 PM

KEMF WORKSHOPS

FRIDAY 20 BAROQUE STRING WORKSHOP

An open baroque performance workshop for secondary-school aged students grades 6+ led by Oxford-based period instrument ensemble Instruments of Time & Truth in partnership with the Oxfordshire County Music Service. Baroque bows will be provided.

[www.timeandtruth.co.uk/
kemfworkshop2026](http://www.timeandtruth.co.uk/kemfworkshop2026)

Admission free

SATURDAY 21 J S BACH – CHORUSES FROM THE CHRISTMAS ORATORIO

A day-long workshop for voices and instruments (A=440) directed by Philip Thorby, in association with Thames Valley Early Music Forum

£16 TVEMF members

£20 non-members

www.tvemf.org/future-events



BACH'S 'THE ART OF FUGUE' Mahan Esfahani

Keble College Chapel | £30/£20/£7 students

No one has done more to popularise the harpsichord as a concert instrument in the present day than Iranian-American virtuoso Mahan Esfahani. Patron of the Keble Early Music Festival, he returns to perform J S Bach's great swan song, 'The Art of Fugue', often cited as the summit of contrapuntal ingenuity, and amongst the greatest achievements in Western music.

7.30 PM

28 SATURDAY

FEBRUARY

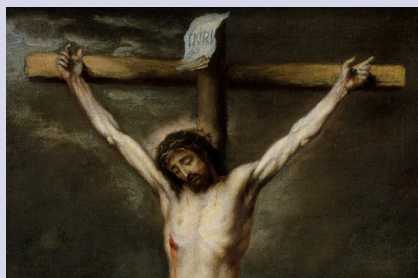
THE AFTERLIFE OF ANCIENT GREEK MUSIC from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance

O'Reilly Theatre | Free (retiring collection)

Ancient Music at Oxford

This lecture-recital follows the transmission and transformation of Greek music theory from its philosophical foundations in Pythagoras and Plato to its rearticulation in Late Antiquity, and its eventual revival in the Renaissance by figures such as Girolamo Mei and Vincenzo Galilei. The event concludes with performances of surviving Greek musical fragments on a reconstructed kithara, accompanied by the AMO chorus.

12 PM



BACH'S ST JOHN PASSION

Keble College Chapel | £40/£30/£10 students

Instruments of Time & Truth

Keble Chapel Choir

Gwilym Bowen (Evangelist)

Keble Choir joins the Instruments of Time & Truth, Gwilym Bowen (Evangelist) and a stellar lineup of soloists, in a performance of the Passion story as told in John's Gospel. Entwining the theatrical and theological Bach provides some of the most dramatic and impassioned music ever composed in recounting the horrific events of Christ's arrest and crucifixion.

7.30 PM