

# Gabriel Faure

Jean Racine (1639–1699) was one of Europe's leading dramatists, and one of the few French classical playwrights to have had any success outside their own country. His other writings are less often remembered, and it is only because of Faure that anyone except a literary specialist is aware that in 1688 he published translations of a series of Latin hymns for the days of the week. "Verbe Égal au Très-Haut" is a free version of *Consors paterni luminis*, the hymn for Tuesday matins, which was thought at the time to be by St Ambrose, the fourth-century bishop of Milan. Matins was sung, at least in strict monasteries, during the night and the words refer to breaking the night's silence with praise to God, putting to flight dark's evil spirits and driving away sloth, though Racine's classical phraseology is less specific than the original. Faure wrote his setting in 1865 at the end of his student days and it won the composition prize at his college, the École Niedermeyer. It has a mature simplicity that most students would foolishly scorn!

## Text and translation

*Verbe Égal au Très-Haut,*

*Notre unique espérance,  
Jour éternel de la terre et des cieux,  
De la paisible nuit,  
Nous rompons le silence,  
Divin Sauveur jette sur nous les yeux!  
Repands sur nous le feu de ta grâce puissante,  
Que tout l'enfer fuie au son de ta voix,  
Dissipe le sommeil d'une âme languissante,  
Qui la conduit à l'oubli de tes lois,  
O Christ sois favorable à ce peuple fidèle  
Pour te bénir maintenant rassemble,  
À ta gloire immortelle  
Et de tes dons qu'il retourne comblé.*

Word equal to the Most High, our only hope,  
Eternal day of earth and sky, Of peaceful night,  
We break the silence, Divine Saviour, cast Thine eyes on us!  
Cast on us the fire of Thy mighty grace,  
That all Hell may flee at the sound of Thy voice,  
Cast sleep from a languishing soul  
Thou who bears it to the limit of Thy laws,  
O Christ, look favourably on this faithful people  
Who gather now to bless Thee,  
Receive the songs they offer To Thy immortal glory  
And Thy gifts which they return manifold!

Translation: Louis Dunn

*Programme notes provided by Clifford Bartlett, 1991*