



*Start the Week with*  
The Hampstead  
Collective

*Bringing live sacred music-making back to Hampstead Parish Church, safely and joyfully every Monday. Seventeen weeks of Bach Cantatas, Handel large-scale works, Sacred Meditations, and Song. Socially-distanced in-person audiences, and live streamed on all social media platforms.*

**Event Six: Sacred Meditation**  
**CANTICUM CANTICORUM**

**5th October 2020, 7-8pm**

# *Canticum Canticorum*



Director/Organ: Geoffrey Webber

Reader: Gaynor Bassey Fish

Soprano: Christine Buras

Contralto: Jess Dandy

Tenor: Aidan Coburn

Tenor: James Robinson

Bass: Ben McKee

## Programme

Organ: *Ricercare* (Tone I)

Song of Songs Ch.1 vv.1-8

*Canticum Canticorum* (nos 1-3)

*Osculetur me osculo*

*Trahe me post te*

*Nigra sum sed formosa*

Meditations on the Song of Songs i (from Chapter 1)

*Canticum Canticorum* (nos 9-10)

*Tota pulchra es*

*Vulnerasti cor meum*

Meditations on the Song of Songs ii (from Chapter 6)

Organ: *Ricercare* (Tone VII)

Song of Songs Ch.2 vv.1-5, 8-14

*Canticum Canticorum* (nos 11-12, 14)

*Sicut liliū*

*Introduxit me rex*

*Vox dilecti mei*

Meditations on the Song of Songs iii (from Chapter 5)

*Canticum Canticorum* (nos 16-17)

*Surge amica mea*

*Dilectus meus mihi*

Meditations on the Song of Songs iv (from Chapter 7)

Organ: *Ricercare* (Tone V)

'Song of the Soul'

*Canticum Canticorum* (no. 29)

*Veni dilecte mi*

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina

King James Bible

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina

Teresa of Ávila

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina

Teresa of Ávila

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina

King James Bible

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina

Teresa of Ávila

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina

Teresa of Ávila

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina

St John of the Cross

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina

The third of The Hampstead Collective's Sacred Meditations focuses on The Song of Songs, or *Canticum Canticorum*, as filtered through the work of two great sixteenth-century figures, from Italy the musician Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (c.1525-94) and from Spain the theologian and mystic Teresa of Ávila (1515-82). Wrestling with this unique and often controversial book of the Hebrew Bible was far from straightforward for both individuals. For Palestrina working on such texts reminded him of former times when he had spent far too much time setting love poetry to music, and the first edition of his motets lacked any mention of the origin of the texts on its title page. For Teresa, living through the period of the Spanish Inquisition, the problem was more external: her inquisitors insisted that she burned her copy of her Meditations in their presence, though fortunately her nuns had already made copies of her work.

The selection of Hebrew love poetry that forms the Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon), itself influenced by other Middle Eastern poetic traditions, has held great appeal to both Jewish and Christian readers over the centuries, not simply due to its ability to be transferred through allegory from the secular to the sacred, but also due to its preoccupation with the natural world. Perhaps the greatest English writer on the book, the Venerable Bede, was understandably keen to apologise for his ignorance about the natural history of the Middle East, noting that he lives far away "on an island in the ocean". But references to the soothing oils, fragrant spices, ripe fruit and colourful flowers that were central to the lives of the lovers, give the writing a vivid and powerful sense of reality and wonder. Composers across the centuries have revelled in setting the texts, and many church musicians (the members of The Hampstead Collective among them) know the words well through settings from the fifteenth century onwards, such as Dunstable's *Tota pulchra es*, Clemens's *Ego flos campi*, the antiphons *Nigra sum* and *Pulchra es* from Monteverdi's *Vespers*, Purcell's *My beloved spake*, and in more recent times Walton's *Set me as a seal*, Hadley's *My beloved spake* and Francis Grier's *Dilectus meus mihi*. Poets too have also drawn much inspiration from the texts, and our Meditation ends with a poem written by John of the Cross, the Spanish writer closely associated with Teresa of Ávila. John had founded a Carmelite monastery in Ávila specifically to follow the reformed rule developed by Teresa (the so-called 'barefoot' Carmelites), and yet the hierarchy of the time meant that Teresa and her nuns were technically subject to the spiritual guidance of John.



If Bede was concerned about his lack of relevant botanical knowledge, Teresa, writing directly to her nuns, was keen to point out that she made no claim to theological correctness or authority, but that her writing was simply her personal response to the texts. This approach was of course bound up with the general situation of women religious at this time who lacked any authority beyond the confines of their own nunneries. But more than this, Teresa is notably critical of the male theologians who claimed to have all the answers to difficult theological questions, as we will hear in one of the passages being read, where she recommends that they take a leaf out of the Virgin Mary's book in exercising true humility.

Teresa's approach therefore contrasts strongly with many of the earlier studies of the book, which are mostly learned attempts to explain the poetry in terms of the standard allegories: the relationship between God and the people of Israel (e.g. Rabbi Akiva c.50-135), the relationship between Christ and the believing soul or his bride the church, as developed by early Christian writers notably Hippolytus (c.170–235) and Origen (184-253), and the later development of casting the bride as the Blessed Virgin Mary, as with St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153).

There are elements of this in Teresa's writing, but she prefers to embrace her own lack of complete understanding of the theology. Dealing with the shift of pronouns in the opening verses she writes that "I don't understand why this is; and that I don't understand gives me great delight". Her writing was first published in 1611 by Jerónimo Gracián, who suggested that her work had been condemned not so much for its actual contents but because it breached the restrictions placed by St Paul on women's activities within the church. Gracián called Teresa's untitled prose 'Conceptions of the Love of God' (*Conceptos del amor de Dios*), though since Teresa herself uses the word Meditations (*Meditaciones*) within her writing, it is this title that has generally been preferred.

Palestrina's motet collection (1584), rather like most of the surviving Commentaries from Origen onwards, does not cover the whole 8 chapters of the book. Of the 29 motets, over half are settings of verses from the first two chapters, perhaps partly reflecting the fact that many manuscripts containing the Commentaries survive incomplete and that in some cases the authors died before completing their work, so that most of the surviving literature focused on these early chapters. However, Palestrina's precise reasoning for choosing the texts he did, and his allocation of particular modes and use of certain combinations of voices, is not easily divined, though he certainly organised them in order of text source and by mode: motets 1-10 are in the transposed Dorian mode (on G, with one flat), 11-18 are in the Mixolydian mode (also on G), 19-24 are in the Phrygian mode (on E/A) and 25-29 are in the Lydian mode (on F). Those in the Dorian and Mixolydian Modes (sounding to modern ears minor and major respectively) are set for SATTB, whilst the rest are for SSATB, apart from the final motet, which returns to the SATTB combination.



'Still Life: Fruit' by Severin Roesen

It seems very likely that the motets were not intended for liturgical use, but were perhaps connected to the growing interest at the time of what we might (to suit the Collective!) call Sacred Meditations, following the example in particular of St Philip Neri, who encouraged the formation of confraternities that studied the word of God in non-liturgical environments which often involved the performance of suitable music, sung either in Italian (i.e. *madrigali spirituali*) or Latin. These took place in buildings known as Oratories, the first of which Philip established in Rome in 1564. One observer writes of his visit to the Oratory “where they deliver every day some most beautiful spiritual discourses on the Gospel, or on the virtues and vices, or ecclesiastical history, or the lives of the Saints. There are four or five each day who discourse, and persons of distinction go to hear them, bishops, prelates, and the like. At the conclusion there is a little music to console and recreate the spirits which are somewhat wearied by the preceding discourses.” (After the establishment of operas at the turn of the seventeenth century, opera houses were not allowed to function during the season of Lent, and instead settings of biblical epics were performed often in the buildings called oratories, hence the musical term oratorio.)

Given Palestrina’s concern to distance himself from any literal interpretation of the texts - he began his Preface by noting that “Far too many poems exist that have no other subject than love of a kind totally alien to the Christian faith” - it should be no surprise that he does not abandon the pure and perfectly balanced and ordered style that made his music so famous. But neither does he ignore the text, for many passages convey the words in a direct and powerful way, frequently with madrigalian word-illustrations, and revealing Palestrina’s supreme mastery of chordal textures as well as counterpoint. To give but one example of his sensitivity to the text, Palestrina’s setting of ‘Nigra sum sed formosa’, where the bride acknowledges both her dark skin, developed through her toil in the heat of the sun, and her beauty, is superbly crafted to match the syllabic stress and meaning of the words: the first two words are given an expressive semitonal inflection, and the final word is pitched lower to mark the rhetorical shift and made even more expressive through the presence of two minor intervals, the minor third as well as the semitone.

The motets chosen for today’s Meditation are taken from those which are set for the SATTB voice combination, and so include music in the transposed Dorian, Mixolydian and Lydian modes, and to help establish these modalities in our minds, abridged versions of the relevant instrumental Ricercare attributed to Palestrina will be played on the organ. Musicians over the centuries have often been inspired to write about the supreme beauty of Palestrina’s contrapuntal and harmonic style, with its judicious control of dissonance and seemingly effortless polyphonic lines. In the context of the Song of Songs, this beauty can perhaps be seen as a perfect reflection of the beauty of both bride and groom, helping us to celebrate “the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church”, as memorably stated in the Prayerbook’s Solemnization of Matrimony.



The Cantus part of the motet *Vox dilecti mei* as printed in a Venetian print dating from 1587

## TEXTS

The translation of Teresa's Meditations being read in tonight's Sacred Meditation is in copyright and comes from *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Ics Pubns, Washington D.C., U.S.A. 1976).

### The Song of Songs (Chapter 1. 2-7)

2. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine.
3. Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.
4. Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee.
5. I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.
6. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept.
7. Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?
8. If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents.

### The Song of Songs (Chapter 2. 1-5, 8-14)

1. I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.
2. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.
3. As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.
4. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.
5. Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love.
8. The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.
9. My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice.
10. My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.
11. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;
12. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;
13. The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vine with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise my love, my fair one and come away.



'Song of Songs' by Marc Chagall

Text sources of Palestrina's motets:

<i>Osculetur me osculo</i>	Ch. 1, 2-3 (see above)
<i>Trabe me post te</i>	Ch. 1, 4 (see above)
<i>Nigra sum sed formosa</i>	Ch. 1, 5 (see above)
<i>Tota pulchra es</i>	Ch. 4, 7-8 (see below)
<i>Vulnerasti cor meum</i>	Ch. 4, 9-10 (see below)
<i>Sicut liliium</i>	Ch. 2, 2-3 (see above)
<i>Introduxit me rex</i>	Ch. 2, 4-5 (see above)
<i>Vox dilecti mei</i>	Ch. 2, 8-10 (see above)
<i>Surge amica mea</i>	Ch. 2, 13b-14 (see below)
<i>Dilectus meus mihi</i>	Ch. 2, 16-17, Ch. 3, v.1 (see below)
<i>Veni dilecte mi</i>	Ch. 7, 11-12 (see below)

*Song of Songs, Chapters 2-3*

13b. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

14. O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.

16. My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies.

17. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bethel.

1. By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.

*Song of Songs, Chapter 4*

7. Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.

8. Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards.

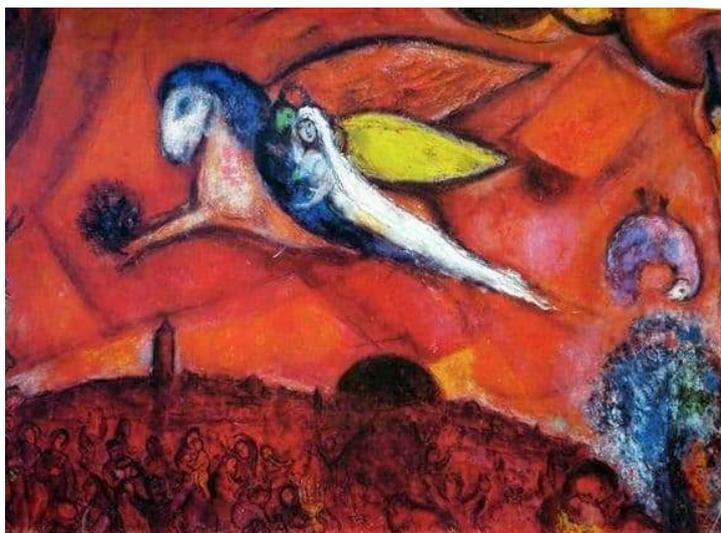
9. Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck.

10. How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!

*Song of Songs, Chapter 7*

11. Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages.

12. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves.



'Song of Songs IV - 1958' by Marc Chagall

'Dark night of the soul' - St John of the Cross

Translation by E. Allison Peers (1935)

1. On a dark night,  
kindled in love with yearnings  
-- oh, happy chance! --

I went forth without being observed,  
my house being now at rest.

2. In darkness and secure,  
by the secret ladder, disguised  
-- oh, happy chance! --  
in darkness and in concealment,  
my house being now at rest.

3. In the happy night,  
in secret, when none saw me,  
nor I beheld aught,  
without light or guide,  
save that which burned in my heart.

4. This light guided me  
more surely than the light of noonday  
to the place where he was awaiting me  
-- well I knew who! --  
a place where none appeared.

5. Oh, night that guided me,  
oh, night more lovely than the dawn,  
oh, night that joined  
beloved with lover,  
lover transformed in the Beloved!

6. Upon my flowery breast,  
kept wholly for himself alone,  
there he stayed sleeping,  
and I caressed him,  
and the fanning of the cedars made a breeze.

7. The breeze blew from the turret  
as I parted his locks;  
with his gentle hand  
he wounded my neck  
and caused all my senses to be suspended.

8. I remained, lost in oblivion;  
my face I reclined on the Beloved.  
All ceased and I abandoned myself,  
leaving my cares  
forgotten among the lilies.



'Song of Songs III 1960' by Marc Chagall

# Performer Biographies



**Geoffrey Webber** is Organist and Assistant Director of Music at Hampstead Parish Church. After being a chorister at Salisbury Cathedral and Music Scholar at the King's School, Worcester, he became Organ Scholar of New College, Oxford in 1977. He remained in Oxford after graduating to pursue academic research alongside his practical activities, and he has maintained this combination ever since. In Oxford he became University Organist and Director of Music at University Church of St Mary the Virgin, and served as Acting Organist at both New College and Magdalen College. In 1989 he moved to Cambridge where he combined the post of Precentor and Director of Studies in Music at Gonville & Caius College with teaching for the Faculty of Music, working as an Affiliated Lecturer and establishing the M.Mus. degree in Choral Studies. In addition to his work at Hampstead, he now serves as Associate Director of Armonico Consort and General Editor of the Church Music Society. His publications include the monograph *North German Church Music in the Age of Buxtehude* (OUP) and as co-editor, the *Cambridge Companion to the Organ* (CUP), and his recordings with the choir of Caius College are noted for their unusually wide range of repertoire.



**Christine Buras** is an American soprano from Washington D.C. and has been a member of the Hampstead Parish Church Choir for three and a half years, though she first depped there on a very memorable Ash Wednesday in 2009 when only half the choir (and no conductor!) turned up for the service. She was a chorister at Washington National Cathedral, where she also made her professional debut in George Crumb's *Ancient Voices of Children*. Christine fully intended to become a respectable orthopaedic surgeon, but the combination of 8 am Chemistry lectures and the realisation that she loved singing in choirs more than anything else made her reconsider. Christine received her bachelor's degree in Music History and Theory from the University of Chicago, including a year spent in the Music Department at King's College London, and subsequently received her masters in Historical Performance from Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music. She then returned to London for a second masters degree in Vocal Studies from the Royal Academy of Music, and has been living in the UK since then. When not singing, Christine can often be found knitting jumpers, walking on mountains in Scotland, and hosting extravagant dinner parties.



**Jess Dandy** is a Cumbrian contralto and director of the mental health initiative, SongPath. A regular at Hampstead since 2017, Jess grew up vicariously in the tradition of Working Men's Choirs, singing hymns with her grandfather, and later formalising those early influences as a choral scholar at Trinity College, Cambridge, where she sometimes made time for her Modern & Medieval Languages degree, particularly when it involved spending a year masquerading as a student in Lyon. A postgraduate degree and fellowship at Guildhall School of Music & Drama followed, where she got to know Aidan & Cath, with some sporadic depping at Hampstead Parish Church back in 2013. She now divides her time (COVID-19 notwithstanding) between Cumbria & London, worming through books, and tramping where the mood takes her.



**Aidan Coburn** first sang with the senior choir at HPC when he was just sixteen in an undisclosed year, and has been involved with music making at the church in various ways ever since. Between then and now, Aidan read undergraduate music at Gonville and Caius College Cambridge and postgraduate vocal studies at Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Aidan taught academic music at The London Oratory School where, in addition to teaching the choristers, he also directed the internationally renowned Schola Cantorum, and ran the Singup Chorister Outreach Programme. As a singer, Aidan has worked with, amongst others, Glyndebourne and Wexford Festival Operas and at the Royal Opera House. In addition to singing, Aidan has performed widely as a conductor, having founded Shadwell Opera (with whom he won the International Herald Angel Award at Edinburgh Fringe Festival), and now conducting the Colla Voce Singers. At Hampstead, Aidan continues to sing in the senior choir as well as directing the Junior Choir and the Community Choir.



**James Robinson** graduated with distinction from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, having done his undergraduate degree in music at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. Recent ensemble projects include work with English Voices, Solomon's Knot, Ex Cathedra, Tenebrae, the BBC Singers, The OAE, and The Gabrieli Consort. He has also worked in Europe with Le Concert D'Astree and Morgens Dahl Kammerkor. He has been a regular deputy at Hampstead Parish Church since 2014. Recent solo oratorio projects include Britten's St Nicolas, Bach's B Minor Mass, Handel's Israel in Egypt, and the Monteverdi Vespers. In the past few months, James has performed both Schumann's Dichterliebe and Ravel's Cinq Chansons Populaires Grecques for Proud Songsters in London, as well as performing Dichterliebe in a new arrangement for string orchestra for Echo Ensemble back in November. He will perform the Brahms Liebeslieder for Proud Songsters on the 10<sup>th</sup> October, along with some Britten folk songs.



**Ben McKee** has been the regular bass at Hampstead Parish Church for the last eighteen months, namely attracted by the prospect of out-bassing his cousin, Malachy Frame. He began his career as a chorister at King's College, Cambridge, was a music scholar at The King's School, Canterbury, and then studied music at the University of Manchester. Whilst there, he co-founded the Halle Youth Choir, was assistant conductor of the Hallé Youth choir, and conducted the university's chamber choir, Ad Solem. As an accomplished bass-baritone, Ben has developed a reputation for both his consort work and performances of new music. In the UK, he is a member of Fieri Consort and Siglo de Oro and regularly sings with groups including the BBC Singers, The Gesualdo Six, Ex Cathedra, The Dunedin Consort, The English Concert, ORA Singers, EXAUDI and Tenebrae. Ben also performs abroad with Theatre of Voices, Chamber Choir Ireland, Coro Casa da Musica in Porto, and was formerly a member of Ars Nova, Copenhagen. As a chorus master, Ben has worked for Coro Casa da Musica under Paul Hillier, preparing the choir for especially challenging programmes including Ligeti's Drei Phantasien. As a soloist, Ben frequently sings oratorio, with recent appearances at the Gaida Festival in Vilnius and St Paul's Knightsbridge, Hampstead Parish Church and Chester Cathedral.

We're delighted that the **The Hampstead Players** are providing readers for this series of meditations, and that this week we're joined by Handley. The Hampstead Players are a notable amateur theatre group based at Hampstead Parish Church and founded in 1976 by the Vicar at that time, Graham Dowell. The Players generally perform two major productions a year, ranging from Shakespeare to Brecht, T.S. Eliot to Tom Stoppard, Anouilh to Arthur Miller. The group also makes dramatic contributions to church worship, and organises play-readings (most recently via Zoom), poetry evenings and literary hours throughout the year. In November 2019, the group staged a widely acclaimed production of The Sound of Music with live orchestra. Membership of The Hampstead Players is open to all who love creating good theatre. Further details on past productions and on becoming a member can be found at [www.hampsteadplayers.org.uk](http://www.hampsteadplayers.org.uk)



**Gaynor Bassey Fish** has been an amateur actor with the acclaimed Hampstead Players since 1987. Acting credits include Polly in Opera Wonyosi (Wole Soyinka's adaptation of The Threepenny Opera), Kentridge in The Biko Inquest (Ile-Ife/tour to the Black Arts Festival, New York) directed by Wole Soyinka and, with the Hampstead Players: Cleopatra in Antony and Cleopatra and Margaret in Richard III (both London/French Tour); Titania in A Midsummer Night's Dream; Ariel in The Tempest; Isabella in Measure for Measure; Hermione in The Winter's Tale; Laertes in Hamlet; Fool in King Lear; Stella in Racing Demon; Tituba in The Crucible; Elijah in Inherit the Wind; Chicago in Follow the Star; Zany in The Glass Slipper; Chorus in Murder in the Cathedral. She recently co-directed the Hampstead Players' popular production of The Sound of Music.

If you develop any symptoms of Coronavirus within 14 days of attending Hampstead Parish Church, you should refer to [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) or call 111 for advice on getting tested. In the event of testing positive, you must inform the NHS Test and Trace service of your attendance at Hampstead Parish Church.

## **NEXT WEEK**

### **EVENT SEVEN: THE ART OF THE PROPHETS**

12th October 7-8pm Live from Hampstead Parish Church, London

Sacred Song Recital: 'The Art of the Prophets – Martin Luther and the Gift of Song'

Jess Dandy, contralto

Dylan Perez, piano



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