

A stained glass artwork depicting the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child. Mary is shown from the chest up, wearing a blue robe with intricate patterns and a pinkish-brown veil. Her eyes are closed in a peaceful expression. The Christ Child is seated in her arms, wearing a white tunic and a blue sash. He has curly golden hair and a halo, with his eyes also closed. The background is dark, with some green foliage on the left and a red area on the right. The entire scene is framed by dark, thick lines representing the leaded glass panes.

**THE FIRST
NOWELL**

PORTSMOUTH
CATHEDRAL CHOIR

DAVID PRICE

CHRISTMAS CAROLS *from* PORTSMOUTH CATHEDRAL

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1	Fanfare for Once in Royal David's City, Once in Royal David's City	<i>Traditional, and George Arthur Richford & David Willcocks</i>	[2.53]
2	Veiled in darkness	<i>Glenn Rudolph</i>	[2.41]
3	Advent Prose	<i>Plainsong</i>	[5.03]
4	Bethlehem Down	<i>Peter Warlock, arr. David Hill</i>	[4.54]
5	Let us light a candle	<i>June Clark</i>	[2.26]
6	In dulci jubilo*	<i>Dieterich Buxtehude</i>	[2.22]
7	Two Advent Carols: People, look East	<i>Traditional, arr. Barry Ferguson</i>	[1.42]
8	The Angel Gabriel	<i>Traditional, arr. Edgar Pettman</i>	[2.36]
9	The Truth from Above	<i>Traditional, arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams</i>	[2.50]
10	Nova, Nova!	<i>Bob Chilcott</i>	[3.00]
11	There is no rose	<i>Philip Stopford</i>	[3.58]
12	Joys Seven	<i>Traditional, arr. Stephen Cleobury</i>	[3.26]
13	Nativitas: Reflection 8: O magnum mysterium**	<i>Philip Moore</i>	[4.32]
14	Ding Dong! Merrily on High	<i>Traditional, arr. Mack Wilberg</i>	[2.43]
15	The Sans Day Carol	<i>John Rutter</i>	[3.20]
16	The First Nowell	<i>Bob Chilcott</i>	[3.20]
17	All bells in paradise	<i>John Rutter</i>	[5.24]
18	Fanfare For Hark the Herald, Hark the Herald Angels Sing	<i>Traditional, and George Arthur Richford & David Willcocks</i>	[4.36]

Total Timings: [60.57]

Portsmouth Cathedral Choir
Sachin Gunga (organ accompaniment), Kim Chin* (organ)
The Band Of His Majesty's Royal Marines Collingwood
David Price** (organ, chimes and conductor)

FOREWORD

Whilst it's true that one shorthand term for Christians is 'an Easter People', Bishop Michael Perham (sometime Bishop of Gloucester) once suggested that Anglicans are 'a Christmas People'. This is undoubtedly true at Portsmouth where we have just added a fourth Carol Service to our Christmas celebrations and welcomed our biggest Christmas crowds ever to services and concerts in 2024.

The music of Advent and Christmas is rich and deeply rooted in the Anglican tradition and here on this album we give you a flavour of a Portsmouth Christmas. We have drawn on all the varied and wonderful events that Portsmouth Cathedral contributes to - from Christmas tours to Antwerp, Carol Services on board HMS Victory for The Second Sea Lord, live broadcasts on BBC TV and Radio as well as our regular round of services here in the Cathedral.

We are privileged to work regularly with musicians from The Band of His Majesty's Royal Marines alongside our own team of boy and girl choristers supported by our Choral Scholars and Lay Clerks.

We recorded these tracks over three nights in September and October 2024. For a choir of our kind, this involves the choristers coming to us after school and a quick tea to join with our Choral Scholars and Lay Clerks to sing for intense three hour recording sessions (with breaks) after the cathedral is locked for the evening. Portsmouth Cathedral is situated within yards of the mouth of Portsmouth Harbour, and so our vigilant engineer and producer had to be aware of any noise from passing ferries or naval vessels - as well as listening intently to the music. We hope you enjoy this snapshot of a Portsmouth Cathedral Christmas.

David Price
Organist and Master of the Choristers

You can find more information about our Music Foundation here:
www.portsmouthcathedral.org.uk/music



THE FIRST NOWELL

CHRISTMAS CAROLS *from* PORTSMOUTH CATHEDRAL

Biblical scholarship suggests that Mary was still a teenager, perhaps 16 or younger, when an angel appeared to her announcing she would bear a son named Jesus. Mary was engaged to be married at the time, and a virgin. No wonder she was 'greatly distressed', as St Luke's gospel puts it.

Some of Mary's trepidation can be felt in the Basque folk-carol ***The Angel Gabriel*** (Track 8), whose verses are bookended by a sense of minor-key introspection. A solemn tone also suffuses Vaughan Williams's English folk carol arrangement ***The truth from above*** (Track 9), despite the underlying certitude that God's plan is to 'redeem us by his Son'. For all the world-historical significance of Christ's birth, however, Mary's experience of it retains a striking human intimacy, as both Philip Moore's gentle organ meditation ***O magnum mysterium*** (Track 13) and Philip Stopford's tender ***There is no rose*** (Track 11) clearly demonstrate. June Clark's 1966 setting ***Let us light a candle*** (Track 5) distils a similarly restrained ambience, while marvelling that 'at this one space in time and place' we find 'containèd all the means of grace'.

A CAUSE FOR JOY

Daunting as the annunciation undoubtedly was for Mary, did she feel elation too? Bob Chilcott's **Nova, Nova!** (Track 10) suggests as much, in its energetically bounding rhythms. The sunny, upbeat demeanour of **People, look East** (Track 7), a Besançon carol tune to words by Eleanor Farjeon, reinforces Gabriel's message that 'Love, the Lord, is on the way'. So too do Buxtehude's brightly reassuring chorale prelude **In dulci júbilo** (Track 6) and the gently celebratory **All bells in paradise** (Track 17), written by John Rutter for the 2012 Nine Lessons and Carols at King's College, Cambridge.

Christ's arrival among humankind has, in the two millennia since, often engendered pure, unmitigated joy as a reaction. Mack Wilberg's jaunty arrangement of the traditional **Ding Dong! Merrily on High** (Track 14) expresses this, as does John Rutter's arrangement of **The Sans Day Carol** (Track 15), with its chirruping organ accompaniment. And the particular experiences of Mary, watching her son perform good works in the world, are breezily explored in Stephen Cleobury's arrangement of the medieval carol **Joys Seven** (Track 12).

A TOUCH OF BRASS

The ring of brass instruments can add a stirring ceremonial element to the singing of Christmas music, strengthening communal bonds among both performers and congregation. On this recording, The Band of His Majesty's Royal Marines Collingwood adds lustre to Bob Chilcott's 2023 setting of the traditional **The First Nowell** (Track 16), commissioned by The Church of England. Gleaming brass fanfares have also been added to **Once in Royal David's City** (Track 1) and **Hark the Herald Angels Sing** (Track 18). These were specially written by George Richford, professor of music at the Royal Marines, for Midnight Mass at Portsmouth Cathedral on 24 December 2023, a service broadcast on BBC television.

HOPE AMID THE DARKNESS

There is, of course, a darker side to the Christmas story, where the happy circumstances of Jesus's arrival in the world are grimly counterbalanced by the shocking manner of his later condemnation and death. Elements of Christ's future suffering are hauntingly foreshadowed in Peter Warlock's **Bethlehem Down** (Track 4). 'When He is King they will clothe Him in grave-sheets', verse three begins. 'Myrrh for embalming, and wood for a crown.' That the battle between good and evil is ever-present in human history, the 'voices of a world in grief' in Glenn Rudolph's carol **Veiled in darkness** (Track 2) remind us. The Christian hope is that the 'glorious light' of Christ can, triumphantly, 'darkness pierce again', and that God will, in the words of the solemn **Advent Prose** (Track 3), 'remember not our sins forever'.

Notes by Terry Blain, courtesy of BBC Music Magazine



PORTSMOUTH CATHEDRAL CHOIR

Today, Portsmouth Cathedral Choir features a top line of either boys or girls - both are heard on this album, though the two do not usually appear together in services. Singing in at least six services per week in the cathedral, the choir has also toured widely across Europe including, in recent years, to Belgium, Poland and the Nordic and Baltic countries. The back row of our choir is formed of a mix of Lay Clerks and Choral Scholars, the latter of whom work as assisting staff at our choir school, The Portsmouth Grammar School.

The choir takes a full part in leading Portsmouth's Cathedral Sing! Chorister Outreach Programme in Hampshire and Portsmouth schools in partnership with programmes like The Gabrieli ROAR programme and with the Diocese of Portsmouth's Choir Church projects.

As well as featuring on BBC Radio 3's Choral Evensong and BBC Television, we have recorded a number of albums with Convivium, Regent, Herald, Smudged Discs and this our first with Signum Records.

DAVID PRICE

David Price has been Organist and Master of the Choristers at Portsmouth Cathedral since 1996, before which he was Assistant Organist at Ely Cathedral. During his time at Portsmouth, he has made significant changes to the choir, including the introduction of girls in 2006, a Choral and Organ Scholar Scheme, additions to the cathedral organ and has built up its profile considerably. Also a regular organ recitalist who performs across the UK and beyond, he is a Honorary Fellow of The Royal School of Church Music and in 2013 Price was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of music by Portsmouth University in recognition of his contribution to the cultural life in Portsmouth Cathedral, the City of Portsmouth and beyond.

THE BAND OF HIS MAJESTY'S ROYAL MARINES COLLINGWOOD

RM Band Collingwood takes part in around 340 ceremonial and concert commitments a year. Each member can play at least two instruments, and the ensemble's broad range extends from classical and ceremonial music to arrangements of jazz and pop.

BOY CHORISTERS

Daniel Sands | *Head Chorister*
David Cuthbert | *Head Chorister*
Niki Muscat | *Dep Head Chorister*
Stanley Hill | *Dep Head Chorister*
Owen Mccauley
Alex Biddle
Samuel Martin
Thomas Reed Turrell
Daniel Ball
Hugh Nisbet
Max Keen
Raffique Callaghan
Oliver Cheesman
Thomas Gullifoyle
Thomas Patterson
Theo Patterson
Luca Shaw
Daniel Stearne
Micah Blackmore
Zachary Byrom
Edward Gao

GIRL CHORISTERS

Dawn Sands | *Head Chorister*
Anna Irvine-Capel | *Head Chorister*
Liberty Tickner | *Dep Head Chorister*
Pippa Elsley
Evelyn Cowhig
Olivia Dixon
Elsie Irvine-Capel
Jenna Hill
Grace Chesters
Honor Michell
Katharine Rustell
Maxine Mutanga
Charlotte Martin
Jessica Stearne
Eliana Byrom
Bea Martin
Darcey Repton
Joko Sowemimo-Coker

ALTOS

John Mitchell
Nick Pepin
Tim Angel

TENORS

Sam Corkin
Bryn Hughes
Theo Almond (Solo Track 3)
Joel Fernandez (Solo Track 5)
Josh Betley

BASSES

Alexander Wallace
Neil Sands
Jimmy Thomson (Solo Track 8)
Noah Toogood (Solo Track 8)





Recorded 29th September - 1 October 2024 in Portsmouth Cathedral, UK

Producer | George Richford
Recording Engineer | Tom Lewington
Recording Assistant | James Waterhouse
Mastering | Jennifer Howells

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