BEYOND THE MANGER

The Choir of BATH ABBEY

Huw Williams



Foreword

Choral music lies close to our hearts; it was in the local church choir that we received our first musical training. Christmas choral music holds an especially cherished place in that journey, for it was through this seasonal repertoire that we were introduced to the rich world of vocal writing spanning many centuries. We also gained an early sense of how music for the seasons can foster genuine community and joy, irrespective of one's creed.

Today, we recognise just how formative those experiences were, and we acknowledge the lasting impression that this special kind of music-making leaves on young singers, on listeners, and on the communities that gather around it. It makes us proud to champion recordings that place young musicians within a tradition of extraordinary depth, beauty, and continuity.

This album therefore reflects so much of what matters to us: musical excellence, local identity, and the passing on of a living choral inheritance.

At a time when there is growing momentum behind efforts to secure UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage status for English sacred choral music, we are glad to play our part in documenting a cherished tradition with a local choral foundation, bringing these voices to listeners around the world. And what better time to do so than at Christmas? After all, what is Christmas without—to borrow the words of a familiar carol—'sweet singing in the choir'?

Emma Pauncefort
Tom Pauncefort

Directors

Programme Notes

Christmas is undoubtedly the most memorable milestone in the Bath Abbey calendar. For three weeks each year, the famous and picturesque Bath Christmas Market surrounds our walls, drawing visitors from across the globe. Yet for many, the market acts as the threshold to a deeper discovery; it is during these weeks that the broadest possible audience encounters the Abbey's musical heart for the first time. December is a season of vibrant energy when the Abbey fills to capacity for a sequence of storied events—from the liturgical beauty of Advent and the Midnight Eucharist to our celebrated Choir carol concerts, including our very popular 'Shoppers' Carols'. It is a time when our music reaches beyond our regular congregation to welcome the curious and the festive alike.

Following our celebrations last year for the 150th anniversary of the Boys' Choir with our album *Everlasting Light*, we now turn that spotlight towards the future. In 2027, the Abbey Girls' Choir will celebrate its 30th anniversary, and there is no better time than Christmas to showcase their flourishing talent. Just as the Abbey's architecture stands as a monument to history, the evolving voices of the Girls' Choir represent the living, breathing future of our foundation. Since their inception in 1997, they have led worship with great distinction. On this recording, they join our Lay Clerks to navigate some of the most challenging and evocative repertoire in the choral tradition, offering a glimpse into the musical excellence that defines the Abbey year-round.

This album brings you a carefully curated combination of new and old carols, where well-known favourites sit alongside contemporary arrangements and several world premiere recordings. Two beautiful

Welsh carol melodies are featured—one by George Guest and a brand-new arrangement of *Sisialau'r Awel Fwyn* (*The Gentle Breeze Blows*) by Jeffrey Howard, commissioned for this project—alongside folk-inspired pieces such as *Now Tell Us, Gentle Mary* and *Masters in This Hall*. We are also delighted to include Benjamin Britten's arrangement of *Greensleeves*, set here to the text *What Child Is This?*, recorded here for the first time.

The programme captures the diverse spirits of the season, from the jazzy, energetic pulse of *Follow That Star* and John Gardner's rhythmic *When Christ Was Born of Mary Free*, to the hauntingly beautiful *Peace on Earth* by Errollyn Wallen. Listeners will also find evocative works by Judith Bingham, Roderick Williams, and Cecilia McDowall, as well as charming 20th-century pieces for upper voices by Edmund Rubbra and John Ireland. The album opens with the dramatic and vibrant *All and Some* by John Byrt and features 'home-grown' arrangements by myself and one of my predecessors, Dudley Holroyd. Combined with popular classics like *The Christmas Song* and *O Holy Night*, we hope this collection reflects the immense variety of the Abbey's musical life. We invite you to enjoy the unique sound of the Abbey Girls and Lay Clerks, performing with harp, piano, and organ within the incomparable acoustic of Bath Abbey and to join our growing Abbey community in celebrating the joy of Christmas.

Huw Williams, Bath, 2026

John Byrt (1940–2021)

All and Some

Soloists: Ruth Williams, Amy Randall, Graham Neal, Asher Randall

Nowell sing we, both all and some,
now *Rex pacificus* is ycome.

Exortum est in love and lysse
now Christ his gree he ganus gysse,
and with his body brought to bliss:
Nowell sing we, both all and some.

De fructu ventris of Mary bright,
both God and man in her alight,
out of disease he did us dight:
Nowell sing we, both all and some.

Puer natus to us was sent,
to bliss us brought, fro bale us blent,
and else to woe we had ywent:
Nowell sing we, both all and some.

Lux fulgebit with love and light,
in Mary mild his pennon pight,
in her took kind with manly might,
Nowell sing we, both all and some.

Gloria tibi, ay, and bliss,
God unto his grace he us wysse,
the rent of heaven that we not miss,
Nowell sing we, both all and some.

Nowell sing we, both all and some,
now *Rex pacificus* is ycome.

Anon. 16th century

John Byrt (1940–2021) was born in Bristol and studied the organ at Clifton College under Douglas Fox. He later became Organ Scholar at St John's College, Oxford, where, after graduating and whilst a fellow, he conducted Cumnor Choral Society, to whom *All and Some* is dedicated, before going on to direct the Schola Cantorum of Oxford. He appears to have been in his early twenties when he wrote this joyful carol, with its characteristically rich Byrt harmonies, especially at the close. He went on to set

other carols, and his final composition was a setting of Nathaniel Wanley's *The Offering of the Eastern Kings*. A particular favourite among his works is his setting of Hardy's poem *The Oxen*, sung at the unveiling of his blue plaque in Tiverton.

Edmund Rubbra (1901–1986)
A Hymn to the Virgin, Op. 3 No. 2

Of on that is so fayr and bright
Velut maris stella
Brighter than the day is light,
Parens et puella:
I crie to the, thou see to me,
Levedy, preye thi Sone for me, Tam pia,
That ic mote come to thee, Maria

Levedy, flour of alle thing, Rosa sina spina
Thu bere Jhesu, Hevene king,
Gratia divina:
Of alle thu ber'st the pris,
Levedy, Queene of Paradys, Electa:
Mayde milde, moder es effecta
Anon. Middle English and Latin c.1300

Edmund Rubbra was born in Northampton and studied at Reading University, where his teacher was Gustav Holst, who encouraged him to apply for a scholarship at the Royal College of Music. After the Second World War, Rubbra became a Roman Catholic, and he was invited to take up a position as lecturer at Oxford University in the music department, which was formed in 1947. There, he influenced a generation of future British musicians and composers. This elegant setting of *A Hymn to the Virgin* uses a Middle English text, with unusual spellings. Set for soprano, sung on this album by the senior Abbey Girls, it is accompanied by a harp. The lilting ostinato harp and the free melodic lines, with their melismatic writing especially on the Latin phrases, create a beautiful and expressive work.

Roderick Williams (b. 1965)
O Adonai, et Dux domus Israël
Soloists: Alice Osborne, Ruth Williams, Isla Byrne, Orla Reddin, Ella Barker, Rosie McDonald, Evie Shepperdson, Shannon Williams, Alastair Comery

O Adonai, et dux domus Israël,
veni ad redimendum nos in brachio extento.
Qui Moyse in igne flammae rubi apparuisti,
et ei in Sina legem dedisti:

O sacred Lord of ancient Israel,
come, stretch out your mighty hand to set us free.
Who showed himself to Moses in the burning bush,
and gave him the holy law on Sinai Mountain:
Traditional Advent Antiphon

Roderick Williams is one of the UK's most sought-after baritones and is in great demand on the concert platform and in recitals encompassing repertoire from the Baroque to world premieres. Opera engagements have included major roles at leading opera houses worldwide, including the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, English National Opera, Dutch National Opera, Dallas Opera, the Bregenz Festival, and Oper Köln. In 2016, Williams won the Royal Philharmonic Society's Singer of the Year award, and in June 2017 was awarded an OBE for services to music. He also performed at the Coronation of King Charles III in 2023.

Alongside his singing, Williams is also an established composer. This atmospheric and dramatic setting features an improvisatory element. After the initial soprano solo (sung by Alice Osborne), a series of sopranos sing a repeating refrain, creating a mesmerising halo effect. The altos, tenors and basses then

sing a chant with no direct rhythmic link to the sopranos. In the middle of the piece, another element is added to the texture: a tenor solo, which is a chant in free time with some orthodox-style ornaments in the solo part. The juxtaposition of the different layers of music creates an interesting and ritualistic effect overall which captures the mood of this Advent text.

Mel Tormé (1925–1999)
Robert Wells (1922–1998)
The Christmas Song
Arr. Peter Gritton (b. 1963)

This famous Christmas song, by two Americans, Mel Tormé (1925–1999) and Robert Wells (1922–1998), was written in 1945. The words are by both, and the music is primarily by Tormé. It was made famous by Nat King Cole's recording of it the following year, and subsequent recordings with orchestra later in 1946 and again in 1953 .

Tormé noted that the song was written during an exceptionally warm July in 1945 and was conceived partly as a way of 'cooling off'. He also said that it was written within 40 minutes, which is quite remarkable for one of the most famous songs ever written. Some consider it to be the most popular Christmas song of all time.

Peter Gritton, former Director of Music at St Paul's School, has arranged this song for unaccompanied choir. As well as being a professional countertenor singing with Tenebrae and I Fagiolini, Gritton composes and works extensively as an adjudicator, educator, and choir director.

John Gardner (1917–2011)
When Christ Was Born of Mary Free

When Christ was born of Mary free,
In Bethlem, in that fair city,
Angels sung e'er with mirth and glee:
In excelsis gloria.

Herdmen beheld these Angels bright,
To them appeared with great light,
And said, "God's Son is born this night":
In excelsis gloria.

This King is come to save His kind,
In the Scripture as we find;
Therefore this song have we in mind:
In excelsis gloria.

Then, dear Lord, for Thy great grace,
Grant us the bliss to see Thy face,
Where we may sing to Thy solace:
In excelsis gloria.
Anon. 15th century

John Gardner was educated at Wellington College and became the Hubert Parry Organ Scholar at Exeter College, Oxford. He later taught at the Royal Academy of Music from 1956. He was also a part-time Director of Music at St Paul's Girls' School, succeeding Gustav Holst and Herbert Howells, later becoming Director of Music at Morley College.

His most famous composition is the carol *Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day. When Christ Was Born* is scored for two-part upper-voice choir. The anonymous text is from the 15th century. This rhythmic and jazzy carol sets the verses in one part, whilst the refrain divides into two with imitation between the two voices.

Judith Bingham (b. 1952)
Corpus Christi Carol
Soloist: Alice Osborne

Lulley, lulla, lulley, lulla,
the falcon hath borne my make away,
he bare him up, he bare him down,
he bare him into an orchard brown.

Lulley, lulla, lulley, lulla,
and in that orchard there was an hall
that was hangèd with purple and pall,
and in that hall there was a bed,
it was hangèd with gold so red.

Lulley, lulla, lulley, lulla,
and in that bed there lies a knight,
his woundès bleeding day and night.

Lulley, lulla, lulley, lulla,
and by that bedside there weepeth a may,
and she weepeth both day and night,

Lulley, lulla, lulley, lulla,
And by that bedside there standeth a stone,
Corpus Christi written thereon,
Lulley, lulla, lulley, lulla.

Lulley, lulla, lulley, lulla!
Anon. 16th century

Judith Bingham was a professional singer and a member of the BBC Singers for many years. She studied composition at the Royal Academy of Music and served as the BBC Singers' Composer in Association between 2004 and 2009. She has written music for many choirs, including King's College, Cambridge, The Three Choirs Festival, and the BBC Symphony Chorus at the Proms.

In 2017, she wrote *The Sleeping Soul* to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Bath Abbey Girls Choir; this atmospheric and evocative anthem was recorded on the album *Caritas* in 2022. Her *Corpus Christi Carol* uses an anonymous 16th-century text. There is rich imagery in this poem, and Bingham creates a haunting scene. The organ plays a repeated ostinato, and the theme of the phrase 'Lulley, lulla' has a poignant and bittersweet quality. This carol was included in the *Choirbook for the Queen*, dedicated to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of her Accession on 6th February 1952.

Traditional
Quem pastores laudavere
Arr. John Scott (1956–2015)
Soloists: Ruth Williams, Isla Byrne, Shannon Williams, Ella Barker

Quem pastores laudavere,
quibus angeli dixere,
absit vobis iam timere,
natus est rex gloriae.

Ad quem magi ambulabant,
aurum, thus, myrrham portabant,
immolabant haec sincere
nato regi gloriae.

Christo regi, Deo nato,
per Mariam nobis dato,
merito resonet vere
Laus, honor et gloria.

(Shepherds left their flocks astraying,
God's command with joy obeying,
when they heard the angel saying:
'Christ is born in Bethlehem'.

Wise men came from far, and saw Him:
knelt in homage to adore Him;
precious gifts they laid before Him:
gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Let us now in ev'ry nation
sing his praise with exultation.
All the world shall find salvation
in the birth of Mary's Son.)
Anon. German, 14th century

Born in Wakefield, where he became a chorister at the cathedral, John Scott went on to become Organ Scholar at St John's College, Cambridge, under the guidance of George Guest. He became Assistant Organist at St Paul's Cathedral and Southwark Cathedral in 1978 before later serving full-time at St Paul's. He was Organist and Director of Music at St Paul's Cathedral between 1990 and 2004.

One of the outstanding organists of his generation, he won the Bach International Organ Competition at Leipzig in 1984 and went on to play at most international venues throughout his career. During his tenure at St Paul's, the choir toured and recorded extensively; his series of *English Anthems* and the complete *Psalm Cycle* received critical acclaim.

The choir appeared at the BBC Proms and commissioned many famous composers, including John Rutter, John Tavener, William Mathias, Peter Maxwell Davies, and Harrison Birtwistle, to name but a few. He became Organist and Director of Music at St Thomas Church, Fifth Avenue, in 2004, where he served with distinction until his untimely death in August 2015. This charming arrangement of a 14th-century German melody is for upper voices and was written for the choristers of St Paul's Cathedral.

Traditional

Now Tell Us, Gentle Mary

Arr. Bernard Massey (1927–2011)

Now tell us, gentle Mary,
What did Gabriel say to you?
Now tell us of the tidings
That he brought to Galilee.
'He told me I was favoured,
That I would be the one
God chose to be the mother
Of Jesus, His own Son.'
Now tell us, gentle Mary,
Of the birth of Christ that morn.
Now tell us of Christ Jesus,
Where it was that He was born?
'Not in a palace glorious,
Not in a silken bed,
But in a stable humble
Did Jesus lay His head.'

Anon. French Traditional Melody, 15th century

This beautiful French melody, probably dating from the 15th century, is commonly known as 'Chartres'. In this arrangement, it is harmonised by Bernard Massey (1927–2011), an organist from Hertfordshire. He served as organist at the Congregational Church in Redhill from 1964 to 1988 and later became President of the Organ Club from 1968 to 1970. He also edited the *Bulletin of the Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland* for the Hymn Society, and his hymns and arrangements appear in several hymnbooks.

The words are translated from the French carol by William B. Lindsay (1813–1895). To provide a folksy lilt, we added percussion, giving the music an elegant, dance-like quality.

Traditional

Suo Gân

Arr. George Guest (1924–2002)
Soloist: Ella Barker

Huna blentyn ar fy mynwes,
Clyd a chynnes ydyw hon;
Breichiau mam sy'n dynn amdanat,
Cariad mam sy dan fy mron;
Ni chaiff dim amharu'th gyntun,
Ni wna undyn â thi gam;
Huna'n dawel, annwyl blentyn,
Huna'n fwyn ar fron dy fam.

Huna'n dawel, heno, huna,
Huna'n fwyn, y tlws ei lun;
Pam yr wyt yn awr yn gwenu,

Gwenu'n dirion yn dy hun?
Ai angylion fry sy'n gwenu,
Arnat ti yn gwenu'n llon,
Tithau'n gwenu'n ôl dan huno,
Huno'n dawel ar fy mron?

Paid ag ofni, dim ond deilen
Gura, gura ar y ddôr;
Paid ag ofni, ton fach unig
Sua, sua ar lan y môr;
Huna blentyn, nid oes yma
Ddim i roddi iti fraw;
Gwena'n dawel yn fy mynwes.
Ar yr engyl gwynion draw.

(Sleep child upon my bosom,
It is cosy and warm;
Mother's arms are tight around you,
A mother's love is in my breast;
Nothing shall disturb your slumber,
Nobody will do you harm;
Sleep in peace, dear child,
Sleep quietly on your mother's breast.

Sleep peacefully tonight, sleep;
Gently sleep, my lovely;
Why are you now smiling,
Smiling gently in your sleep?
Are angels above smiling on you,
As you smile cheerfully,
Smiling back and sleeping,
Sleeping quietly on my breast?

Do not fear, it is nothing but a leaf
Beating, beating on the door;
Do not fear, only a small wave
Murmurs, murmurs on the seashore;
Sleep child, there's nothing here
Nothing to give you fright;
Smile quietly in my bosom,
On the blessed angels yonder.)
Welsh Traditional Melody

George Guest was born in Bangor in North Wales, where he was also a cathedral chorister. After a brief spell as Sub-Organist at Chester Cathedral, he became Organist and Master of the Choristers at St John's College, Cambridge, between 1951 and 1991. During this time, he made over 60 recordings and established an enviable reputation for the choir.

Under his guidance, the choir toured widely and commissioned major composers, including Herbert Howells and Michael Tippett. Many of his organ scholars went on to remarkable fame as well. He became interested in and learned the Welsh language during his time at Cambridge; he later adjudicated at Welsh choral competitions and at the Eisteddfod.

This simple but effective arrangement of the Welsh lullaby, ***Suo Gân***, alternates phrases sung by a soprano soloist accompanied by a simple organ part with the full choir, often with lower voices humming.

Marin Marais (1656–1728)
Masters in This Hall
Arr. Huw Williams (b. 1971)

Masters in This Hall
Hear ye news today
Brought from oversea
and ever I you pray.

Nowell, nowell, nowell
Nowell sing we clear!
Holpen are all folk on earth
Born is God's Son so dear.

Nowell, nowell, nowell,
Nowell sing we loud!
God today hath poor folk rais'd
and cast adown the proud.

Then to Bethlem town
we went two and two
and in a sorry place
heard the oxen low.
Nowell, nowell, nowell…

Therein did we see
a sweet and goodly may
And a fair old man
upon the straw she lay.

Nowell, nowell, nowell…

And a little child
on her arm had she
Wot ye who is this
saith the hinds to me.

Nowell, nowell, nowell…

This is Christ the Lord,
masters be ye glad,
Christmas is come in
and no folk should be sad.
Nowell, nowell, nowell…
William Morris (1834–1896)

This melody was composed by the French composer Marin Marais as a dance for his opera *Alcyone* in 1706. The English poet William Morris added the English words sung here in about 1860. I chose to arrange this melody in 2015 for the Stroud Choral Society's Christmas carol concert.

The melody is arranged in different ways for each verse: verse one features the sopranos; verse two is primarily for tenors and basses; and in verse three, the melody moves from the sopranos to the altos. Verse four moves into a different key and is slower, featuring spread chords in the accompaniment. However, verse five returns to the main tempo in a new key, with a slightly cheeky semitone modulation for the last half of the refrain!

John Ireland (1879–1962)
The Holy Boy

Lowly, laid in a manger,
With oxen brooding nigh,
The Heav'nly Babe is lying
His Maiden Mother by.
Lo! the wayfaring sages,
Who journey'd far through the wild,
Now worship, silent adoring;
The Boy, The Heav'nly Child!

Leave your work and your playtime,
And kneel in homage and prayer,
The Prince of Love is smiling
Asleep in His cradle there!
Bend your heart to the wonder,
The Birth, the Mystery mild,
And worship, silent, adoring,
The Boy, the Heav'nly Child!

Dim the light of the lantern,
And bare the mean abode,
Yet gold and myrrh and incense
Proclaim the Son of God.
Lowly, laid in a manger
By Virgin undefiled,
Come worship, silent adoring,
The Boy, the Heav'nly Child.
Hubert A. Brown (fl. early 20th century)

John Ireland was born in Cheshire and studied piano and organ at the Royal College of Music under Stanford. He later became organist of St Luke's, Chelsea, serving from 1904 to 1926, and is best known for his piano music and songs. *The Holy Boy* exists in several forms, including versions for solo piano, solo organ, and solo voice. The original version, for piano, was written for Christmas 1913; the words by his solicitor, Hubert A. Brown, were added later and published in 1938. With its elegant, wistful melody and graceful harmony, *The Holy Boy* remains one of his best-known works.

Michael Praetorius (1571–1621)
Es ist ein Ros' Entsprungen
Arr. Jan Sandström (b. 1954)
Soloists: Alice Osborne, Phil Draisey, Alastair Comery, Mike Entwisle

Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen,
aus einer Wurzel zart,
als uns die Alten sungen,
von Jesse kam die Art.
Und hat ein Blümlein bracht
mitten im kalten Winter,
wohl zu der halben Nacht.

(There is a flower springing,
from tender roots it grows.
From Eden beauty bringing,
from Jesse's stem a rose.
On his green branch it grows
A bud that in cold winter,
At midnight will unclose.)
Anon. German, 15th century

This atmospheric and mysterious setting, written in 1990 by Swedish composer Jan Sandström, takes the original harmonised version by Michael Praetorius and adds another layer of a humming choir.

The added harmonies create a musical image of the Rose blooming; the humming choir enters from the lowest parts and ascends to a rich chord before each phrase of the Praetorius chorale begins. Sandström was born in Vilhelmina and grew up in Stockholm, where he studied at the Royal College of Music.

John Hughes (1896–1968)
Sisialau'r Awel Fwyn
Arr. Jeffrey Howard (b. 1969)

Sisialai'r awel fwyn dros fryn a dôl
o gwmpas Bethlehem mhell, bell yn ôl;
ŵyn bach morwyn â'r ôd branciai yn ffôl,
gwyliai'r bugeiliaid hwy 'mhell, bell yn ôl
Sisialai'r awel fwyn…

Canau angylion llon uwch bryn a dôl,
Fwyn garol iddo ef 'mhell, bell yn ol;
ac er mai preseb gwael roed iddo'n gôl,
daeth Crist i Fethlehem 'mhell, bell yn ôl.

Sisialai'r awel fwyn…

(*The gentle breeze blows across hill and meadow*
around Bethlehem
long, long ago;

little lambs as white as the ode
playing around foolishly,
the shepherds watched them
long, long ago.
The gentle breeze…

Merry angels sang above a hill and meadow
a sweet carol for him, a long time ago
and although he had a poor manger
Christ came to Bethlehem long, long ago.)
Heidelberg Press

Sisialau'r awel fwyn, composed by John Hughes (Rhosllannerchrugog, Denbighshire 1896–1968), is a Welsh carol which describes a gentle breeze meandering through an idyllic meadow scene with shepherds and angels long, long ago. Christ's majesty comes to us on earth in the lowliness of this Bethlehem manger. Jeffrey Howard's arrangement was commissioned by Bath Abbey Music Society in 2025 for this recording. Scored for three upper voices, with the accompaniment for harp, the elegant and lilting music captures the character of the gentle breeze.

Traditional

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)
Thomas Armstrong (1898–1994)
Arr. Huw Williams (b. 1971) | Dudley Holroyd (1933–1998)
Soloists: Ruth Williams, Alastair Comery

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by:
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing to God the King,
And peace to men on earth;
For Christ is born of Mary;
And, gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wond'ring love.

How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming;
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him
still, The dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in;
Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel.
Philip Brooks (1835–1893)

The words of this famous carol are by Bishop Phillips Brooks. The third verse was set by Dudley Holroyd (1933–1998), Organist and Master of the Choristers at Bath Abbey between 1967 and 1983, and is written for unaccompanied choir. Born in Halifax, Yorkshire, Holroyd became Organist of High Wycombe Parish Church and Director of Music at Aylesbury Grammar School before moving to his post at Bath Abbey.

I arranged the first verse especially for this recording. It is set for unaccompanied choir and features two soloists over a mostly humming choir. Verse two is harmonised by Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958), and the final verse harmony and descant are by Thomas Armstrong (1898–1994).

Errollyn Wallen (b. 1958)

Peace on Earth

And snow falls down on me.
Peace on Earth.
The night is dark and soft.
Peace on Earth.
The lights that sparkle in the square,
The smoke that lingers in the air.
Peace on Earth.

And grace falls down on me.
Peace on Earth.
The dark will turn aside.
Peace on Earth.
The fires that burn in every hearth
Do sing our praise of Christmas past.
Peace on Earth.
Errollyn Wallen

Errollyn Wallen CBE is Master of the King's Music. Appointed in July 2024, she became the first Black person ever to hold this distinguished role. Wallen is a

multi-award-winning, Belize-born British composer, named as one of the world's top twenty, most-performed living classical composers. Her prolific output includes over twenty operas and a large catalogue of orchestral, chamber, and vocal works, which are performed and broadcast throughout the world.

She has composed for the opening ceremony of the 2012 Paralympic Games, the Queen's Golden and Diamond Jubilees, a specially commissioned song for COP26, and a re-imagining of *Jerusalem* for the Last Night of the Proms in 2020. BBC Radio 3 featured her as Composer of the Week, and she has made several radio documentaries.

Peace on Earth is set for keyboard accompaniment, played here on the harp with a soprano melody. The evocative and haunting harmonies create a mesmerising effect—the simple but effective harp accompaniment contrasts beautifully with the *cantabile* melody.

Traditional

Personent Hodie

Arr. Gustav Holst (1874–1934)
Arr. Huw Williams (b. 1971)

On this day earth shall ring
with the song children sing
to the Lord, Christ our King,
born on earth to save us;
Him the Father gave us.
Ideo-o-o, ideo-o-o,
Ideo gloria in excelsis Deo!

His the doom, ours the mirth;
when he came down to earth,
Bethlehem saw his birth;
ox and ass beside him,
from the cold would hide him.
God's bright star, o'er his head,
wise men three to him led;
kneel they low by his bed,
lay their gifts before him,
praise him and adore him.

On this day angels sing;
with their song earth shall ring,
praising Christ, heaven's King,
born on earth to save us;
peace and love he gave us.
Anon. Latin, 16th century; trans. Jane M. Joseph (1894–1929)

Gustav Holst's (1874–1934) forthright setting of this melody, *Personent Hodie*, has always been a highlight at Christmas. The melody was first published in *Piae Cantiones* in 1582. This setting of the words used here is by Jane Marian Joseph (1894–1929) and is based on the Latin words from *Piae Cantiones*.

I adapted the harmonised verses, mostly inspired by Holst's original, whilst working at St Paul's Cathedral (1998–2008); this was partly because the Vicars Choral—the professional singers at St Paul's who sing the alto, tenor, and bass parts—always complained about singing so many verses in harmony! The words and music were recently published in the *Revised English Hymnal* (2023).

The Little Drummer Boy

Katherine K. Davis, Henry V. Onorati and Harry Simeone
(DELAWARE-MUSIC CORP (NS) and EMI MILLS MUSIC, INC. (ASCAP)
All rights administered by WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC INTERNATIONAL LTD.)
Soloists: Orla Reddin, Asher Randall

Alongside his work with the UK's leading professional choirs, Matthew Morley has served since 1993 as Organist of St Bride's Church, Fleet Street—the historic

'journalists' church'. Arranged in 2011 for a charity service, Morley's theatrical arrangement of *The Little Drummer Boy* breathes new life into Katherine Kennicott Davis' much-loved carol.

Conceived both musically and choreographically, the piece draws playful inspiration from the iconic Bing Crosby and David Bowie duet, whilst subtly echoing the rhythmic persistence of Ravel's *Boléro* and the dramatic textures of Britten's *Saint Nicolas*. It offers a touching, modern reimagining of the humble boy offering his simple gift before the Christ Child.

Cecilia McDowall (b. 1951)

O Oriens

O Oriens, splendor lucis aeternae,
et sol justitiae:
veni, et illumina
sedentes in tenebris,
et umbra mortis.
(O Morning Star, splendour of light
eternal,
and sun of righteousness:
come, and enlighten
those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death.)
Anon. Latin, 5th century, from the *O Antiphons*

This work was commissioned by Merton College, Oxford, in 2012 as part of the 750th anniversary of the founding of the college. The rich and warm harmonies, together with the contrasts between the upper and lower voices in the choir, capture the vision of light and darkness with great effect.

Cecilia McDowall (b. 1951) is one of the UK's leading composers of sacred and secular choral music. She has won many awards including, in 2014, the British Composer Award in the Choral category for her haunting work, *Night Flight*. McDowall's distinctive style fuses fluent melodic lines with occasional dissonant harmonies and rhythmic exuberance. Her music has been commissioned and performed by leading organisations such as the City of London Sinfonia, London Mozart Players, Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Chorus, St Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Cathedral, BBC Singers, The Sixteen, Tenebrae, Oxford and Cambridge choirs, and the Kansas City Chorale.

Peter Gritton (b. 1963)

Follow That Star

Dmm, dmm, dmm, dmm
ba da 'n' doo da da 'n' ba da 'n' doo da

One dark and stormy evening,
Through the wind and rain,
There came a sight worth seeing,
'cause it wasn't gonna happen again
Three Kings.
They'd seen a bright light in the sky,
Without knowing who, what, when,
where, why,
They grabbed their gifts and off they
went,
Three Kings

They don't know what to do, just follow
that star

They had to find the little town,
They had to find the little town,
It was not easy to be found.
Peter Gritton

This is a fun and jazzy-style piece with both words and music by Peter Gritton. The character, represented by the 'slightly stompy' musical instruction, is something which the Abbey choristers enjoy, and it has become a firm favourite at our Christmas concert.

The basses sing a percussive bass, like the double bass in a jazz band, and the tenors sing a jazzy melody: 'ba da 'n' doo'. The melody is mostly in the soprano part and is full of jazzy syncopated rhythms.

Adolphe Adam (1803–1856)

O Holy Night

Arr. John West (1863–1929)

O Holy Night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of our dear Saviour's birth;
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
'Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!

Fall on your knees; Oh hear the Angel voices!
O night divine, O night when Christ was born

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming,
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand;
So, led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,
Here come the wise men from the Orient land.
The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger,
In all our trials born to be our friend;
He knows our need, He guardeth us from danger;
Behold your King; before Him lowly bend!
Original French version:
Placide Cappeau (1808–1877)
English version:
adapted by John Sullivan Dwight (1813–1893)

One of the UK's most popular Christmas carols, *O Holy Night* was written in 1847 by the French composer and teacher Adolphe Adam (1803–1856). The elegant melody, supported by flowing arpeggiated accompaniment, has great poise and balance, whilst the refrain builds dramatically to a grand climax at the end of each verse. Adam, the son of a well-known composer, was discouraged by his father from pursuing music as a profession, yet he went on to compose several operas and later became a professor at the Paris Conservatoire. The original French title is *Minuit, chrétiens!* ('Midnight, Christians!'). John West's arrangement helped establish the carol as a staple of the English Christmas choral tradition. A prolific English organist, composer, and editor, West (1863–1929) was a central figure in late-Victorian and Edwardian church music.

Dieterich Buxtehude (1637–1707)

Ihr lieben Christen, freut euch nun, BuxWV 51: VII. Aria: Komm doch, Jesu, deine Kirche

Arr. Huw Williams (b. 1971)

So komm doch, Jesu, komme bald,
uns gänzlich zu befreien,
komm, komm, unser Seelen Aufenthalt,
uns ewig zu erfreuen.
Komm, komm, Jesu, komm,
Und säume nicht,
laß uns in deines Himmels Licht
dein ewiges Lob ausschreien.

(So come, Jesus, come quickly
to fully free us,
come, come our souls' resting place,
to gladden us eternally.
Come, come, Jesus, come,
and don't delay,
let us, in your heavenly light,
shout out your eternal praise.)
Erasmus Alber (fl. 16th century)

This lilting and charming trio for alto, tenor, and bass comes from Buxtehude's Christmas Cantata *Ihr lieben Christen, freut euch nun, BuxWV 51*. Originally scored for strings, I arranged it for organ whilst working at St Paul's Cathedral, where lower-voices-only services in December offered a welcome opportunity to introduce some Baroque repertoire. Although Buxtehude is best known for his dramatic and highly accomplished organ music, he also wrote a substantial body of choral music. Whereas his keyboard writing is distinctly Germanic and influenced composers such as Bach, the choral and orchestral writing in *So komm doch Jesu* is more Italianate in style. The result is music of graceful, dance-like elegance.

Traditional

What Child Is This?

Arr. Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)

What child is this, who, laid to rest
on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems
sweet,
while shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
whom shepherds worship and angels
sing:
Haste, haste to bring him praise,
the babe, the son of Mary.

Why lies he in such mean estate,
where ox and ass are feeding?
Come, have no fear, God's Son is here,
His love all loves exceeding:
Nails, spear shall pierce him through,
the cross be borne for me, for you:
Hail, hail, the Saviour comes,
the babe, the son of Mary.

So bring him incense, gold and myrrh,
all tongues and peoples own him,
the King of kings salvation brings,
let every heart enthrone him:
Raise, raise your song on high,
while Mary sings a lullaby,
joy, joy for Christ is born,
the babe, the son of Mary.
William Chatterton Dix (1837–1898)

Britten's arrangement of the tune *Greensleeves* remained unpublished at the time of his death and was not issued until 2001. The piano accompaniment, with its syncopations, gives the music a haunting character. Britten described the spread chords in the left hand as sounding 'like a harp', whilst the sustained syncopated notes in the right hand are marked 'like a cor anglais'. The original *Greensleeves* melody was first entered in the Stationers' Register in 1580 and is often, though uncertainly, attributed to King Henry VIII. Britten arranged many folk songs throughout his life, and this beautiful setting is thought to date from 1941, when he was still living in the United States.

Traditional

We Wish You a Merry Christmas

Arr. Arthur Warrell (1882–1939)

We wish you a merry Christmas and a
happy New Year.

Good tidings we bring to you and your
kin.
We wish you a merry Christmas and a
happy New Year.

Now bring us some figgy pudding

And bring some out here. Good tidings …

For we all like figgy pudding,
So bring some out here. Good tidings…

And we won't go till we've got some,
So bring some out here. Good tidings…
Anon. West Country Traditional,
16th century

Arthur Warrell was born in Farmborough, near Bath, and educated in Bristol. He became Assistant Organist at Bristol Cathedral before later being appointed Organist of Clifton Parish Church. In 1909, he joined the University of Bristol as a lecturer and founded the University Choir, Orchestra, and Madrigal Singers. In this delightful arrangement of the well-known West Country carol, the melody passes between the voices: the treble line carries it in verses one and four, the tenors in verse two, and the altos in verse three. Among the most striking features of the arrangement are the acceleration towards the end of the final chorus and the top B-flat in the soprano line. The arrangement therefore carries a special local resonance and provides a particularly fitting conclusion to this Bath Abbey project.

Conductor



Huw Williams is Director of Music at Bath Abbey, where he directs its renowned choirs of boys, girls, and lay clerks. A recent recording, *Caritas*, was featured on Classic FM and described as 'a choir at the peak of its powers' (*Church Music Quarterly*). One critic wrote, 'I expected to like this disc; but readers, I loved it' (*Choir & Organ*). Sir John Rutter praised 'Huw Williams and his music team's truly outstanding achievement in bringing the ambition and standard of music at Bath Abbey to the level of any leading cathedral in Britain… a shining example of what can be achieved without the benefit of a choir school'.

Before taking up his post at Bath Abbey, Huw served as Director of Music at Her Majesty's Chapel Royal, St James's Palace, where his predecessors included Tallis, Byrd, and Purcell. There he directed the music for Prince George's christening, the Queen's Christmas Message, and the annual Remembrance Sunday service at the Cenotaph. He was previously Organist at St Paul's Cathedral for ten years, playing for numerous high-profile and state occasions. One of his recordings there, *Organ Spectacular*, received a

Gramophone Editor's Choice award.

He also enjoys an international career as an organist. In 2025, he performed the complete organ works of J. S. Bach at Bath Abbey. He appears as accompanist on 20 recordings with St Paul's and Hereford Cathedrals and with The Sixteen.

Born in Swansea and a fluent Welsh speaker, Huw was the subject of a documentary on S4C. His compositions have been performed at St Paul's Cathedral, Buckingham Palace, Bath Abbey, and further afield. He is an editor of the recently published *Revised English Hymnal*. His honours include Associateships of both the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal School of Church Music, as well as the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal.

Organ, piano

Jeffrey Howard is an organist, pianist, conductor and arranger from Cardiff. He is active in Welsh music circles and often composes and arranges for choirs in the UK and abroad.

He is an advocate of keeping the heritage of Welsh language music alive but arranging in a contemporary and accessible style. His commissioned arrangement on this album, *Sisialau'r Awel Fwyn*, describes the quiet Nativity scene long ago and how the gentle breeze blew over the hills and meadows—a fitting evocation of the humble birth of Christ, offsetting the business and noise of the modern world.

Harp

Nia Evans, originally from Y Forest, Pontarddulais, is an award-winning harpist now based in Cardiff. A graduate of both the Royal Academy of Music (BMus) and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (MMus), she enjoys a versatile freelance career as a soloist, ensemble player, and orchestral harpist. Recent engagements include the 2025 UEFA Women's Euros in Lucerne, the Senedd for a visit by His Majesty King Charles III and Queen Camilla, and the official launch of the Cardiff BBC Singer of the World Competition. She has performed with orchestras including the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, appearing at venues such as Bristol Beacon, Hall for Cornwall, and Lighthouse Poole, and working with conductors including Robert Trevino, Mark Wigglesworth, and Thierry Fischer. Her awards include the bronze medal at the 5th Hong Kong International Harp Competition in 2020. Nia also performs regularly in chamber settings, including a flute and harp duo, and has been a member of Hiraeth Trio since 2017. She gratefully acknowledges support from the Olive Jenkins Memorial Bursary, the Ryan Davies Memorial Fund, the Countess of Munster Musical Trust, and the Thomas and Elizabeth Williams Scholarship.

Jeremy Little has enjoyed a long career as a percussionist in the South West, being a founder member and principal percussionist of the Bristol Ensemble and Bath Philharmonia. He plays with many other orchestras including Welsh National Opera, BBC NOW, English National Ballet, Ulster Orchestra and Southern Sinfonia. He regularly records for film and television, his most notable being a solo role in *Dog Soldiers*, a werewolf horror. He teaches percussion at Millfield School and enjoys coaching the National Children's Orchestras percussion section.

Acknowledgements

Bath Abbey Music Society (BAMS) is a registered charity, providing financial and organisational support for the Abbey's choirs and musicians.

Funds raised by BAMS are used to support the following types of activity:

- Subsidising choir tours to some of the most prestigious cathedrals, churches and other concert venues in the UK and overseas;
- Funding choir and organ recordings;
- Contributing to the costs of music tuition for choir members;
- Supporting the boys' choir with transport and logistics.

BAMS is delighted to have been able to support the costs of producing this album, showcasing the talent of our girls and lay clerks as we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Girls' Choir in 2027.

Also from CRD and The Choir of Bath Abbey



CRD 3556 Everlasting Light | The Choir of Bath Abbey

'This album celebrates the 150th anniversary of the Boys' Choir at Bath Abbey, and does so fulsomely.'
– BBC Music Magazine

For the complete CRD catalogue, visit www.crdrecords.com

Lay Clerks

Soprano

Mollie Appleton
Ella Barker
Bea Bowater
Emmeline Branston
Isla Byrne
Rozzy Commander
Rosie Daniels
Sophie Giles
Cora Handley
Libby Hill
Tilda Lacey
Rosie McDonald
Iris Marten
Bethany Matthews
Alice Osborne
Emily Pagnamenta
Louise Perry
Mair Phillips
Ella Rose-Powles
Greta Rawson-Courage
Orla Reddin
Marianna Sandbrook
Evie Shepperdson
Ruth Williams
Shannon Williams



Alto

Rob Burnet
Phil Draisey
Keiron Nash
Amy Randall

Tenor

Thomas Brewer
Alastair Comery
Roger Dawe
Matthew Keighley
Graham Neal
Chris Johnson

Bass

Craig Bissex
Mike Entwisle
Paul Maine
James Millichap
Asher Randall

crd
3566

John Byrt	All and Some	1:58
Edmund Rubbra	A Hymn to the Virgin, Op. 3 No. 2	2:05
Roderick Williams	O Adonai, et Dux domus Israël	5:43
Mel Tormé | Robert Wells, Arr. Peter Gritton	The Christmas Song	2:37
John Gardner	When Christ Was Born of Mary Free	2:15
Judith Bingham	Corpus Christi Carol	4:02
Traditional, Arr. John Scott	Quem pastores laudavere	1:59
Traditional, Arr. Bernard Massey	Now Tell Us, Gentle Mary	1:34
Traditional, Arr. George Guest	Suo Gân	3:13
Marin Marais, Arr. Huw Williams	Masters in This Hall	3:25
John Ireland	The Holy Boy	2:34
Michael Praetorius, Arr. Jan Sandström	Es ist ein Ros' Entsprungen	3:32
John Hughes, Arr. Jeffrey Howard	Sisialau'r Awel Fwyn	3:20
Traditional, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Thomas Armstrong, Arr. Huw Williams | Dudley Holroyd	O Little Town of Bethlehem	3:41
Errollyn Wallen	Peace on Earth	2:52
Traditional, Arr. Huw Williams	Personent Hodie	2:16
Katherine K. Davis, Henry V. Onorati, Harry Simeone	The Little Drummer Boy	4:08
Cecilia McDowall	O Oriens	3:30
Peter Gritton	Follow That Star	2:03
Adolphe Adam, Arr. John West	O Holy Night	4:53
Dieterich Buxtehude Arr. Huw Williams	Ihr lieben Christen, freut euch nun, BuxWV 51:VII. Aria: Komm doch, Jesu, deine Kirche	2:56
Traditional, Arr. Benjamin Britten	What Child Is This?	2:20
Traditional, Arr. Arthur Warrell	We Wish You a Merry Christmas	1:45

Executive Producers Emma Pauncefort, Tom Pauncefort
Producer Emily Baines
Engineer Bobby Williams

Recorded 3, 4, 21, 22 July 2025
Piano Steinway Model D
Organ Klais 1997

© and ℗ 2026 CRD Records Ltd