

THE CHOIR OF



ST JOHN'S
CAMBRIDGE

O HOLY NIGHT
GRAY



O HOLY NIGHT

1	Adolphe Adam, arr. John E West O holy night	[5.37]	11	Errollyn Wallen Peace On Earth	[3.47]
2	Sally Beamish In the stillness	[2.42]	12	Felix Mendelssohn From <i>Christus</i> , Opus 97 When Jesus our Lord was born in Bethlehem Say, where is he born There shall a star from Jacob come forth	[7.16]
3	Tamsin Jones Noel: verbum caro factum est	[2.58]	13	Franz Xaver Gruber, arr. Simon Morley Stille Nacht	[3.43]
4	Traditional, arr. Philip Ledger Sussex Carol	[2.08]	14	Francis Poulenc <i>Quatre motets pour le temps de Noël</i> O magnum mysterium	[3.15]
5	John Rutter There is a flower *	[4.36]	15	Quem vidistis pastores dicite	[2.51]
6	Anonymous, 15th century There is no rose	[3.59]	16	Videntes stellam	[3.20]
7	Herbert Howells <i>Three Carol-Anthems</i> A Spotless Rose	[3.30]	17	Hodie Christus natus est	[2.19]
8	Sing Lullaby	[3.40]	18	Becky McGlade In the Bleak Midwinter	[4.17]
9	Here Is The Little Door	[3.50]	19	Jonathan Dove The Three Kings	[5.02]
10	Traditional, arr. Robert Lucas Pearsall In dulci jubilo	[3.43]		Total timing:	[1.12.39]

* Commissioned by St John's College

THE CHOIR OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE
ALEXANDER ROBSON ORGAN
CHRISTOPHER GRAY DIRECTOR

www.signumrecords.com

CONDUCTOR'S REFLECTIONS

Michaelmas Term at the University of Cambridge begins in October and runs to the end of November or start of December. For the Choir of St John's College, term finishes with the Advent Carol Service which has been broadcast on BBC Radio 3 most years since 1981. After a week or so off, the Choir has a tradition of performing Christmas concerts in some of Europe's most prestigious venues. In my first two Christmases at St John's, these have included Het Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Mûpa Budapest, the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, the Philharmonie in Luxembourg and the Prinzregententheater in Munich. With this album, it is good to have the opportunity to record some of the repertoire we love sharing with the thousands of people who attend our Christmas concerts each year.

At the centre of the programme are the atmospheric *Quatre motets pour le temps de Noël* by Francis Poulenc, and the heartfelt *Three Carol-Anthems* by Herbert Howells who directed the Choir here at St John's during the Second World War. Other items include the beautiful carol John Rutter wrote for the Choir in 1985, *There is a*



Christopher Gray

flower, and the haunting *Peace On Earth* by Master of the King's Music, Errollyn Wallen.

My aim with this album has not been to break new ground with repertoire, but to ensure that classics remain fresh for the current generation. As we prepare, in the words of Eric Milner-White's great Bidding Prayer, to 'hear again the message

of the angels, and in heart and mind to go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass, and the babe lying in a manger', the music traverses different facets of the timeless story, ultimately asking what gifts we can bring to the new-born king. The journey encompasses both the human celebration of a birth and the divine mystery of God offering salvation through his son.

Christopher Gray
Director of Music, St John's College

MUSICAL NOTES

by Rebecca Franks

The stars are brightly shining, angels are singing, wise men are travelling from afar to offer gifts to a baby, lying in a manger. And so the scene is set by *O holy night* for this festive album, which explores the Christmas story through music and words from across the ages. This uplifting carol, with its effortless melody, has become a popular favourite since it was written by Adolphe Adam in 1843, recorded by artists from cathedral choirs to Bing Crosby to Mariah Carey. Originally a setting in French of a poem *Minuit, chrétiens* by Placide Cappeau, and known as the *Cantique de Noël* the carol was translated, with plenty of artistic licence, into English in 1855 by John Sullivan Dwight.

Turn your mind's eye now to a small parish church, lit by candles, and surrounded by fresh, white snow. That's the setting for Sally Beamish's beautiful unaccompanied carol *In the stillness* (2007) with original words by Katrina Shepherd. She transports us to a place of reflection and hushed rapture, full of anticipation for a 'child, soon to be born'. Tamsin Jones's *Noel: verbum caro factum est* (2017) offers a lively contrast, its vigorous rhythms harking back to the 15th century, when the carol's anonymous text was written. Her music offers a bridge between past and present. The version sung here was published in 2020 in *Multitude of Voices*, an anthology featuring sacred music by female composers.

A century before, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Cecil Sharp were travelling the country to collect English folk songs. Independently, they both came across the celebratory *Sussex Carol* – Sharp in Gloucestershire and Vaughan Williams in Monk's Gate, Sussex (hence the name), where he heard it sung by Harriet Verrall. Also known as *On Christmas Night*, this traditional carol's roots stretch back centuries, with its text first published in 1684. Both David Willcocks and Philip Ledger, former directors of music at King's College, Cambridge, made popular arrangements of it, and it is Ledger's which is performed here.



Alexander Semple singing the solo in 'A Spotless Rose.'

Our attention moves to the figures around Christ, with John Rutter's *There is a flower*, commissioned in 1985 for St John's College Choir and its then director, George Guest. Setting a text by the 15th century monk John Audelay, the carol opens with a solo introducing the 'jesse tree', which refers to the image of a branching tree tracing Jesus's ancestral family. A common subject in Christian art, it was often pictured in medieval illuminated manuscripts and stained glass. Flowers and plants recur throughout Christian iconography, and the rose has long been a powerful symbol for the Virgin Mary. *There is no rose of such virtue* is one of the best-known medieval carol texts, and it has been set by composers including Britten and Joubert but is sung here in an anonymous arrangement.

We find the image of the rose again in Herbert Howells's *Three Carol-Anthems*, written between 1918 and 1920 when the British composer was in a period of convalescence after being severely ill with Graves' Disease. (Later, much recovered, he would be the acting organist at St John's College during the Second World War.) In *A Spotless Rose*, Howells sets, with mellifluous grace, an English version of the old German hymn *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen*. A baritone solo offers one of Howells's breath-held moments of beauty,

as does the ending. 'I should like, when my time comes, to pass away with that magical cadence,' the composer Patrick Hadley wrote to Howells. The lilting *Sing Lullaby* follows, an anthem using words fresh from the pen of the Gloucestershire poet FW Harvey, a friend of poet-composer Ivor Gurney. Its lines seem to trace vaulting stone arches, reaching up to the heavens. And this masterful trio of pieces closes here with the poised *Here Is The Little Door*, setting a poem about the visit of the Magi by author Frances Chesterton, whose husband was the *Father Brown* novelist GK Chesterton.

While Howells claimed to have been inspired to write *A Spotless Rose* somewhat prosaically, by watching shunting train trucks on the Gloucester to Bristol line, *In dulci jubilo* ('In sweet rejoicing') had rather more exalted beginnings. Angels sang the words to a 14th century German mystic, Heinrich Seuse – at least, so the story goes. Whatever the truth of the matter, this ancient German tune has been heard in various musical guises through the centuries, including the uplifting eight-part arrangement in 1837, in Latin and English, made by Robert Lucas Pearsall 'for the use of madrigal and choral societies'.

Some carols offer the chance to rejoice, while others provide a moment to reflect. Errollyn Wallen's *Peace On Earth* is a case in point. Written in 2006 by Wallen, now Master of the King's Music, her carol has become a contemporary classic conjuring, in her words, 'the bleakness of winter in a turning troubled world'. A haunting vocal line floats over a slowly spinning ostinato and out of its mood of uneasy, exquisite beauty comes a message of 'hope for light and peace'.

Felix Mendelssohn was working with a rather larger canvas in the 1840s when he composed 16 movements that would be published, after his death, as an incomplete oratorio about the life of Christ. Unfinished, perhaps, but the composer was on inspired form. *Christus* begins with Jesus's birth, building from a soprano recitative (*When Jesus, our Lord*), via a warm trio for tenor and basses (*Say, where is he born?*) into the resplendent *There shall a star* for full choir.

Earlier that century, on the Christmas Eve of 1818, Franz Gruber was asked by his friend Father Joseph Mohr to set his poem *Stille Nacht* (Silent Night) to music – specifically for voices with a guitar accompaniment. Gruber worked fast and that very night, at Midnight Mass at St Nicholas's in Obendorf, Austria, *Stille Nacht* was heard for

the first time, offering its timeless vision of peace. The arrangement sung here is by organist Simon Morley.

'I think I've put the best and most genuine part of myself into it,' the French composer Poulenc said of his sacred music. It's hard to disagree when listening to his *Quatre motets pour le temps de Noël*, four unaccompanied choral miniatures tracing scenes from the Christmas story. The profound *O magnum mysterium* unfolds slowly, building in its grave beauty as it explores the great mystery of the nativity. In *Quem vidistis pastores dicite*, we turn to the adoration of the shepherds, who are asked what they have seen in speech-like vocal lines rising and falling over a bed of humming. *Videntes stellam* evokes both the serene beauty and the majesty of a starlit sky, under which the Magi travel to offer their gifts of gold, incense and myrrh, while jubilation erupts in *Hodie Christus natus est* with triumphant dotted rhythms and dancing semiquavers celebrating Christ's birth: 'Glory to God in the highest. Alleluia.'

Becky McGlade was walking down a Cornish lane 'on a cold, bleak November day', when Christina Rossetti's poem *In the Bleak Midwinter* came to mind, known to so many music lovers in the settings by Holst and Darke. McGlade

immediately began composing her own music as she walked, and the result is a carol with, in her words, 'a gentle, undulating feel'. Hers is a vision of peaceful winter stillness rather than cold bleakness, with soft dissonances conjuring an ethereal snowy atmosphere. Across three verses, the music the same for each, the poem builds to its emotional payoff, with the final line 'give my heart' repeated by McGlade three times.

Simplicity is a key ingredient in Jonathan Dove's *The Three Kings* too, commissioned for the 2000 Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at King's College, Cambridge. Dove takes his cue from the structure of Dorothy L Sayers' poem, in which she dedicates a verse to each of the three kings: the 'very young', 'the man in his prime' and 'very old'. Two haunting, ballad-like verses in a minor key, punctuated by the refrain of 'O balow, balow la lay', describe the Magi's gifts of myrrh and incense. With the arrival of the third king, his hands full of gold, the music transforms into the major, the voices splitting into a glittering accompaniment and triumphant melody. After this celebratory outburst Dove leaves us, however, in reflective mood. The music gently subsides, leaving some questions unanswered. It is as if we are stepping back from the scene of the nativity, moved and forever changed by all we've experienced.



A Chorister singing his solo on 17 July 2024.

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A Chorister taking notes during a session.

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TEXTS & TRANSLATIONS

1 O HOLY NIGHT

Adolphe Adam (1803–1856)

arr. John E West (1863–1929)

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth;
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
'Till 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.
O night, O night divine.

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 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!
He knows our need, He guardeth us from danger;
Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!

*Placide Cappeau (1808–1877), translated John Sullivan Dwight
(1813–1893)*

2 IN THE STILLNESS

Sally Beamish (b. 1956)

In the stillness of a church
Where candles glow
In the softness of a fall
Of fresh white snow
In the brightness of the stars
That shine this night
In the calmness of a pool
Of healing light
In the clearness of a choir
That softly sings
In the oneness of a hush
Of angels' wings
In the mildness of a night
By stable bare
In the quietness of a lull
Near cradle fair
There's a patience as we wait
For a new morn
And the presence of a child
Soon to be born

Katrina Shepherd

3 NOEL: VERBUM CARO FACTUM EST

Tamsin Jones (b. 1972)

Noel!
This night there is a child y-born
That sprang out of Jesse's thorn;
We must sing and say therefor:
Verbum caro factum est. [The Word is made flesh]

Jesus is the childes name,
And Mary mild is his dame;
All sorrow is turned to game:
Verbum caro factum est. [The Word is made flesh]

It fell upon the high midnight:
The stars they shone both fair and bright;
The angels sang with all their might:
Verbum caro factum est. [The Word is made flesh]

Now kneel we down on our knee,
And pray we to the Trinity
Our help, our succour for to be;
Verbum caro factum est. [The Word is made flesh]
Noel!

Anonymous, 15th Century

4 SUSSEX CAROL

Traditional, arr. Philip Ledger (1937–2012)

On Christmas night all Christians sing
To hear the news the angels bring.
News of great joy, news of great mirth,
News of our merciful King's birth.

Then why should men on earth be so sad,
Since our redeemer made us glad,
When from our sin he set us free,
All for to gain our liberty?

When sin departs before his grace,
Then life and health come in its place.
Angels and men with joy may sing
All for to see the new-born King.

Anonymous traditional, 17th Century

5 THERE IS A FLOWER

John Rutter (b. 1945)

There is a flow'r sprung of a tree,
The root thereof is called Jesse,
A flow'r of price;
There is none such in paradise.

This flow'r is fair and fresh of hue,
It fadeth never, but ever is new;

The blessed branch this flow'r on grew
Was Mary mild that bare Jesu;
A flow'r of grace;
Against all sorrow it is solace.

The seed hereof was Goddes sand,
That God himself sowed with his hand,
In Nazareth that holy land,
Amidst her arbour a maiden found;
This blessed flow'r
Sprang never but in Mary's bower.

When Gabriel this maid did meet,
With 'Ave Maria' he did her greet;
Between them two this flow'r was set
And safe was kept, no man should wit,
Till on a day
In Bethlem it could spread and spray.

When that fair flow'r began to spread
And his sweet blossom began to bed,
Then rich and poor of ev'ry land
They marvelled how this flow'r might spread,
Till kinges three
That blessed flower came to see.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Angels there came from heaven's tower
To look upon this freshele flow'r,
How fair he was in his colour
and how sweet in his savour;
And to behold
How such a flow'r might spring in gold.

There is a flow'r sprung of a tree,
The root thereof is called Jesse,
A flow'r of price;
There is none such in paradise.

John Audelay (15th century)

6 **THERE IS NO ROSE**

Anonymous, 15th century

There is no rose of such virtue
As is the rose that bare Jesu: Alleluia.

For in this rose contained was
Heaven and earth in little space: Res miranda.
[Wonderful thing]

By that rose we may well see
There be one God in persons three: Pari forma.
[Equal in form]

The angels sungen the shepherds too:
Gloria in excelsis Deo: Gaudeamus. [Glory on high
to God: Let us rejoice]

Leave we all this worldly mirth
And follow we this joyful birth: Transeamus. [Let
us follow]

Anonymous, 15th century

7 **A SPOTLESS ROSE**

Herbert Howells (1892–1983)

A spotless Rose is blowing,
Sprung from a tender root,
Of ancient seers' foreshowing,
Of Jesse promised fruit;
Its fairest bud unfolds to light
Amid the cold, cold winter,
And in the dark midnight.

The Rose which I am singing,
Whereof Isaiah said,
Is from its sweet root springing
In Mary, purest Maid;
For through our God's great love and might
The Blessed Babe she bare us
In a cold, cold winter's night.

Anonymous, 14th century

8 **SING LULLABY**

Herbert Howells (1892–1983)

Sing lullaby, sing lullaby,
While snow doth gently fall,
Sing lullaby to Jesus
Born in an oxen-stall.

Sing lullaby to Jesus,
Born now in Bethlehem,
The naked blackthorn's growing
To weave His diadem.

Sing lullaby, sing lullaby
While thickly snow doth fall,
Sing lullaby to Jesus
The Saviour of all.

Frederick William Harvey (1888–1957)

9 **HERE IS THE LITTLE DOOR**

Herbert Howells (1892–1983)

Here is the little door,
Lift up the latch, oh lift!
We need not wander more,
But enter with our gift;
Our gift of finest gold.
Gold that was never bought nor sold;
Myrrh to be strewn about his bed;

Incense in clouds about His head;
All for the child that stirs not in His sleep,
But holy slumber holds with ass and sheep.

Bend low about His bed,
For each He has a gift;
See how His eyes awake,
Lift up your hands, O lift!
For gold, He gives a keen-edged sword.
(Defend with it thy little Lord!)
For incense, smoke of battle red,
Myrrh for the honoured happy dead;
Gifts for His children, terrible and sweet;
Touched by such tiny hands,
And Oh such tiny feet.

Frances Chesterton (1869–1938)

10 IN DULCI JUBILO

German traditional, arr. Robert Pearsall (1795–1856)

In dulci jubilo [in quiet joy]
Let us our homage show
Our heart's joy reclineth
In praesepio [in a manger]
And like a bright star shineth
Matris in gremio [in the mother's lap]
Alpha es et O. [Thou art Alpha and Omega]

O Jesu parvule [O tiny Jesus]
I yearn for thee alway!
Hear me, I beseech thee
O Puer optime [O best of boys]
My prayer let it reach thee,
O Princeps gloriae, [Prince of glory]
Trahe me post te. [draw me unto thee]

O Patris caritas [O father's caring]
O Nati lenitas [O newborn's mildness]
Deeply were we stained
Per nostra crimina [by our crimes]
But thou hast for us gained
Coelorum gaudia [heavenly joy]
O that we were there.

Ubi sunt gaudia [where be joys]
Where, if that they be not there
There are angels singing
Nova cantica [new songs]
There the bells are ringing
In Regis curia [at the king's court]
O that we were there.

Heinrich Seuse (1295–1366)

11 PEACE ON EARTH

Errollyn Wallen (b. 1958)

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.

Hear them singing
Peace on earth.

Errollyn Wallen (b. 1958)

12 WHEN JESUS OUR LORD WAS BORN IN BETHLEHEM, SAY WHERE IS HE BORN, THERE SHALL A STAR FROM JACOB COME FORTH

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

When Jesus our Lord was born in Bethlehem,
in the land of Judaea,
behold, from the East to the city of Jerusalem
there came wise men, and said:

Say, where is he born, the King of Judaea?
For we have seen his star,
and are come to adore him.

There shall a star from Jacob come forth,
and a sceptre from Israel rise up.
And dash in pieces princes and nations.

How brightly beams the morning star!
What sudden radiance from afar
with light and comfort glowing.
Thy word, Jesu, inly feeds us,
rightly leads us, life bestowing.
Praise, O praise such love o'erflowing!

Matthew 2:1–2, Numbers 24:17, Psalm 2:9

13 STILLE NACHT

*Franz Xaver Gruber (1787–1863),
arr. Simon Morley (unknown)*

Stille Nacht! Heilige Nacht!
Alles schläft; einsam wacht
Nur das traute hochheilige Paar.
Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar,
Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht,
Hirten erst kundgemacht
Durch der Engel Halleluja,
Tönt es laut von fern und nah:
Christ, der Retter ist da!

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht,
Gottes Sohn, o wie lacht
Lieb' aus deinem göttlichen Mund,
Da uns schlägt die rettende Stund'.
Christ, in deiner Geburt!

Josef Mohr (1792–1848)

*Silent night! Holy night!
All are sleeping, alone and awake;
Only the intimate holy pair,
Lovely boy with curly hair,
Sleep in heavenly peace!*

*Silent night! Holy night!
To shepherds it was first made known
By the angel, Alleluia;
Sounding forth loudly far and near:
Jesus the Saviour is here!*

*Silent night! Holy night!
Son of God, O how he laughs;
Love from your divine mouth,
Then it hits us—the hour of salvation.
Jesus at your birth!*

14 O MAGNUM MYSTERIUM

Francis Poulenc (1899–1963)

O magnum mysterium
et admirabile sacramentum,
ut animalia viderent
Dominum natum iacentem in praesepio.
Beata virgo,
cuius viscera meruerunt portare
Dominum Christum.

Fifth Responsory at Matins on Christmas Day

15 QUEM VIDISTIS PASTORES DICITE

Francis Poulenc (1899–1963)

Quem vidistis pastores dicite:
annuntiate nobis in terris quis apparuit.
Natum vidimus et choros
Angelorum
collaudantes Dominum.
Dicite quidnam vidistis,
et annuntiate Christi Nativitatem.

Fourth Responsory at Matins on Christmas Day

*O great mystery
and wonderful sacrament,
that beasts should see the
new-born Lord lying in a manger.
Blessed virgin,
whose body was worthy to bear the
Lord Christ.*

*Who did you see, shepherds?
Speak, and tell us who has appeared on earth.
'We saw a new-born child and a choir
of Angels
praising the Lord.'
Speak of what you have seen,
and proclaim the birth of Christ.*

16 VIDENTES STELLAM

Francis Poulenc (1899–1963)

Videntes stellam

Magi gavisi sunt gaudio magno:

et intrantes domum obtulerunt Domino

aurum, thus et myrrham.

Magnificat antiphon on the octave of the Epiphany

When they saw the star,

the Magi rejoiced with great gladness:

and they entered the house and offered the Lord

gold, incense and myrrh.

17 HODIE CHRISTUS NATUS EST

Francis Poulenc (1899–1963)

Hodie Christus natus est;

hodie Salvator apparuit;

Hodie in terra, canunt Angeli, laetantur

archangeli;

Hodie exsultant justi dicentes:

Gloria in excelsis Deo. Alleluia.

Magnificat antiphon at Second Vespers on Christmas Day

Today Christ is born;

today our Saviour has appeared;

Today on earth the angels sing and the archangels

rejoice;

Today the righteous exult, saying

'Gloria in excelsis Deo, Alleluia.'

18 IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER

Becky McGlade (b. 1974)

In the bleak midwinter

Frosty wind made moan,

Earth stood hard as iron,

Water like a stone,

Snow had fallen snow on snow,

Snow on snow,

In the bleak midwinter

Long ago.

Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him,

Nor earth sustain;

Heaven and earth shall flee away

When He comes to reign:

In the bleak midwinter

A stable-place sufficed

The Lord God Almighty

Jesus Christ.

What can I give Him,

Poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd

I would bring a lamb,

If I were a wise man

I would do my part, –

Yet what I can I give Him,

Give my heart.

Christina Rossetti (1830–1894)

19 THE THREE KINGS

Jonathan Dove (b. 1959)

O balow, balow la lay.

The first king was very young,

With doleful ballads on his tongue,

He came bearing a branch of myrrh

Than which no gall is bitterer,

O balow, balow la lay,

Gifts for a baby King, O.

The second king was a man in prime,

The solemn priest of a solemn time,

With eyes downcast and reverent feet

He brought his incense sad and sweet,

Gifts for a baby king, O.

The third king was very old,

Both his hands were full of gold,

Many a gaud and glittering toy,

Baubles brave for a baby boy,

Gifts for a baby king, O.

Dorothy Leigh Sayers (1893–1957)



The Choir of St John's College performing Christmas repertoire in the Elbphilharmonie, Hamburg, on 19 December 2024

**THE CHOIR OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE,
CAMBRIDGE 2023 – 2024, JULY**

ADAM, HOWELLS, JONES

Trebles

Evelyn Austen
Ingrid Birchall
Bertram Bowes
Arthur Cobb ³
Amelia Crichton-Stuart
Nicholas Garcia
Gabriel Gritten
Martha Gritten
George Henty
Jing Jin
Kevin Ke
Charles Lipscomb
Bryony MacLeod-Jones
James Marshall
Samuel Smith
Montague Tatnell ¹
Felix van den Bos
Aiden Wee

Altos

Liv Hawkins
Alice Hilder-Jarvis
Alice Markham
Matthew Monaghan

Tenors

James Gant
Joseph Hancock
Theodore Horch
Hamish MacGregor ^{*}
Garbhán McEnoy
Carlos Rodríguez Otero

Basses

George Bird
Jonathan Hatley
John Moore
Henry Montgomery
Alexander Semple ⁷
Alexander Weiss

Herbert Howells Organ Scholar

Alexander Robson ^{*}

Junior Organ Scholar

Tingshuo Yang

^{*} *This organist was playing for the recording*

⁺ *Deputy singer for some tracks*

Numbers indicate soloist credits for each track

**THE CHOIR OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE,
CAMBRIDGE 2024 – 2025, JANUARY**

ANONYMOUS, BEAMISH, DOVE, LEDGER, MCGLADE, MENDELSSOHN,
MORLEY, PEARSALL, POULENC, RUTTER, WALLEN

Trebles

Evelyn Austen
Ingrid Birchall
Bertram Bowes
Arthur Cobb ^{10 19}
Amelia Crichton-Stuart ¹²
Nicholas Garcia ¹⁰
Martha Gritten
George Henty ¹⁹
Jing Jin
Bryony Macleod-Jones ⁵
James Marshall
Felix van den Bos

Altos

Alice Markham ⁶
Matthew Monaghan ¹⁰
Anna Morgan ¹⁰
Sarah Reid
Alex Thow

Tenors
Milo Coker
William Collison ^{10 12}
James Gardner
Joseph Hancock ⁺
Theodore Horch ⁶
Garbhán McEnoy ¹⁰

Basses

George Akka
Simon Hall ¹⁰
Edwin Hughes
Rufus Jasko
John Moore ^{10 12}
Oliver Morris
Alexander Weiss ¹²

Herbert Howells Organ Scholar

Alexander Robson ^{*}

Junior Organ Scholar

Tingshuo Yang

^{*} *This organist was playing for the recording*

⁺ *Deputy singer for some tracks*

Numbers indicate soloist credits for each track

THE CHOIR OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

The Choir of St John's College, Cambridge is known and loved by millions from its broadcasts, concert tours and recordings. Founded in the 1670s, the Choir has developed a reputation for its rich, warm sound, its expressive interpretations, and its broad repertoire. Alongside these musical characteristics, the Choir is particularly proud of its happy, relaxed and mutually supportive atmosphere. The Choir is directed by Christopher Gray who follows a long line of eminent musicians including George Guest, Christopher Robinson, David Hill, and Andrew Nethsingha.

The Choir is made up of boy and girl Choristers who are educated at St John's College School and altos, tenors, and basses who are mostly members of St John's and other colleges that make up the University of Cambridge. The Choir's primary purpose is to enhance the liturgy and worship at seven services each week during term time in the College's beautiful Gilbert Scott Chapel. The group has a vast repertoire spanning over 500 years, with a special interest in championing new music. In recent decades, there have been commissions from most of the UK's leading composers of

choral music, as well as from numerous early-career artists in Cambridge and elsewhere. The Choir also enjoys joining the period instrument ensemble St John's Sinfonia to perform Bach cantatas in a liturgical setting each term.

There are regular tours across Europe, Asia, and North America, performing in some of the world's most famous concert venues and cathedrals. Recent tour destinations have included the United States, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Estonia, France, Italy, Switzerland, Japan, Brazil, South Africa, Australia, and Singapore. At home in the UK, the Choir has performed in concert venues including Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Royal Albert Hall, St John's Smith Square, and Royal Festival Hall.

In May 2016 the College launched its 'St John's Cambridge' recording label in conjunction with Signum Classics. Since then, 22 Choir albums have been released, including single-composer albums of music by Jonathan Harvey (BBC Music Magazine Award winner), Ralph Vaughan Williams and Michael Finnissy, two of which were shortlisted for Gramophone Awards. In addition to these albums, there have been four *Magnificat* albums of varied Evensong canticles, an anthem compilation *Locus Iste*, masses by Poulenc and Kodály, a live

anthology *The Tree*, a Psalms collection, and seasonal albums for Advent, Christmas, Ash Wednesday and Eastertide.

Webcasts of services are available at www.sjcchoir.co.uk and there are live-streamed video broadcasts of Chapel services on Facebook, in association with Classic FM, as well as substantial content on YouTube and Instagram.

ALEXANDER ROBSON ORGAN

Alexander Robson is the Herbert Howells Organ Scholar at St John's College, where he is in his final year studying Music. Alongside accompanying the daily services at St John's, he has performed for live broadcasts, recordings, and international tours with the College Choir, recently including concerts at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, Tivoli Vredenburg, Utrecht, and Müpa Budapest.

Before coming to St John's, Alexander was Organ Scholar at St George's Chapel, Windsor, where he played for services and special events. In 2024, he became a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists, receiving several prizes for his performance. He also regularly performs as a continuo keyboardist, recently including Bach's *St John Passion* with the Cambridge Collegium Musicum.



Alexander Robson

Alexander studies the organ with Ann Elise Smoot and the piano with Marie-Noëlle Kendall, and performs as a soloist across the UK. In 2025 he will take up the Organ Scholarship at Westminster Cathedral.

CHRISTOPHER GRAY
DIRECTOR OF MUSIC
ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

Christopher Gray has been Director of Music at St John's College since April 2023. With responsibilities focusing on the College's celebrated Choir and organ, he works with the Choristers, Choral Scholars, Choral Graduates, and Organ Scholars to provide music that enhances the liturgy of the Chapel, upholding a tradition that dates from the 1670s.

After early musical education in his hometown of Bangor, Northern Ireland, Christopher became Assistant Organist at St George's Parish Church, Belfast. At the age of 18 he moved to England to take up the organ scholarship at Pembroke College, Cambridge, where he read music. A Fellow of the Royal College of Organists, Christopher studied the organ with David Sanger and Nicolas Kynaston at Cambridge. He was subsequently taught by Margaret Phillips at the Royal College of Music, where he was a postgraduate student and a prize-winner. During this time, he also held the organ scholarship at Guildford Cathedral.

In 2000 Christopher was appointed Assistant Director of Music at Truro Cathedral, working closely with Andrew Nethsingha and then Robert



© Richard Marsham

Christopher Gray

Sharpe. In 2008 he became Director of Music, taking on responsibility for the cathedral choir and its seven sung services each week, as well as the Father Willis organ. As Musical Director of Three Spires Singers and Orchestra he conducted most of the large-scale choral-orchestral repertoire.

During his first two years at St John's, Christopher has directed the Choir on broadcasts including the Advent Carol Service, and on tours to Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Germany, Hungary and the USA. He has worked with composers

on several new pieces for the Choir, as well as collaborating with The Gesualdo Six and the Academy of Ancient Music.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Choir thanks those who continue to support the 'St John's Cambridge' recording label, in particular Mr Archie Burdon-Cooper. The College acknowledges with gratitude members of the Epiphany Club who support the Choir's Choral Graduate Programme.

PUBLISHERS

Novello and Company Limited (Adam)
Edition Peters (Beamish, Dove, Wallen)
Stainer & Bell Limited (Howells)
Oxford University Press (arr. Ledger, arr. Pearsall, Rutter)
Boosey & Hawkes (McGlade)
Rouart, Lerolle & Cie (Poulenc)

The Three Kings Music by Jonathan Dove

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Peace on Earth Words and Music by Errollyn Wallen

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In the stillness Words by Katrina Shepherd Music by Sally Beamish, Music © assigned 2022 to Peters Edition Limited, London.

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Sing Lullaby Words by FW Harvey

Music by Herbert Howells, Reproduced by kind permission of Elaine Jackson

Recorded in St John's College Chapel, Cambridge, UK on the following dates: 15 – 18 July 2024 (arr. Adam, Howells, Jones) 18 – 20 July 2025 (Anonymous, Beamish, Dove, Ledger, McGlade, Mendelssohn, Morley, Pearsall, Poulenc, Rutter, Wallen)

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The Choir of St John's College in the College Chapel.

© Keith Heppell



A Chorister recording her solo on 20 January 2025.

© Isabelle Freeman

**AWARD-WINNING RECORDINGS FROM
THE CHOIR OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE,
CAMBRIDGE**



Latest Release

LAMENT & LIBERATION SIGCD893

“a bold statement of intent, *Lament & Liberation* contains a mixture of modern classics and new commissions... Gray’s St John’s College choir sing it with a confidence and bite that’s compelling.” *The Arts Desk*

MAGNIFICAT 4 SIGCD777

★★★★★ “These are beautiful canticles. This whole series of St John’s recordings has been a joy to follow.” *MusicWeb International*

★★★★★ “The stand-out for me is the concluding Worcester Service by Piers Connor Kennedy, with its echoes of plainchant. As organist George Herbert writes in his excellent booklet notes, it ‘inspires a real feeling of worship and understatement.’” *Choir & Organ*

★★★★★ “Imaginative programming of innovative contemporary works rubbing shoulders with canonical repertoire...the distinctive St John’s ‘sound’, with its immaculate balance, luminous tone and elegant yet unaffected phrasing...Andrew Nethsingha has departed from St John’s with a sense of promise fulfilled and bright hope for the future” *BBC Music Magazine*

“As before, every detail has been polished and beautifully presented...” *Gramophone*

ADVENT LIVE – VOLUME 3 SIGCD768

“The singing is uniformly excellent” *Cross Rhythms*

“The voices of the choir unfold with brilliance and with a sonority of optimal quality in the interpretation of the majestic hymns...” *Sonograma Magazine*

“This is a college that is very well placed to be leading the way into the new sound that will become increasingly the norm in our cathedrals and collegiate chapels” *John Rutter on BBC Radio 3*

NEW MILLENNIUM SIGCD750

BBC Music Magazine
Choral & Song Choice

Choir & Organ
Choral CD Choice

★★★★★ (Performance & Recording) “The album gives a remarkable overview of contemporary choral trends... The choir’s musicianship is superb and its vocal balance perfectly calibrated; the textures vibrant and the sensuous beauty of the St John’s Sound is expertly captured... A valuable addition to the choral library” *BBC Music Magazine*

★★★★★ “This superlative album represents Andrew Nethsingha’s exploration of contemporary music during his 15 years as director of music at St John’s College, Cambridge... the sequence is beautifully planned and feels seamless” *Choir & Organ*

“Needless to say, the standard of playing and singing from St John’s is impeccable. These are wonderful performances underpinned by superb balance and intonation. Nethsingha bringing out musical detail and textural meaning with a finely judged ear that does small miracles with every piece. A fascinating and indispensable collection!” *Opera Today*

Gramophone Editor's Choice
Gramophone Award Shortlist (Choral) September 2023

MAGNIFICAT 3 SIGCD742

“What a wonderful performance: the dynamics, the contrasts, the utter confidence of the singing... Excellent solos, boys in great fettle, acoustic well-captured. It's a fine series, this: anyone who's ever sung or loved this kind of Anglican church music should be impatient for more” *BBC Radio 3 Record Review*

“This ongoing series has not only been a beautifully prepared and sung tribute to the Anglican canticle tradition, but also to Andrew Nethsingha's brilliant leadership of music at St John's” *Gramophone*

Gramophone Critics' Choice & Editor's Choice

THE PSALMS SIGCD721

“The diction of the Choir of St John's College, Cambridge is so exquisitely perfect that one can take dictation from it, yet there is absolutely no sense of metronomic stiffness... Choral singing at this level of perfection can never be taken for granted” *Fanfare*

“Nethsingha and the Choir of St John's clearly recognise the importance of these liturgical poems-in-music: the performances here are evidence that they are guided by the principle that everything — metre, emphasis, lyricism, momentum, dynamics and clarity — plays an equally crucial role” *The Sunday Times*

Europadisc Easter Highlight

EASTERTIDE EVENSONG SIGCD707

★★★★★ “The results are extremely fine, with much attention to musical detail, clear diction, impeccable tuning and a well-balanced choral blend” *Choir & Organ*

“Nethsingha is his own man and absolutely his own musician, which is why his choir continues to evolve and lead” *Andrew Mellor, Gramophone*

“For all devotees of choral evensong, this is an indispensable disc” *David Truslove, Opera Today*

THE TREE SIGCD691

“The whole thing is a beautifully realised tribute to the history of the choir and its hope for the future” *BBC Record Review*

“A well-crafted and beautifully sung disc” *BBC Music Magazine*

★★★★★ “The outstanding quality of the singing and playing is the reason to buy this recording. Even something as straightforward as Stanford's 'A song of Wisdom' is given a ravishing performance” *Choir & Organ*

Gramophone Editor's Choice

MAGNIFICAT 2 SIGCD667

“These are inspirational performances, music wonderfully shaped and words unfailingly invested with meaning” *Opera Today*

“They're on cracking form right now... there's that sort of earthy ferocity that is totally exhilarating... the control, the pianissimo and the clarity this recording brings is magnificent” *BBC Radio 3 Record Review*

“This choir's singular qualities – responsiveness, sophistication of line and texture and a chameleonic stylistic acumen that never loses sight of its own core, identifying sound – are all in play here” *Gramophone*

ADVENT LIVE - VOLUME 2 SIGCD661

“It is a real album, the mystery and expectation of Advent coursing through a repertoire that never stoops below this ensemble's judicious idea of what constitutes high-quality music, whatever the century... The qualities of the choir hardly need repeating” *Gramophone*

“The fantastic balance of anthems, hymns and organ music leaps out in this arresting, fabulously performed Advent programme” *BBC Music Magazine*

Gramophone Editor's Choice
Finalist (Contemporary)
Gramophone Awards 2021
BBC Music Magazine Choral & Song Choice
Europadisc Top Ten Recording of the Year

MICHAEL FINNISSY – PIOUS ANTHEMS & VOLUNTARIES SIGCD624
★★★★★ "The sequence maintains a powerfully communicative grip... The choir makes the music sound as lived-in as Byrd or Howells" *BBC Music Magazine*
★★★★★ "Exquisitely beautiful, sensual music" *Choir & Organ*
"An 84-minute work that might well change your listening life" *Classical Music*
"This is some of the most compelling music written for the 'English choral tradition' in many years... the results are infinitely rewarding" *Europadisc*

ASH WEDNESDAY SIGCD605

"The malleable, sensitive trebles have what seems to me an unparalleled ability to invest text and phrase with meaning" *Gramophone*

"It's the most glorious, glorious music making" *BBC Radio 3, Record Review*

★★★★★ "Exceptionally satisfying. Bravo. Bravissimo" *AllMusic*

Gramophone Editor's Choice

MAGNIFICAT SIGCD588
"extreme perception of blend (vowel and timbre), words and phrasing; a true ensemble" *Gramophone*

★★★★★ "A fascinating hour's music" *Choir & Organ*

« Superbe. Les petits trebles sont en grande forme » *Diapason (France)*

Gramophone Editor's Choice

LOCUS ISTE SIGCD567
★★★★★ "a glint of sunlight, inspired and inspiring" *BBC Music Magazine*
"Beautifully captured" *BBC Radio 3, Record Review*
"This disc really soars" *Gramophone*

ADVENT LIVE SIGCD535

"Under Andrew Nethsingha's inspired direction, the choir has retained its renowned clarity, flamboyance and readiness to take risks" *Gramophone*

"Sung with typical St John's verve and character, this superbly programmed collection will take your Advent listening in unexpected, but entirely apposite, directions" *BBC Music Magazine*

BBC Music Magazine Choral & Song Choice

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS – MASS IN G MINOR SIGCD541

★★★★★ "Formidably attractive" *BBC Music Magazine*

"Director Andrew Nethsingha shapes a performance of profound dignity and power, beautifully sung by this always impressive choir" *The Guardian*

POULENC | KODÁLY | JANÁČEK – KYRIE SIGCD489

★★★★★ "...a superb reading from Nethsingha and his forces... Throughout, the choir sing with their justly famed blend and perfect intonation. An essential disc..." *Choir & Organ*

CHRISTMAS WITH ST JOHN'S SIGCD458

"proving yet again, they are as good as it gets" *Classic FM*

"a meticulously sung carol collection from the always classy choir of St John's... shimmering tone clusters and delicious suspensions" *The Guardian*

"an evocatively sung collection...glowing with devotional joy, wonder and a kaleidoscope of colours and emotions" *Choir & Organ*

BBC Music Magazine Award Winner
Gramophone Editor's Choice

JONATHAN HARVEY – DEO SIGCD456

★★★★★ "ecstatic...the Choir tackles it all with confidence and clarity" *The Observer*

★★★★★ "characterful yet authoritative performances of which they can be justly proud" *Choir & Organ*

THE COVER OF
ST JOHN'S
LAMBETH



LAMENT & LIBERATION
GRAY

THE COVER OF
ST JOHN'S
LAMBETH



NEW MILLENNIUM
NETHSINGHA

THE COVER OF
ST JOHN'S
LAMBETH



MAGNIFICAT 3
NETHSINGHA

THE COVER OF
ST JOHN'S
LAMBETH



THE PSALMS
NETHSINGHA

THE COVER OF
ST JOHN'S
LAMBETH



MAGNIFICAT 4
NETHSINGHA

THE COVER OF
ST JOHN'S
LAMBETH



THE TREE
HILL (NETHSINGHA) ROBINSON

THE COVER OF
ST JOHN'S
LAMBETH



MAGNIFICAT 2
NETHSINGHA

THE COVER OF
ST JOHN'S
LAMBETH



ADVENT LIVE VOLUME 2
NETHSINGHA

THE COVER OF
ST JOHN'S
LAMBETH



PIOUS ANTHEMS & VOLUNTARIES
FINNISSY (NETHSINGHA)

THE COVER OF
ST JOHN'S
LAMBETH



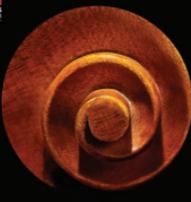
ADVENT LIVE VOLUME 3
NETHSINGHA | HERBERT

THE COVER OF
ST JOHN'S
LAMBETH



MAGNIFICAT
NETHSINGHA

THE COVER OF
ST JOHN'S
LAMBETH



SUBITO JULIA IRWING VIOLIN

THE COVER OF
ST JOHN'S
LAMBETH



VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
MASS IN G MINOR
NETHSINGHA

THE COVER OF
ST JOHN'S
LAMBETH



ADVENT LIVE
NETHSINGHA

THE COVER OF
ST JOHN'S
LAMBETH



KYRIE
KENC MODALY JANACEK
NETHSINGHA

THE COVER OF
ST JOHN'S
LAMBETH



CHRISTMAS WITH ST JOHN'S
NETHSINGHA

A BBC recording