

FRANCIS POTT

At First Light

Word

Joseph Spooner, Cello • Christian Wilson, Organ

Commotio • Matthew Berry

At First Light (2018) 41:57

(Texts: Latin Mass for the Dead ¹ ⁷, Bible – Old Testament ² ⁴ ⁵, Thomas Blackburn, 1916–1977 ³, Kahlil Gibran, 1883–1931 ⁶, Alun Lewis, 1915–1944 ⁶, Wendell Berry, b. 1934 ⁶, Hebrew text, translation by Eric Bruskin, b. 1957 ⁷)

¹	Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine	9:22
²	Generatio praeterit et generatio advenit –	3:22
³	Daybreak	4:32
⁴	Laudibus in sanctis Dominum celebrate Supremum	9:01
⁵	This day has ended	7:06
⁶	We follow the dead to their graves –	2:36
⁷	God of compassion who dwells on high	5:45

Word (2012) 37:29

(Text compiled by The Reverend Dr Nicholas Fisher, b. 1948, from St John's Prologue, Bible NRSV ⁹ ¹¹ ¹³ ¹⁶ ¹⁸ ²¹ and the poems of R.S. Thomas, 1913–2000 ¹⁰ ¹² ¹⁴ ¹⁵ ¹⁷ ²⁰)

⁸	Prelude	1:18
⁹	In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God	1:22
¹⁰	In the beginning was the word. What word?	3:11
¹¹	What has come into being in him was life	0:49
¹²	I have seen the sun break through	7:00
¹³	He was in the world, and the world came into being through him	1:24
¹⁴	And to one God says: Come to me by numbers and figures –	3:34
¹⁵	You must put your knowledge off and come to me with your mind bare	2:31
¹⁶	But to all who received him, who believed in his name	0:58
¹⁷	It's a long way off	4:41
¹⁸	And the Word became flesh and lived among us	1:06
¹⁹	Epilogue –	3:22
²⁰	Enough that we are on our way	3:32
²¹	And the Word became flesh and lived among us	2:41

Francis Pott thanks the singers of Commotio, Matthew Berry, Joseph Spooner, Christian Wilson, Adrian Lucas of Acclaim Productions (producer), Aaron Prewer-Jenkinson of Acclaim Productions (producer's assistant), the support staff at Keble College, Oxford, Choral Connections, and commissioners Eric Bruskin and Nicholas Fisher.

Further thanks are due for financial support towards the creation of the album from Eric Bruskin, Robert Lipton, Oriol College, Oxford, Jane Brady, Nicholas Fisher, Susan Fogarty, The R.S. Thomas and M.E. Eldridge Society, P.E. and D.W. Gough, William Kingston, John G. McElhenney and Terry Duffy.

Francis Pott (b. 1957)

At First Light • Word

After many years exploring how far I could harness the guiding principles of 16th-century imitative polyphony within a tonally and harmonically expanded modern context, more recently I have found myself mixing sacred and secular texts. With this came a more selective attitude to polyphonic counterpoint, and a need to adapt my approach in more conscious reaction to the dictates of a given poem.

The two works heard in this recording were written some six years apart. They have meeting points but also marked differences. Occasionally they can be heard fleetingly to quote one another, much as if some equation could be made between a shared poetic image and the musical gesture called forth in response. In a general sense, the urge to revisit and refine a specific musical turn of phrase is no more than one might expect from a composer nodding towards 16th-century forebears, since in ancient sacred polyphony a series of imitative 'points' might unfold seamlessly and organically, with the end of one overlapping the onset of another and each suggesting a free variation of the last; but modern English replaces the majestic impersonality of church Latin with language and poems which may be conversational, immediate, colloquial, mundanely and stubbornly unpoetic – but also unfamiliar, and thus likely to suffer if the shifting tapestry of choral counterpoint is applied to them, obscuring the diction. So the two works presented here represent my own version of T.S. Eliot's 'hints and guesses'. As Eliot said also in the same context, the purpose is altered in the fulfilment; which may be why Tchaikovsky is reported to have commented that every work becomes a dress rehearsal for the next. Whether or not that is true, I do think of the two works presented here as exploratory and transitional in quite specific ways.

At First Light was commissioned by Eric Bruskin, a resident of Philadelphia, US, in memory of his mother. Eric had a longstanding interest in my work, and I was touched to be the person approached for a task which is both a privilege and a daunting responsibility. In a sense, no music can ever measure up to the weight of love or

hope of consolation vested in it under such circumstances – but in memory I carry the deaths of my own parents, and I was able to draw upon that. Eric's fondness for my *Cello Sonata* (itself written *in memoriam*) led him to ask that I include a solo cello part in the new work – but his attachment also to my choral writing led him to request a centrepiece which would be both the celebration of a life well lived and a showcase of contrapuntal technique: in his memorably alarming phrase, 'a polyphonic burn-out'... Therefore, the seven movements of *At First Light* arrange themselves as a series of slow meditations surrounding an exuberant extended motet in which the lamenting cello falls temporarily silent.

Eric's Jewish faith meant that approaching an agnostic humanist brought up within the Anglican tradition was hardly free of problems! Gradually, though, I was able to win his approval for a collated mosaic of texts. This embraces some liturgical Latin (necessary for the motet) as the shared preserve of broad Western culture in general, but balances it with a secular approach to loss, celebration, remembrance and the many shades of our mourning those whom we see no longer. Eric was adamant that he did not want the title 'Requiem'; but what has emerged is still a form of semi-secular requiem in all but name, taking its title instead from a phrase in the poem by Thomas Blackburn set as movement three. This seemed to suggest succinctly how the loss of one very close to us is an awakening into an unfamiliar world where everything is changed. Following the exuberant central movement, texts by the Lebanese-born Kahlil Gibran and the Kentuckian poet Wendell Berry first address the departed loved one directly, then place us within an imaginary funeral cortège, where the perennial and universal in human experience become personal without subscribing explicitly to any particular faith (or lack of it). The final text of all is a translation of a Hebraic prayer, requested and provided by Eric Bruskin, which first serves to mirror its Latin counterpart heard at the outset, then leads full circle back to that textual starting point.

Throughout, the lamenting cello represents a wordless commentary on the experience articulated in the text. It evokes and, in some sense, tries to embrace and sanctify the individual existential journeys of the bereft as they seek to make their own sense of what the short-lived Second World War poet Alun Lewis called 'the unbearable beauty of the dead' (movement five).

In a modern world hostage to ever greater menace, displacement, bloodshed and anguish, I hope fervently that this music not only brings a measure of solace to the person who commissioned it, but also makes its own small contribution to bailing out the sinking ship of humanity.

Word was commissioned by The Revd Dr Nicholas Fisher in 2011 and completed in December 2012. The commission was conceived as part of the Merton Choirbook project, collating a series of newly-composed works to mark the 750th anniversary of the foundation of Merton College, Oxford, in 1264.

Unusually, Nicholas Fisher presented his idea with a complete text already in mind. His intention was to enable contemplation of the Gospel's significance in our postmodern cultural epoch – hence 'Word' strictly without its definite article, to connote *Λόγος* – a concept, not a tangible thing. That lay behind his prescription of the New Revised Standard Version for St John's *Prologue*, and his choice of R.S. Thomas, whose thorny demotic language and idiosyncratic rhythms operate in the service of a 'poetry of ideas' and present a formidable challenge to any composer.

For decades an adherent myself to Thomas's verse, I was under no illusions as to the hurdles facing me, which begin with the sheer daunting self-sufficiency of such writing. At the same time, to the humanist agnostic composer Thomas offers a chance to reflect his tenacious grappling with a faith continually beset by doubt or dark outbreaks of the wrong kind of belief. There is nothing of comfortable certainty here, nothing of sensual self-indulgence or the decorative-for-its-own-sake. Difficult, counterintuitive meters mirror the beleaguered sense of instinctive faith as a square peg in the round hole of a scientifically-based rationalism. There are also

colloquialisms which seemingly mirror the mundane failure of humanity to apprehend anything numinous or mystical in the beauty of the natural order around it – an order which, moreover, it is forever despoiling and eroding.

Above all, Thomas appears not so much to address the individual as to commune only with himself, the hermit seemingly of cave or mountain top. The unsparing introspection of this harsh lone voice threatened to defy articulation through the collective utterance of any chorus. In particular, it seemed to forbid any polyphonically imitative approach, whereby each thread in the tapestry is intrinsically part of some greater, composite whole. Having composed after that fashion in many works, I found myself having to reinvent or, if not that, replace certain fundamentals of the technical way in which my musical ideas found expression. This is not to say that counterpoint recedes entirely, that a hymn-like uniformity imposes itself or that the sung element begins to conform to the supposed monody of an Ancient Greek tragic chorus. However, I did experience a sense of confronting a poetic Rosetta Stone and having to find my own key to its code before the hermetic difficulties of its flinty, resistant inner music could be unlocked. In the event, the general type and style of word-setting now seem to me to resemble more, say, those of Benjamin Britten in *Rejoice in the Lamb* (Christopher Smart) or the *Hymn to St Cecilia* (W.H. Auden).

Word alternates the verses from St John's *Prologue* with four complete short poems by Thomas and an extract from a somewhat longer one. It features a demanding and important organ part, which not only 'book-ends' the work with its own *Prologue* and *Epilogue*, but also contributes a crucial climactic solo section before the final choral passage. I delineated distinction between the prose of St John and the verse of Thomas by omitting the organ from the Biblical passages, which I aimed to keep simple and unvarnished in effect. I recalled Tippett's example in his oratorio *A Child of Our Time*, where contemplative Lutheran chorales conventional in Bach's *Passion* settings are tellingly replaced by spirituals from the Afro-American tradition.

As arranged here, the Thomas poems embody and interrogate respectively [i] restless, scurrying humanity's blindness to divine mystery; [ii] gritty intimations of some distant, hard-won but redemptive radiance; [iii] celebration of the divine through the symmetries, geometric perfections and mathematical intricacies of the natural and elemental world (but voiced by a shaping deity himself, not celebrated by humanity); [iv] an approach to some celestial kingdom from afar, tinged with anticipatory intimations of what it may prove to be; and [v] the pathos of several humanity, levelled by mortality and pursuing its uncertain, individual paths towards whatever final destiny awaits it.

I decided to unite the two contiguous strands of poetry and prose in the final choral section, whose subdued opening emerges out of the organ's solo passage. Accordingly, here the chorus returns to the text forming the very opening of St John's *Prologue* and heard previously at the beginning of *Word*, while two solo voices (soprano and tenor) intone the final Thomas poem in octaves, seemingly as one but, as female and male, embodying all of humanity. The preceding interpolations from St John have been so devised that salient features of their uppermost lines can now be laid end to end to form the contour of the chorale-like material sung by chorus and soloists. Other thematic links, too numerous to itemise, operate between and across sections

throughout the work. Certain of them recur fleetingly but obviously within the closing passage for organ solo.

With the generous permission of Nicholas Fisher, beyond its proper inscription to Merton College *Word* carries a secondary dedication to the memory of my friend Martin Read (1959–2012), a fine composer and tireless, selfless inspirer of compositional creativity in the young through his work as director of music at Alton College, Hampshire. He died suddenly just before *Word* was completed. He subscribed to no conventional religious belief, but – rather – to that 'uncontrollable mystery' of music itself as the living token of fractured humanity's healing attempts to make a kind of sense of its existence. As such, in his own way he must surely have affirmed and understood Thomas's second poem:

*I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
of great price, the one field that had
the treasure in it. I realize now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it.*

Francis Pott

At First Light

① Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine

Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis. In memoria aeterna erit iustus, ab auditione mala non timebit.

Lux aeterna luceat eis, Domine. Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis.

Mass for the Dead

② Generatio praeterit et generatio advenit

Generatio praeterit et generatio advenit. Terra vero in aeternum stat. Oritur sol et occidit. Omnia flumina intrant mare et mare non redundat: ad locum unde exeunt flumina revertuntur. Quid est quod fuit? Ipsum quod futurum est. Quid est quod factum est? Ipsum quod fiendum est.

Ecclesiastes I: 4, 5, 7, 9

③ Daybreak

There the sea birds come at first light
in all weathers, on all days,
To a particular field for feeding,
feathered in the sun's faint rays,
And through sleep I still catch their sea cries,
Turning my dreams to ocean themes
whose great rhythm never dies,
Think of cliffs of sleep till some great hand
sends the birds on their highways,
Draws them back when it is evening
to the coigns above the bays;
Master hand that with a difference
on all our human being plays
And will never let us fall, for death as an end
is a pack of lies,
This the wind that blows at midnight
to the stars above us says,
Age is but a growing nearer to being
without what flesh purveys
So however bad the weather

what is there to do but praise.

*Thomas Blackburn: Laudate
Text © The Estate of Thomas Blackburn
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④ Laudibus in sanctis Dominum celebrate supremum

Laudibus in sanctis Dominum celebrate supremum.
Firmamenta sonent inclyta facta Dei. Inclyta facta Dei
cantata sacraque potentis voce potestatem saepe sonate
manus.

Magnificum Domini cantet tuba martia nomen. Pieria
Domino concelebrate lyra. Laude Dei resonant,
resonantia tympana summi. Alta sacri resonant organa
laude Dei.

Hunc arguta canant tenui psalteria corda, hunc agili
laudet laeta chorea pede. Concava divinas effundant
cymbala laudes,

Cymbala dulcesona laude repleta Dei. Omne quod
aetheriis in mundo vescitur auris Halleluia canat tempus
in omne Deo.

Laudate Dominum de caelis. Laudate eum caeli
caelorum, et aquae omnes quae super caelos sunt
laudent nomen Domini. Laudate Dominum de terra.
Laudate eum in excelsis.

Halleluia.

Psalm CL [collation of paraphrased and standard texts]

⑤ This day has ended

This day has ended ... What was given us here we shall
keep ... It was but yesterday we met in a dream. You
have sung to me in my aloneness ... But now our sleep
has fled and our dream is over. Ever it has been that love
knows not its own depth until the hour of separation.

Kahlil Gibran: The Prophet

My soul cries out with love
Of all that walk and swim and fly.
From the mountains, from the sky,
Out of the depths of the sea
Love cries and cries in me.

And summer blossoms break above my head
With all the unbearable beauty of the dead.

Alun Lewis: Odi et Amo, iii

Iustorum animae in manu Dei sunt, et non target illos
tormentum mortis. Visi sunt oculis insipientium mori, et
aestimata est afflictio exitus illorum, et quod a nobis est
iter exterminii. Illi autem sunt in pace.

Wisdom of Solomon, 3: i-iii

⑥ We follow the dead to their graves

We follow the dead to their graves,
and our long love follows on
beyond, crying to them, not
'Come back!' but merely 'Wait!'
In waking thoughts, in dreams
we follow after, calling, 'Wait!
Listen! I am older now. I know
now how it was with you
when you were old and I
was only young. I am ready
now to accompany you
in your lonely fear'. And they
go on, one by one, as one
by one we go as they have gone.

*Wendell Berry: Sabbaths (2000): x:i
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⑦ God of compassion who dwells on high

God of compassion who dwells on high,
grant perfect rest on the wings of the Divine Presence
in the heights of the holy and the pure ones who shine
like the firmament
to the souls who have gone to their world.
...May their resting place be in paradise.
May the Master of mercy shelter them beneath His wings
for eternity;
and may He bind their souls in the bonds of life.
The Lord is their heritage, may they rest in peace.

Hebrew Liturgy of Interment

Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine, et lux perpetua
luceat eis.

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Music by Francis Pott, text compiled by Francis Pott from
Mass from the Dead, Liturgy of Interment, Ecclesiastes, Psalm CL,
Wisdom of Solomon, Thomas Blackburn (1916–1977), Kahlil Gibran
(1883–1931), Alun Lewis (1915–1944), Wendell Berry (b. 1934).
Commissioned by Mr Eric Bruskin.

Word

[Italic text is used for St John's Prologue and plain text for the Thomas poems.]

9 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

10 In the beginning was the word. What word? At the end is the dust. We know what dust; the dust that the bone comes to, that is the fall-out from our hubris, the dust on the Book that, out of breath with our hurry we dare not blow off in a cloud, lest out of that cloud should be resurrected the one spoken figure we have grown too clever to believe in.

(R.I.P. 1588–1988, excerpt)

11 *What has come into being in him was life and the life was the light of all people.*

12 I have seen the sun break through to illuminate a small field for a while, and gone my way and forgotten it. But that was the pearl of great price, the one field that had the treasure in it. I realize now that I must give all that I have to possess it. Life is not hurrying on to a receding future, nor hankering after an imagined past. It is the turning

aside like Moses to the miracle of the lit bush, to a brightness that seemed as transitory as your youth once, but is the eternity that awaits you.

The Bright Field

v. 1 13 *He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.*

v. 10

14 And to one God says: Come to me by numbers and figures; see my beauty in the angles between stars, in the equations of my kingdom. Bring your lenses to the worship of my dimensions: far out and far in, there is always more of me in proportion. And to another: I am the bush burning at the centre of your existence; 15 you must put your knowledge off and come to me with your mind bare. And to this one he says: Because of your high stomach, the bleakness of your emotions, I will come to you in the simplest things, in the body of a man hung on a tall tree you have converted to timber and you shall not know me.

Mediations

16 *But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.*

v. 12

17 It's a long way off but inside it There are quite different things going on: Festivals at which the poor man Is king and the consumptive is Healed; mirrors in which the blind look At themselves and love looks at them Back; and industry is for mending The bent bones and the minds fractured By life. It's a long way off, but to get There takes no time and admission Is free, if you will purge yourself Of desire, and present yourself with Your need only and the simple offering Of your faith, green as a leaf.

The Kingdom

18 *And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory.*

v. 14a

20 Enough that we are on our way; never ask of us where.

Some of us run, some loiter; some of us turn aside

to erect the Calvary that is our signpost, arms

pointing in opposite directions to bring us in the end

to the same place, so impossible is it to escape love. Imperishable

scarecrow, recipient of our casts-off, shame us until what is a swear-

word only becomes at last the word that was in the beginning.

The Word

21 *And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory.*

v. 14a

Word © Peters Edition Ltd, London 2015.
Music by Francis Pott, text compiled by The Revd Dr Nicholas Fisher from St John's Prologue [NRSV] and poems by R.S. Thomas (1913–2000). Commissioned by The Revd Dr Nicholas Fisher for The Merton Choirbook.

Joseph Spooner



Photo: Katie Vandyck

Joseph Spooner's diverse career has taken him across the UK, from the Baltic to the Atlantic, and from the recording studio to concert platforms in Continental Europe, Russia, New York, Mexico, and New Zealand. Notable chamber music collaborators have included David Owen Norris and Madeleine Mitchell. Spooner's delving into the repertoire has led to the recovery of unjustly neglected works, and his efforts have been praised by *International Record Review*, *Gramophone* and *The Strad*. Recent years have seen the release of further recordings on various labels, including Rawsthorne's *Cello Sonata*, Hesketh's *IMMH*, *Sea-Croon* (an album of previously unexplored 1920s English music), and Sherwood's *Double Concerto* (with the BBC Concert Orchestra and Rupert Marshall-Luck). Spooner was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music in 2012 and is proud to be the dedicatee of works by Alwynne Pritchard, Errollyn Wallen and Martin Read. His instrument was made by Nicolas Vuillaume in c. 1865.

www.josephspooner.net

Christian Wilson



Christian Wilson has forged a unique path as an organist, and his own transcriptions span numerous genres, ranging from medieval dances to the music of Piazzolla and Frank Zappa. Recent performances have met with critical acclaim at major concert venues across the world. Wilson's musical career began at Westminster Abbey, where he was head chorister. He later spent a year as sub-organist at St George's Cathedral, Perth (Western Australia) before taking up the organ scholarship at Christ Church, Oxford. Following a research degree, Christian was awarded various prizes and scholarships to study for the solo postgraduate degree at the Musikhochschule, Stuttgart. In 2012 he became the eighth person in the world to perform Francis Pott's epic organ symphony, *Christus*. In addition to his role as organist at HM Chapels

Royal, HM Tower of London, Wilson is director of music at Brasenose College, Oxford, and lecturer in music at Christ Church, playing regularly on BBC radio and appearing on television as a performer or musicologist. His recent recordings of organ music from the interwar period, *Commotio*, and the organ works of Francis Pott (both released on the Acis label) have been particularly well received.

www.christianwilson.co.uk

Commotio



Photo: Amalia Bastos

Commotio was formed in August 1999 to promote neglected contemporary choral repertoire. Performances have included the second UK performance of Alfred Schnittke's mighty *Requiem* and other rarely heard works such as Paul Hindemith's *Mass* and Kenneth Leighton's *Mass for Double Choir*, and the world premiere of Pierre Villette's *Inviolata*. Commotio also promotes and performs the works of a younger generation of composers including, most recently, Dobrinka Tabakova, Grace-Evangeline Mason, and Anna Thorvaldsdottir. Their commissions include works by John Duggan, Richard Allain, Edward Cowie, and Francis Pott. The ensemble's debut album of South

African choral music was released in February 2006, followed by an album for choir and cello in February 2008. The choir have also recorded several critically acclaimed albums for Naxos, including *Luminosity* (James Whitbourn, 8.572103), *In the Heart of Things* (Francis Pott, 8.572739), *The Rose in the Middle of Winter* (Bob Chilcott, 8.573159) and *All Good Things* (Bob Chilcott, 8.573383). In December 2016, Commotio performed at Parkinson's UK Oxford's Christmas concert and premiered a new carol by Bob Chilcott, *The Angel did Fly*. The choir gave the first UK performance of Rolande Falcinelli's *Messe de Saint-Dominique* in June 2018.

www.commotio.org

Soprano

Emily Armour [1-7](#)
 Anne-Marie Boylan [1-7](#)
 Aoife Dudley (soloist [17](#) [20](#))
 Harriet Edwards [8-21](#)
 Dawn Herbert [8-21](#)
 Chloe Martindale
 Francesca Mosely
 Lorna Richerby
 Kirsten Rowe [1-7](#)
 Griselda Sherlaw-Johnson
 Kate Smith (soloist [17](#))
 Hannah Wight (soloist [17](#))

Alto

Naomi Barson-Cain [1-7](#)
 Helena Bickley-Percival
 Sue Chamberlin
 Rupert Griffin
 Katie Hillier [8-21](#)
 Laura Jones
 Catherine Mann
 Helen Swan [1-7](#)
 Heather Thomas (soloist [6](#))
 Pippa Thynne

Tenor

Tim Ambrose (soloist [5](#) [6](#) [20](#))
 James Graham
 Michael Hosking
 Neil Malcolm
 James Martin
 Tim Nightingale
 David Smith

Bass

Hugh Conway Morris
 John Kay
 Martyn Matthews
 Michael Peyton Jones [8-21](#)
 George Rolls
 Michael Rowley
 Paul Ryan [1-7](#)
 Philip Towler

Matthew Berry



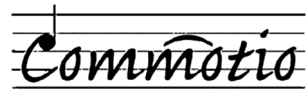
Matthew Berry, the conductor and joint founder of Commotio, studied music at University College Oxford, where he was organ scholar and then assistant organist. After conducting The Oxford Chamber Choir for two years as a student, he founded Commotio in 1999. Having finished his degree, he studied postgraduate choral direction with Patrick Russell for two years at the Royal Academy of Music in London. Berry's expertise lies in the research and promotion of little-known contemporary choral repertoire, principally from Scandinavia, South Africa, the United States and Slovenia. In 19 years working with Commotio he has initiated many premieres including, most recently, the UK premiere of Rolande Falcinelli's *Messe de Sainte-Dominique*. In February 2013, the Governing Body of the Royal Academy of Music elected Berry an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music (ARAM). Berry returned to conduct Commotio in 2019–20 after a short sabbatical during which Bob Chilcott directed the choir. www.commotio.org/conductor

Francis Pott



Francis Pott began musical life as a chorister at New College, Oxford. He held Open Music Scholarships at Winchester College and then at Magdalene College, Cambridge, where he studied composition with Robin Holloway and Hugh Wood while pursuing piano studies privately in London with Hamish Milne. Throughout the 1990s he was John Bennett Lecturer in Music at St Hilda's College, Oxford, as well as a member of the Choir of Winchester Cathedral, under the direction of David Hill. In 2001 he became director of London College of Music within the University of West London, subsequently leading research across all areas of the University's Faculty of Arts. In 2007 the University appointed him to its first chair in composition, a post which he still occupies despite taking partial retirement in 2018 to devote more time to writing music. Pott's works have been performed and broadcast in over 40 countries, widely published in the UK and released worldwide on some 40 albums. Winner of four national and two international composition awards, in 1997 he received First Prize in the piano solo section of the Prokofiev Composing Competition, Moscow. In 1999 *A Song on the End of the World*, his oratorio for soloists, chorus and orchestra, named after a poem written in Nazi-occupied Warsaw by Czesław Miłosz, was the acclaimed millennial Elgar Commission of The Three Choirs Festival, Worcester. The work was hailed by *The Times* and the *Birmingham Post*. In 2006 a further oratorio for tenor soloist, double chorus and organ, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, was acclaimed by Richard Morrison in *The Times*. In 2006 and 2011 Pott was a nominated finalist in the BASCA British Composer Awards (now the Ivors Composer Awards, staged in association with BBC Radio 3) in London. Recent pieces include chamber, choral and organ music. May 2017 saw the world premiere of Pott's third major work for chorus and orchestra, the sea-inspired Requiem *Cantus Maris*, at the Royal Festival Hall, Southbank Centre, London. www.francispott.com

Francis Pott's acclaimed musical voice is one of uncommon eloquence and seriousness of purpose, and his works have been performed and broadcast in over 40 countries. This recording presents world premiere recordings of two major pieces. *At First Light* is a memorial work which takes the form of a series of slow meditations surrounding an exuberant motet, with wordless commentary from a lamenting cello. *Word*, with its significant role for the organ and the inclusion of texts by the Welsh priest and poet R.S. Thomas, reveals Gospel contemplation in a postmodern world.



Francis
POTT
(b. 1957)

1–7 At First Light (2018) 41:57

8–21 Word (2012) 37:29

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Joseph Spooner, Cello 1–3 5–7

Christian Wilson, Organ 8 10 12 14 15 17 19–21

Commotio 1–7 9–18 20–21

Matthew Berry

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet. The English and Latin sung texts are included in the booklet and may also be accessed at www.naxos.com/libretti/573976.htm

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