

BENJAMIN BRITTEN
**A Ceremony
of Carols**

IRELAND | BRIDGE | HOLST

Choir of Clare College, Cambridge
Graham Ross

A Ceremony of Carols

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| BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913-1976) | | |
| 1 | Venite exultemus Domino
for mixed choir and organ (1961) | 4'11 |
| 2 | Te Deum in C
for mixed choir and organ (1934) | 7'40 |
| 3 | Jubilate Deo in C
for mixed choir and organ (1961) | 2'30 |
| 4 | Deus in adjutorium meum intende
from <i>This Way to the Tomb</i> for mixed choir a cappella (1944-45) | 4'37 |
| 5 | A Hymn to the Virgin
for solo SATB and mixed choir a cappella (1930, rev. 1934) | 3'23 |
| 6 | A Hymn of St Columba
for mixed choir and organ (1962) | 2'01 |
| 7 | Hymn to St Peter op. 56a
for mixed choir and organ (1955) | 5'57 |
| JOHN IRELAND (1879-1962) | | |
| 8 | The Holy Boy
version for mixed choir a cappella (1941) | 2'50 |
| FRANK BRIDGE (1879-1941) | | |
| 9 | Music, when soft voices die H. 37
for mixed choir a cappella (1904) | 3'26 |
| GUSTAV HOLST (1874-1934) | | |
| 10 | This have I done for my true love op. 34 no. 1, H. 128
for mixed choir a cappella (1916) | 5'25 |
| BENJAMIN BRITTEN | | |
| 11 | The Sycamore Tree
for mixed choir a cappella (1930, rev. 1967) | 1'30 |
| ANONYMOUS, arr. BENJAMIN BRITTEN | | |
| 12 | The Holly and the Ivy
traditional folksong, arranged for mixed choir a cappella (1957) | 3'36 |
| BENJAMIN BRITTEN | | |
| 13 | Sweet was the song the Virgin sung
from <i>Christ's Nativity</i> for soprano and mixed choir a cappella (1931) | 2'45 |
| A Ceremony of Carols op. 28 (1942, rev. 1943)
version for mixed choir and harp arranged by JULIUS HARRISON (1885-1963) | | |
| 14 | 1. Procession | 1'18 |
| 15 | 2. Wolcum Yole! | 1'21 |
| 16 | 3. There is no rose | 2'27 |
| 17 | 4a. That yongè child | 1'50 |
| 18 | 4b. Balulalow | 1'18 |
| 19 | 5. As dew in Aprille | 0'56 |
| 20 | 6. This little babe | 1'24 |
| 21 | 7. Interlude | 4'00 |
| 22 | 8. In freezing winter night | 3'34 |
| 23 | 9. Spring Carol | 1'14 |
| 24 | 10. Deo gracias | 1'05 |
| 25 | 11. Recession | 1'26 |
| 26 | A New Year Carol op. 7 no. 5
from <i>Friday Afternoons</i> arranged for mixed choir and harp (1933-35) | 2'17 |

Choir of Clare College, Cambridge
 Tanya Houghton, *harp*
 Eleanor Carter, Ashley Chow, *organ*
 Graham Ross, *conductor*

Choir of Clare College, Cambridge

Graham Ross, *Director of Music*

<i>Sopranos</i>	Sophie Alabaster (5), Katie Care, Lottie Greenhow (13), Rhea Gupta (12), Jessica Hopkins (7, 22), Helena Mackie (2, 12, 18), Rebecca McElroy, Matilda Mills (23), Scarlet O'Shea (23), Louise Turner
<i>Altos</i>	Eleanor Carter, Rosina Griffiths (5, 12), Isaac Jarratt Barnham, Julia Morris, Theo Normanton, Caitlin Obee, Joseph Payne (12), Pia Rose Scattergood, Mathilda Stables
<i>Tenors</i>	Laurence Booth-Clibborn, Harry Castle, Michael Johnston (12, 22), Victoria Longstaff, Jonathan Nicolaides, Samuel Porteous (5)
<i>Basses</i>	Ashley Chow, Conor Farrell-Foster, Liam Goddard, Toby Hession (5), Christopher Holliday (12), Harry Swanson
<i>Harp</i>	Tanya Houghton (15-24, 26)
<i>Organ</i>	Eleanor Carter (2, 6, 7), Ashley Chow (1, 3)
<i>Conductor</i>	Graham Ross

I have always loved performing Benjamin Britten's works for voice: I have known *A Ceremony of Carols* as long as I can remember; I often sang the treble role of one of the 'Pickled Boys' in *Saint Nicholas*; the first opera I ever conducted was *The Little Sweep* in Aldeburgh's Jubilee Hall sixty years after its première in the same venue; and my first recording for harmonia mundi (HMU 907576) included Imogen Holst's brilliant orchestration of *Rejoice in the Lamb*. More recently, I've conducted the *War Requiem* in King's College Chapel, Cambridge, humbly standing on the very same flagstone on which the composer stood in his own performances in that venue. For me, Britten really sets the standard with his approach to text, always with a careful understanding of the poetry and inflexions of language – whether English or otherwise. In assembling this recording around *A Ceremony of Carols*, I have included some of Britten's lesser-known pieces that span more than three decades, as well as works by three composers who heavily influenced him.

Focussing later on festive music, we begin at the start of the day with Britten's trio of C major morning canticles for choir and organ, set in English. These were not written together, however: the **Te Deum in C** was composed by a twenty-year-old Britten in 1934 for the choir of St Mark's, North Audley Street, London. Later that year he set a *Jubilate Deo* in E flat, thereby completing the traditional pairing of Anglican canticles, but this was never released during his lifetime – so the C major *Te Deum* seemed incomplete. Almost three decades later, at the request of the Duke of Edinburgh, Britten resolved this with his **Jubilate Deo in C**, composed for St George's Chapel, Windsor in 1961. The **Venite exultemus Domino**, composed in the same month in 1961, was found among Britten's unpublished works after his death, and we can assume that it was also written for St George's at the request of the Duke. The *Venite* is largely homophonic, with chant-like phrases connected by organ modulations to sometimes surprising new tonal areas. The *Te Deum* is driven from the start by an organ pedal syncopated ostinato. Voices build from low to high, leading to thrilling climaxes. A solo soprano line in the calmer central section features ever-increasing phrase lengths that make way for a gradual acceleration of the pedal ostinato and a reprise of the opening material. Though the *Jubilate Deo* employs a largely sparse texture, typical of his later style, the organ takes on a lively accompaniment with buoyant rhythmic scalar passages underpinning the vocal parts. Hints of heterophony (divergent versions of the same melody) in the paired vocal parts show influences of the Eastern music Britten encountered during this period.

From the *Te Deum*'s composition until 1939, incidental music for film and radio plays was a significant part of Britten's output. He returned to this interest in 1945 with music for *This Way to the Tomb*, a radio play by Ronald Duncan (who completed the libretto for *The Rape of Lucretia* the following year). Britten's a cappella setting of psalm 70, **Deus in adiutorium meum intende**, introduced Duncan's play. The text is a heartfelt plea from David for rescue from his enemies, which would have resonated strongly in wartime Britain, and particularly with pacifists Britten and Duncan. Britten's setting is sectional and wide-ranging, often with solemn canonic and contrapuntal writing that harks back to the counterpoint techniques he acquired from his studies with John Ireland.

The earliest version of **A Hymn to the Virgin** dates from July 1930, when the sixteen-year-old Britten was confined to bed in his school infirmary. It received its first performance in 1931, at which time his mother sang the alto solo, and in 1934 he transposed it down a semitone for publication. The anonymous Macaronic text from around 1300 was taken from *The Oxford Book of English Verse 1250–1900* which Britten had received as a school prize. A main chorus delivers the medieval English whilst a solo quartet/semi-chorus interjects the Latin from a distance. The two choruses come together in the final stanza, though antiphony is restored at the end. Britten retained a soft spot for this work throughout his life, and it was performed at his funeral in 1976. **A Hymn of St Columba**, composed in 1962, was commissioned for the 1400th anniversary of St Columba's voyage from Ireland to the island of Iona. Britten mirrors the urgency of Columba's missionary task in his marking 'with fire', introducing from the outset a disturbing pedal ostinato which drives the piece forward. The broad unison vocal melody swells to great effect and returns at the end in canon. **Hymn to St Peter** was written in 1955 and first performed in the same year for the quinqucentenary of the Church of St Peter Mancroft in Norwich. The work draws on a text taken from the Gradual of the Feast of St Peter and St Paul, with its associated plainsong: this chant is presented on the organ at the start and is echoed in a solo soprano line that delivers the Latin 'Tu es Petrus' text above its English translation ('Thou art Peter') sung by the choir. No doubt the commissioning church and the text also held further significance for Britten as it shared the name of his life partner, Peter Pears.

John Ireland taught Britten at London's Royal College of Music in the 1930s. 'Either the boy is awarded a scholarship, or I resign', said Ireland (his wish was granted). His carol **The Holy Boy**, originally written for piano on Christmas Day 1913, tells of the birth of Christ. The piece became one of Ireland's most popular works, and he made several arrangements during his lifetime. A simple lilting melody reaches its climax in the final stanza, by means of a simple trick: the highest melody note is one pitch higher than in the verses which precede it. In 1924 at the Norfolk and Norwich Festival, the eleven-year-old Britten first heard Frank Bridge's orchestral poem *The Sea*, conducted by the composer, and was 'knocked sideways'. The following year, Bridge invited him to study with him. 'He really taught me', Britten later recalled, 'to take as much trouble as I possibly could over every passage'. Bridge wrote only a few a

cappella works for mixed chorus, but his 1904 **Music, when soft voices die** is particularly evocative. A reworking of a song he wrote the previous year, it reaches a brief central climax framed by a hushed opening and a closing 'slumber'. Britten famously paid tribute to his teacher in his 1937 *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge*. In this partsong, Bridge's musical language seems to pay homage to his own teacher, Charles Villiers Stanford. Of the first generation of British 20th-century composers, Britten reserved special admiration for Gustav Holst (who, like Ireland and Bridge, was also taught by Stanford). Holst had a wider outlook than many of his contemporaries, with strong influences not only in British folksong but also as far afield as India and Japan. His partsong **This have I done for my true love** was written in 1916 for the first of the Whitsuntide Festivals that Holst organised in the parish church of Thaxted in Essex, where he retreated for long weekends to compose. The words use the symbol of dance as a means of religious ritual and praise, encapsulating the key events of the Gospels.

One of the earliest of Britten's own settings of well-known Christmas texts is **The Sycamore Tree**, composed over two days in 1930, two months after *A Hymn to the Virgin*. Both works were premiered in the same concert, when the former was given its original title *I saw three ships*. Britten revisited the carol in 1967, dedicating it to his amanuensis Imogen Holst in the process. It is a lively setting that has folk-melody elements and depictions of pealing bells. June Gordon, a near-contemporary of Britten at the RCM, asked him to arrange **The Holly and the Ivy** for her Haddo House Choral Society's 1956 carol concert in Aberdeen, as the choir were 'heartily sick of all arrangements tried so far'. Britten's response, completed in January 1957, set one of the five versions noted by Cecil Sharp in his *English Folk Carols* (with its quirky 'playing of the merry harp'), creating a palindromic combination of different solo and accompanying voices for the seven stanzas. **Sweet was the song the Virgin sung**, another student piece, was written in 1931 at the RCM and forms the second movement of *Christ's Nativity*. Setting words from William Ballet's 16th-century *Lute Book*, he revised it for contralto solo and women's voices for performance at the 1966 Aldeburgh Festival. The gently rocking cooing refrain ('lulla, lullaby') supports the legato solo melody, and the absence of lower voices gives a remote and weightless quality to the music.

Britten composed **A Ceremony of Carols** in 1942 whilst on board the M. S. Axel Johnson, a Swedish cargo vessel, travelling back to England after having spent three successful years in America with Pears. During the voyage, they berthed at Halifax, Nova Scotia, where Britten came across *The English Galaxy of Shorter Poems* in a bookshop. With this and two harp manuals he had with him (studying for an eventually unfulfilled concerto commission) he began work on setting these medieval poems for upper voices and harp. These became the first sketches of the *Ceremony*. The work begins with *Hodie Christus natus est*, the plainsong antiphon from the *Vespers of the Nativity*. Britten may have been inspired by Holst's earlier *The Hymn of Jesus*, where alternating boys and adult choirs enter to plainsong chants. Britten was later to use the processional idea in such works as *Saint Nicolas*, *Noyes Fludde* and *Curlow River*. The short movements of the *Ceremony* are highly contrasting, ranging from the plangent individual lines of *That yongë child* and *In freezing winter night* to the choral blocks of *Balulalow* and *There is no rose*, with moments of angularity and exuberance in *I sing of a maiden* and *This little babe*. Solos and duos add further colour, and the ethereal solo harp *Interlude* provides an ingenious variation on the plainsong theme. The text of *Deo gracias* in the penultimate movement brings the work to its climax over repeated harp glissandi. An echo of the *Hodie* plainsong brings the work to its natural, unaccompanied close. Scored originally for three-part upper voices and harp, the work had immense popularity (the first published score in 1943 sold out within a month) that led Britten's publisher to invite the composer Julius Harrison to make an arrangement for mixed adult voices, which we perform here. Purists may argue this lacks something of Britten's quest for innocence in his original scoring, but Harrison's arrangement makes use of the expanded palette to great effect. There is denser scoring for dramatic impact, more divisi writing, interplay between upper and lower voices, and a careful treatment of the three-part canon in *This little babe*. Britten was as much a pragmatist as a perfectionist ('I want my music to be of use to people', he said), and his works were regularly rearranged during his lifetime either by him or by others (Imogen Holst's aforementioned orchestration of *Rejoice in the Lamb* being one such example). I would like to think that he would be pleased that a mixed-voice undergraduate choir such as at Clare College is still regularly exposed to this wonderful music and that it wasn't confined only to the (also wonderful) boy trebles of our neighbouring Colleges Cambridge.

It would perfectly suffice to end this programme with the *Hodie* recessional plainsong, but instead I give the last word to the charming **A New Year Carol**. It forms the fifth movement of *Friday Afternoons*, the first of Britten's many works for children written for his schoolmaster brother, Robert, whose school choir in Prestatyn in Wales rehearsed on Friday afternoons. The folk text may relate to the Welsh custom of bringing fresh spring water with evergreen sprigs as a New Year gift, and 'levy dew, the water and the wine' is likely to be a corruption of 'levez Dieu', a reference to the elevation of the Host at the Eucharist. In our performance, we transfer the original piano part to harp, and combine the assigned lower and upper voices of the first two stanzas in the final verse as we collectively turn a new leaf and 'let the New Year in'.

GRAHAM ROSS

J'ai toujours aimé interpréter les œuvres vocales de Benjamin Britten : je connais depuis toujours *A Ceremony of Carols* ; j'ai souvent chanté le rôle de soprano d'un des garçons mis au saloir, un des "Pickled Boys", dans *Saint Nicolas* ; le premier opéra que j'ai dirigé était *The Little Sweep* ("Le petit ramoneur") au Jubilee Hall d'Aldeburgh, soixante ans après sa création en ce même lieu ; et mon premier enregistrement pour harmonia mundi comprenait la brillante orchestration de *Rejoice in the Lamb* ("Réjouissez-vous en l'Agneau") réalisée par Imogen Holst (HMU 907576). Plus récemment, j'ai dirigé le *War Requiem* à la chapelle du King's College, à Cambridge, me tenant humblement sur cette même dalle d'où dirigeait le compositeur lorsqu'il donnait des concerts en ce lieu. À mes yeux, Britten constitue vraiment un modèle par sa façon de traiter le texte, de prêter toujours une grande attention à la poésie et aux inflexions du langage – qu'il s'agisse d'un texte anglais ou d'une autre langue. Pour composer le programme de cet enregistrement, centré sur *A Ceremony of Carols*, j'ai inclus certaines œuvres moins connues de Britten, qui s'étendent sur plus de trente ans, ainsi que des œuvres de trois compositeurs qui l'ont fortement influencé.

Avant d'en venir à des œuvres de musique festive, nous commençons par le début de la journée, avec le trio de cantiques matinaux en ut majeur que Britten a composés dans des versions anglaises pour chœur et orgue. Les trois œuvres n'ont toutefois pas été écrites au même moment : le *Te Deum en ut majeur* a été composé en 1934, par un Britten âgé de vingt ans, pour le chœur de l'église Saint-Marc de North Audley Street, à Londres. Cette même année, Britten écrit ensuite un *Jubilate Deo en mi bémol majeur*, complétant ainsi l'association traditionnelle de ces deux cantiques anglicans, mais ce *Jubilate* n'a jamais été publié de son vivant - le *Te Deum* restait donc incomplet. Près de trente ans plus tard, à la demande du duc d'Édimbourg, Britten y a remédié en composant un *Jubilate Deo en ut majeur* pour la chapelle Saint-Georges de Windsor en 1961. Quant au *Venite exultemus Domino* ("Venez, chantons notre allégresse au Seigneur"), composé le même mois, il a été retrouvé parmi les œuvres inédites de Britten après sa mort, et l'on peut supposer qu'il avait également été écrit pour la chapelle Saint-Georges à la demande du duc. Ce *Venite* est en grande partie homophonique, avec des phrases en style de psalmodie que des modulations à l'orgue relient à de nouvelles régions tonales parfois surprenantes. Le *Te Deum* est propulsé dès le départ par un ostinato syncopé au pédalier de l'orgue. Les voix entrent en montant du grave à l'aigu, conduisant à des sommets éclatants. Dans la section centrale plus calme, une ligne mélodique du soprano solo comporte des phrases de longueur toujours croissante, qui font place à une accélération progressive de l'ostinato et à une reprise du matériau initial. Bien que le *Jubilate Deo* utilise une texture bien plus clairesmée, typique du style plus tardif de Britten, l'orgue s'y charge d'un accompagnement très vif avec des passages rythmiques enjoués en gammes soutenant les parties vocales. Les éléments d'hétérophonie (différentes versions d'une même mélodie chantées simultanément) que comprennent les parties vocales jumelées trahissent l'influence de la musique orientale, que Britten avait découverte à cette époque.

Depuis la composition du *Te Deum* jusqu'en 1939, les œuvres musicales composées pour des films et des pièces radiophoniques ont constitué une part importante de la production de Britten. Il revint à ce genre en 1945 avec la musique pour *This Way to the Tomb* ("Cette voie vers la tombe"), pièce radiophonique de Ronald Duncan (qui écrira l'année suivante le livret de l'opéra de Britten, *Le Viol de Lucrèce*). Britten composa une version a cappella du psaume 70, *Deus in adiutorium meum intende* ("Dieu, viens à mon secours") en introduction à la pièce de Duncan. Ce texte est une imploration touchante de David pour être sauvé de ses ennemis qui a dû rencontrer beaucoup d'échos dans une Grande-Bretagne alors en guerre, en particulier auprès des pacifistes qu'étaient Britten et Duncan. La version musicale qu'en donne Britten, composée par sections, est d'une grande ampleur, d'une écriture souvent solennelle, canonique et contrapuntique, qui rappelle les techniques de contrepoint qu'il avait apprises lors de ses études avec John Ireland.

La première version de *A Hymn to the Virgin* ("Un hymne à la Vierge") remonte à juillet 1930, alors que Britten, âgé de seize ans, était alité dans l'infirmerie de son école. L'œuvre a été exécutée pour la première fois en 1931, la mère du compositeur chantant la partie d'alto soliste. Pour la publication, en 1934, Britten l'a transposée d'un demi-ton vers le bas. Le texte anonyme, qui fait alterner l'anglais et le latin, date de 1300 environ : il est tiré d'une anthologie poétique, l'*Oxford Book of English Verse 1250-1900*, que Britten avait reçue en prix à l'école. Un chœur principal chante le texte en anglais médiéval tandis qu'un quatuor soliste ou un demi-chœur intervient de loin en chantant les vers latins. Les deux chœurs se rejoignent dans la strophe finale, bien que l'antiphonie reparaisse à la fin. Britten a gardé tout au long de sa vie un faible pour cette œuvre, qui a été jouée à ses funérailles en 1976. *A Hymn of St Columba* ("Un hymne de saint Colomba"), composé en 1962, a été commandé pour le 1400^e anniversaire du voyage de saint Colomba depuis l'Irlande vers l'île d'Iona. Britten exprime le caractère urgent de la tâche missionnaire de Colomba en recommandant de jouer l'œuvre "avec feu" et en introduisant dès le début un inquiétant ostinato au pédalier qui fait aller la musique de l'avant. L'ample mélodie vocale à l'unisson se gonfle, produisant un effet puissant, et revient à la fin en canon. L'*Hymn to St Peter* ("Hymne à saint Pierre") a été écrit en 1955 et exécuté pour la première fois la même année à l'occasion du cinquantième centenaire de l'église Saint-Pierre Mancroft à Norwich. L'œuvre s'inspire d'un texte tiré du graduel de la fête des saints Pierre et Paul et du plain-chant qui lui est associé : celui-ci est exposé au début à l'orgue avant d'être repris en écho par la soprano solo qui énonce le texte latin "Tu es Petrus" ("tu es Pierre") au-dessus de sa traduction anglaise ("Thou art Peter") chantée par le chœur. Nul doute que l'église commanditaire ainsi que le texte n'aient eu pour Britten une signification supplémentaire puisqu'ils partageaient le nom de son compagnon de vie, Peter Pears.

John Ireland a été le professeur de Britten au Royal College of Music de Londres dans les années 1930. "*Ou bien ce garçon obtient une bourse, ou bien je démissionne*", aurait-il déclaré (son souhait a été exaucé). Son chant de Noël, *The Holy Boy* ("Le saint enfant"), écrit à l'origine pour piano le jour de Noël 1913, raconte la naissance du Christ. Cette pièce est devenue l'une des œuvres les plus populaires d'Ireland, qui en a fait plusieurs arrangements au cours de sa vie. Une simple mélodie bien cadencée atteint son point culminant dans la strophe finale grâce à une petite astuce : la note la plus haute de la mélodie est supérieure d'un ton par rapport aux versets antérieurs. En 1924, lors du festival de Norfolk et Norwich, Britten, alors âgé de onze ans, entendit pour la première fois le poème orchestral de Frank Bridge, *The Sea* ("La mer"), sous la direction du compositeur, et en fut véritablement "renversé". L'année suivante, Bridge le convia à suivre son enseignement. Britten dira plus tard à ce propos : "*Il m'a vraiment appris à élaborer chaque passage avec le plus grand soin possible*". Bridge n'a composé que quelques œuvres a cappella pour chœur mixte, mais sa pièce de 1904, *Musical, when soft voices die* ("La musique, quand meurent de douces voix"), est particulièrement évocatrice. Reprise d'une mélodie qu'il avait écrite l'année précédente, l'œuvre atteint un bref apogée central encadré par une ouverture murmurée et un "sommeil" conclusif. Britten a rendu un célèbre hommage à son professeur en composant des *Variations sur un thème de Frank Bridge* ("Variations sur un thème de Frank Bridge") en 1937. De même, par son langage musical, le morceau polyphonique de Bridge semble être un hommage à son propre professeur, Charles Villiers Stanford. Parmi les compositeurs britanniques de la première génération du xx^e siècle, Britten gardait une admiration particulière pour Gustav Holst (qui, comme Ireland et Bridge, avait suivi l'enseignement de Stanford). Holst avait une vision musicale plus large que beaucoup de ses contemporains, faisant place à des influences marquantes venues non seulement de la chanson folklorique britannique mais aussi de musiques aussi lointaines que celles de l'Inde et du Japon. Sa pièce polyphonique *This have I done for my true love* ("Voici ce que j'ai fait pour mon pur amour") a été écrite en 1916 pour le premier festival de Pentecôte que Holst organisa dans l'église paroissiale de Thaxted, dans l'Essex, où il se retirait pour composer pendant de longs week-ends. Les paroles évoquent le symbole de la danse comme moyen de rituel religieux et de louange, reprenant les événements-clés des Évangiles.

L'une des premières mises en musique de textes de Noël connus que fit Britten est *The Sycamore Tree* ("Le sycamore"), composée en deux jours en 1930, deux mois après *A Hymn to the Virgin*. Les deux œuvres ont été créées lors du même concert, la première sous son titre original, *I saw three ships* ("J'ai vu trois vaisseaux"). Britten a remanié ce chant de Noël en 1967, le dédiant à cette occasion à son assistante, Imogen Holst. Il s'agit d'une version musicale animée, qui comporte des éléments mélodiques folkloriques et des imitations de sonneries de cloches. June Gordon, qui avait fréquenté le Royal College of Music presque en même temps que Britten, lui a demandé en 1956 d'arranger *The Holly and the Ivy* ("Le houx et le lierre") pour le concert de chants de Noël de la Haddo House Choral Society à Aberdeen, car la chorale en avait "vraiment assez de tous les arrangements essayés jusqu'alors". La réponse de Britten, achevée en janvier 1957, mettait en musique l'une des cinq versions recueillies par Cecil Sharp dans son anthologie d'*English Folk Carols* (avec son excentrique "jeu de la joyeuse harpe"), créant une combinaison palindromique de différentes voix solistes et voix d'accompagnement pour les sept strophes. Écrite en 1931 au Royal College of Music, *Sweet was the song the Virgin sung* ("Doux était l'air que chantait la Vierge") est une autre composition d'un Britten encore étudiant. Elle constitue le deuxième mouvement de la suite de Noël, *Christ's Nativity* ("Nativité du Christ"). Reprenant des paroles d'un recueil pour luth du xvi^e siècle, le *Lute Book* de William Ballet, Britten les a arrangées pour contralto solo et voix de femmes afin de faire exécuter l'œuvre au festival d'Aldeburgh en 1966. Le refrain roucoulant et doucement berçant ("lulla, lullaby") soutient la mélodie legato de la soliste, et l'absence de voix graves confère à la musique une impression de légèreté et d'éloignement.

Britten a composé *A Ceremony of Carols* en 1942, alors qu'il se trouvait à bord du *M. S. Axel Johnson*, un cargo suédois qui le ramenait en Angleterre après trois années fructueuses passées en Amérique avec Peter Pears. Au cours du voyage, ils firent escale à Halifax, en Nouvelle-Écosse, où Britten découvrit dans une librairie une anthologie de poèmes brefs, *The English Galaxy of Shorter Poems*. Avec ce livre et deux manuels de harpe qu'il avait avec lui (il les étudiait en vue d'une commande de concerto qui ne vit finalement pas le jour), il commença à mettre en musique ces poèmes médiévaux pour voix aiguës et harpe. Ce furent les premières esquisses de la *Ceremony of Carols*. L'œuvre commence par *Hodie Christus natus est* ("Aujourd'hui est né le Christ"), l'antienne en plain-chant des vêpres de Noël. Britten s'est peut-être inspiré d'une œuvre plus ancienne de Holst, *The Hymn of Jesus* ("L'hymne de Jésus"), où des chœurs de garçons et d'adultes interviennent en alternance en plain-chant. Britten utilisera plus tard cette idée processionnelle dans des œuvres comme *Saint Nicolas*, *Noyes Fludde* ("L'arche de Noé") et *Curlew River* ("La rivière aux courlis"). Les mouvements brefs de la *Ceremony* sont très contrastés, allant des mélodies mélancoliques de *That yongë child* ("Ce jeune enfant") et *In freezing winter night* ("Dans la nuit glaciale de l'hiver") aux blocs choraux de *Balulalow* et *There is no rose* ("Il n'y a nulle rose"), avec des moments plus carrés et exubérants dans *I sing of a maiden* ("Je chante d'une jeune fille") et *This little babe* ("Ce petit bébé"). Solos et duos apportent des couleurs supplémentaires, et l'*Interlude* éthéré pour harpe soliste ajoute une variation ingénieuse sur le thème en plain-chant. Le texte du *Deo gracias* dans l'avant-dernier mouvement amène l'œuvre à son point culminant par des glissandos répétés à la harpe. Un écho du plain-chant initial du *Hodie* conduit l'œuvre à sa conclusion naturelle, sans accompagnement. Conçue à l'origine pour

trois voix aiguës et harpe, la *Ceremony* a connu une immense popularité (sa première édition, publiée en 1943, a été épuisée en un mois), incitant l'éditeur de Britten à demander au compositeur Julius Harrison d'en réaliser un arrangement pour voix adultes mixtes, que nous exécutons ici. Les puristes diront peut-être qu'il y manque quelque chose de la quête d'innocence que présentait la version originale de Britten, mais l'arrangement de Harrison exploite cette palette sonore élargie avec une grande efficacité. L'écriture présente des passages plus denses, aux effets dramatiques, elle est plus souvent divisée et comprend des échanges entre voix supérieures et inférieures, et le canon à trois voix de *This little babe* est traité avec beaucoup de soin. Britten était autant pragmatique que perfectionniste ("Je veux que ma musique soit utile aux gens", disait-il), et ses œuvres étaient régulièrement arrangées de son vivant, que ce soit par lui ou par d'autres (l'orchestration de *Rejoice in the Lamb* par Imogen Holst, mentionnée plus haut, en est un exemple). J'aime à penser qu'il aurait été heureux qu'un chœur d'étudiants à voix mixtes comme celui du Clare College soit encore régulièrement initié à cette merveilleuse musique et que celle-ci ne soit pas réservée aux seuls garçons sopranos (également merveilleux) de nos collèges voisins cambridgiens.

Il aurait été tout à fait satisfaisant de terminer ce programme par le plain-chant du *Hodie* dans la récession finale de la *Ceremony*, mais je préfère donner le dernier mot au charmant **A New Year Carol** ("Un chant de Nouvel An"). Il constitue le cinquième mouvement des *Friday Afternoons* ("Vendredis après-midi"), première des nombreuses œuvres pour enfants que Britten écrivit pour son frère instituteur, Robert, dont la chorale scolaire de Prestatyn, au Pays de Galles, répétait tous les vendredis après-midi. Le texte folklorique se rapporte peut-être à la coutume galloise d'apporter de l'eau de source fraîche avec des petites branches de plantes au feuillage persistant comme cadeaux de Nouvel An, et l'expression "levy dew, the water and the wine" ("levez la rosée, l'eau et le vin") est probablement une déformation de l'expression française "levez Dieu", référence à l'élévation de l'hostie au moment de l'Eucharistie. Dans notre interprétation, la partie de piano originale est jouée à la harpe et nous combinons les voix inférieures et supérieures des deux premières strophes dans le verset final pour tourner tous ensemble une nouvelle page et "laisser entrer la nouvelle année".

GRAHAM ROSS

Traduction : Laurent Cantagrel

1 | **Venite exultemus Domino**

Psalm 95

O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.
Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving: and shew ourselves glad in him with psalms.

For the Lord is a great God: and a great King above all gods.

In his hand are all the corners of the earth:

and the strength of the hills is his also.

The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands prepared the dry land.

O come, let us worship, and fall down:

and kneel before the Lord our Maker.

For he is the Lord our God: and we are the people

of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

Today if ye will hear his voice,

harden not your hearts:

as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness;

When your fathers tempted me: proved me, and saw my works.

Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said:

It is a people that do err in their hearts,

for they have not known my ways;

Unto whom I swear in my wrath: that they should not enter into my rest.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son:

and to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever

shall be: world without end. Amen.

2 | **Te Deum in C**

Book of Common Prayer

We praise Thee, O God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord.

All the earth doth worship Thee, the Father everlasting.

To Thee all Angels cry aloud, the Heavens and all the Powers therein.

To Thee Cherubim and Seraphim continually do cry,

Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God of Sabaoth!

Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of Thy glory.

The glorious company of the Apostles,
praise Thee.

The goodly fellowship of the Prophets,
praise Thee.

The noble army of Martyrs praise Thee.

The Holy Church throughout all the world
doth acknowledge Thee.

The Father of an infinite majesty
Thine honourable, true, and only Son;
Also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter.

Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ.

Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.

When Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man,

Thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb.

When Thou hadst overcome

the sharpness of death,

Thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven

to all believers.

Thou sittest at the right hand of God in the glory of the Father.

We believe that Thou shalt come to be our judge.

We therefore pray Thee help Thy servants.

Whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood.

Make them to be numbered with Thy Saints

in glory everlasting.

O Lord save Thy people and bless Thine heritage.

Govern them and lift them up for ever.

Day by day we magnify Thee and we worship Thy Name,

ever world without end.

Vouchsafe O Lord to keep us this day without sin.

O Lord have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us.

O Lord let Thy mercy lighten upon us, as our trust is in Thee.

O Lord in Thee have I trusted, let me never be confounded.

3 | **Jubilate Deo in C**

Psalm 100

O be joyful in the Lord, all ye lands:

serve the Lord with gladness and come before his presence with a song.

Be ye sure that the Lord he is God:

it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and

the sheep of his pasture.

O go your way into his gates with thanksgiving,

and into his courts with praise:

be thankful unto him, and speak good

of his Name.

For the Lord is gracious,

his mercy is everlasting:

and his truth endureth from generation to generation.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever

shall be: world without end. Amen.

4 | **Deus in adjutorium meum intende**

Psalm 70

Deus in adjutorium meum intende.

Domine ad adjuvandum me festina.

Confundantur et revereantur,

qui quaerunt animam meam.

Avertantur retrorsum,

et erubescant, qui volunt mihi mala.

Avertantur statim, erubescantes,

qui dicunt mihi: Euge, euge, euge.

Exsultent et laetentur

in te omnes qui quaerunt te, et dicant semper:

Magnificetur Dominus:

qui diligunt salutare tuum.

Ego vero egenus et pauper sum:

Deus adjuva me.

Adjutor meus, et liberator meus es tu:

Domine ne moreris.

Gloria Patri et Filio

et Spiritui Sancto.

Sicut erat in principio, et nunc et semper,

et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

[Make haste, O God, to deliver me,

Hurry to help me, O Lord.

Let them be ashamed and confounded

that seek after my soul.

Let them be turned back

and shamed that wish me evil.

Let them be turned back at once that ashamedly

say of me: There, there.

They shall rejoice and be glad with you,

all those who seek you, and they will continually say:

May the Lord be made great:

those who cherish your salvation.

But I am an inadequate pauper:

God, help me.

My helper, you are my liberator:

Lord, do not delay.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son,

and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, both now and always,

and for generation after generation. Amen.]

5 | **A Hymn to the Virgin**

Anonymous, 13th century

Of one that is so fair and bright

Velut maris stella, *[Like a star of the sea,]*

Brighter than the day is light,

Parens et puella: *[Both mother and maiden:]*

I cry to thee, thou see to me,

Lady, pray thy Son for me,

Tam pia, *[So pure,]*

That I may come to thee.

Maria! *[Mary!]*

All this world was forlorn

Eva peccatrice, *[Because of Eve, a sinner,]*

Till our Lord was y-born

De te genetrix. *[Through you, his mother.]*

With ave it went away

Darkest night, and comes the day

Salutis; *[Of salvation:]*

The well springeth out of thee.

Virtutis. *[Of virtue.]*

Lady, flow'r of ev'rything,

Rosa sine spina, *[Rose without thorn,]*

Thou bare Jesu, Heaven's King,

Gratia divina: *[By divine grace:]*

Of all thou bear'st the prize,

Lady, queen of paradise

Electa. *[Chosen.]*

Maid mild, mother es Effecta.

Effecta. *[You are made.]*

6 | **A Hymn of St Columba**

St Columba (521-597)

Regis regum rectissimi

Prope est dies Domini

Dies irae et vindictae,

Tenebrarum et nebulae,

Regis regum rectissimi.

Diesque mirabilium
Tonitruorum fortium,
Dies quoque angustiae,
Maeroris ac tristiae.
Regis regum rectissimi.

In quo cessabit mulierum
Amor et desiderium
Nominumque contentio
Mundi huius et cupido.
Regis regum rectissimi.

*[King of kings and of lords most high,
Comes his day of judgement nigh:
Day of Wrath and vengeance stark,
Day of shadows and cloudy dark,
King of kings and of lords most high.]*

*Thunder shall rend that day apart,
Wonder amaze each fearful heart.
Anguish and pain and deep distress
Shall mark that day of bitterness.
King of kings and of lords most high.]*

*That day the pangs of lust will cease,
Man's questing heart shall be at peace;
Then shall the great no more contend
And worldly fame be at an end.
King of kings and of lords most high.]*

- 7 | **Hymn to St Peter**
Gradual for the Feast of St Peter and St Paul
Thou shalt make the Princes over all the earth:
They shall remember thy name, O Lord.
Instead of thy fathers, Sons are born to Thee:
Therefore shall the people praise thee, Alleluia.

Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram
aedificabo ecclesiam meam. Alleluia.
*[Thou art Peter, and upon this rock
I will build my church. Alleluia.]*

- 8 | **The Holy Boy**
Herbert S. Brown (1872-1923)

Lowly, laid in a manger,
With oxen brooding nigh,
The Heav'nly Babe is lying
His Maiden Mother by.

Lo! The way-faring sages,
Who journey'd far through the wild,
Now worship, silent adoring,
The Boy, The Heav'nly Child –
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 hearts to the wonder,
The Birth, the Mystery mild,
And worship, silent adoring,
The Boy, the Heav'nly Child –
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.
The Heav'nly Child!

- 9 | **Music, when soft voices die**
Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory—
Odours, when the violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heaped for the beloved's bed;
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.

- 10 | **This have I done for my true love**
English traditional

Tomorrow shall be my dancing day
I would my true love did so chance
To see the legend of my play
To call my true love to the dance:
Sing oh my love, oh my love, my love;
This have I done for my true love.

Then was I born of a virgin pure,
Of her I took fleshly substance:
Then was I knit to man's nature,
To call my true love to my dance.

In a manger laid and wrapped I was,
So very poor, this was my chance,
Betwixt an ox and a silly poor ass,
To call my true love to the dance.

Then afterwards baptized I was,
The Holy Ghost on me did glance,
My Father's voice heard from above,
To call my true love to my dance.

Into the desert I was led,
Where I fasted without substance:
The Devil bade me make stones my bread,
To have me break my true love's dance.

The Jews on me they made great suit,
And with me made great variance,
Because they loved darkness better than light
To call my true love to the dance.

For thirty pence Judas me sold,
His covetousness for to advance;
Mark whom I kiss, the same do hold,
The same is he shall lead the dance:

Before Pilate the Jews me brought,
When Barabbas had deliverance
They scourged me and set me at nought
Judged me to die to lead the dance:

When on the cross hanged I was,
When a spear to my heart did glance,
There issued forth both water and blood,
To call my true love to the dance:

Then down to Hell I took my way,
For my true love's deliverance,
And rose again on the third day,
Up to my true love and the dance:

Then up to Heaven I did ascend
Where now I dwell in sure substance,
On the right hand of God, that man
May come into the general dance.

- 11 | **The Sycamore Tree**
English traditional

As I sat under a sycamore tree,
A sycamore tree, a sycamore tree,
I looked me out upon the sea
On Christ's Sunday at morn.

I saw three ships a-sailing there,
A-sailing there, a-sailing there,
Jesu, Mary and Joseph they bear
On Christ's Sunday at morn.

Joseph did whistle and Mary did sing,
Mary did sing, Mary did sing,
And all the bells on earth did ring
For joy our Lord was born.

O they sail'd into Bethlehem,
To Bethlehem, to Bethlehem,
Saint Michael was the steersman,
Saint John sat in the horn

And all the bells on earth did ring,
On earth did ring, on earth did ring:
'Welcome be Thou Heaven's King,
On Christ's Sunday at morn!'

12 | **The Holly and the Ivy**

English traditional

The Holly and the Ivy are trees that's both well known;
Of all the trees that grows in woods, the holly bears the crown.
The rising of the sun, the running of the deer,
The playing of the merry harp, sweet singing in the choir.

The holly bears a blossom as white as any flower,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ to be our sweet Saviour.
The rising of the sun...

The holly bears a colour as green as any tree,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ to set poor sinners free.
The rising of the sun...

The holly bears a berry as red as any blood,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ to do poor sinners good.
The rising of the sun...

The holly bears a prickle as sharp as any thorn,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ at Christmas day in the morn.
The rising of the sun...

The holly bears a bark as bitter as any gall,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ for to redeem us all.
The rising of the sun...

13 | **Sweet was the song the Virgin sung**

Anonymous, 16th century

Sweet was the song the Virgin sung,
When she to Bethlem Juda came,
And was deliver'd of a Son,
That blessed Jesus hath to name.
Jesus lullaby, sweet Babe, sang she.

My Son and eke a Saviour born
Who hast vouchsafed from on high
To visit us that were forlorn.
Jesus lullaby, sweet Babe, sang she.
And rock'd Him sweetly on her knee.
Jesus!

A Ceremony of Carols

14 | **1. Procession**

Vespers for Christmas Day

Hodie Christus natus est:
hodie Salvator apparuit:
hodie in terra canunt angeli:
laetantur archangeli:
hodie exsultant iusti dicentes:
Gloria in excelsis Deo.
Alleluia!

*[Today Christ was born:
today the Saviour appeared:
today on earth the angels sing:
the archangels rejoice:
today the righteous celebrate saying:
Glory to God in the highest.
Alleluia!]*

15 | **2. Wolcum Yole!**

Anonymous, 14th century

Wolcum be thou hevenè king,
Wolcum Yole!
Wolcum, born in one morning,
Wolcum for whom we sall sing!

Wolcum be ye Stevene and Jon,
Wolcum Innocentes every one,
Wolcum, Thomas marter one,
Wolcum, be ye, Good Newe Yere,
Wolcum Twelfth the Day both in fere,
Wolcum, seintes lefe and dare,
Wolcum Yole! Wolcum!

Candelmesse, Quene of bliss,
Wolcum bothe to more and lesse.

Wolcum be ye that are here.
Wolcum Yole!
Wolcum alle and make good cheer.
Wolcum alle another yere.
Wolcum Yole! Wolcum!

16 | **3. There is no rose**

Anonymous, 15th century

There is no rose of such vertu
As is the rose that bare Jesu.
Alleluya.

For in this rose containèd was
Heaven and earth in litel space,
Res miranda. *[Miraculous thing.]*

By that rose we may well see
There be one God in persons three,
Pares forma. *[In the parent's image.]*

The aungels sungen the shepherds to:
Gloria in excelsis Deo!
Gaudeamus. *[We rejoice.]*

Leave we all this worldly mirth,
And follow we this joyful birth.
Transeamus. *[We follow.]*

17 | **4a. That yongë child**

Anonymous, 14th century

That yongë child when it gan weep
With song she lullèd him asleep:
That was so sweet a melody
It passèd alle minstrelsy.

The nightingalë sang also:
Her song is hoarse and nought thereto:
Whose attendeth to her song
And leaveth the first then doth he wrong.

18 | **4b. Balulalow**

*James Wedderburn (c. 1495-1553),
John Wedderburn (c. 1505-1556),
and Robert Wedderburn (c. 1510-1555/60)*

O my deare hert, young Jesu sweit,
Prepare thy creddil in my spreit,
And I sall rock thee to my hert
And never mair from thee depart.

But I sall praise thee evermoir
With sanges sweit unto thy gloir;
The knees of my hert sall I bow,
And sing that richt Balulalow!

19 | **5. As dew in Aprille**

Anonymous, 14th century

I sing of a maiden
That is makèles:
King of all kings
To her son she ches.

He came al so stille
There his moder was,
As dew in Aprille
That falleth on the grass.

He came al so stille
To his moder's bour,
As dew in Aprille
That falleth on the flour.

He came al so stille
There his moder lay,
As dew in Aprille
That falleth on the spray.

Moder and mayden
Was never none but she:
Well may such a lady
Goddess moder be.

20 | **6. This little babe**

Robert Southwell (1561-1595)

This little babe so few days old,
Is come to rifle Satan's fold;
All hell doth at his presence quake,
Though he himself for cold do shake;
For in this weak unarmed wise
The gates of hell he will surprise.

With tears he fights and wins the field,
His naked breast stands for a shield;
His battering shot are babish cries,
His arrows looks of weeping eyes,
His martial ensigns Cold and Need,
And feeble Flesh his warrior's steed.
His camp is pitchèd in a stall,
His bulwark but a broken wall;
The crib his trench, haystacks his stakes,
Of shepherds he his muster makes;
And thus, as sure his foe to wound,
The angels' trumps alarum sound.

My soul, with Christ join thou in fight;
Stick to the tents that he hath pight.
Within his crib his surest ward;
This little babe will be thy guard.
If thou wilt foil thy foes with joy,
Then flit not from this heavenly Boy.

22 | **8. In freezing winter night**

Robert Southwell (1561-1595)

Behold, a silly tender babe,
In freezing winter night,
In homely manger trembling lies –
Alas, a piteous sight!

The inns are full; no man will yield
This little pilgrim bed.
But forced he is with silly beasts
In crib to shroud his head.

This stable is a Prince's court,
This crib his chair of State;
The beasts are parcel of his pomp,
The wooden dish his plate.

The persons in that poor attire
His royal liveries wear;
The Prince himself is come from Heav'n;
This pomp is prizèd there.
With joy approach, O Christian wight,
Do homage to thy King.
And highly praise his humble pomp,
Which he from Heav'n doth bring.

23 | **9. Spring Carol**

William Cornysh (1465-1523)

Pleasure it is
To hear, iwis,
The Birdès sing.
The deer in the dale,
The sheep in the vale,
The corn springing.
God's purveyance
For sustenance,
It is for man.
Then we always
To give him praise,
And thank him than,
And thank him than.

24 | **10. Deo gracias**

Anonymous, 15th century

Deo gracias! [*Thanks be to God!*]
Adam lay ybounden,
Bounden in a bond,
Four thousand winter
Thought he not too long;

And all was for an appil,
An appil that he tok.
As clerkès finden
Written in their book.

Ne had the appil takè ben,
The appil takè ben,
Ne hadde never our lady
A ben hevenè quene.

Blessèd be the time
That appil takè was.
Therefore we moun singen:
Deo gracias! [*Thanks be to God!*]

25 | **11. Recession**

Vespers for Christmas Day

Hodie Christus natus est:
hodie Salvator apparuit:
hodie in terra canunt angeli:
laetantur archangeli:
hodie exsultant iusti dicentes:
Gloria in excelsis Deo.
Alleluia!

[*Today Christ was born:
today the Saviour appeared:
today on earth the angels sing:
the archangels rejoice:
today the righteous celebrate saying:
Glory to God in the highest.
Alleluia!*]

26 | **A New Year Carol**

Anonymous

Here we bring new water from the well so clear,
For to worship God with, this happy New Year.
Sing levy-dew, sing levy-dew,
The water and the wine,
The seven bright gold wires
And the bugles that do shine.

Sing reign of Fair Maid, with gold upon her toe;
Open you the West Door and turn the Old Year go.
Sing levy-dew...

Sing reign of Fair Maid, with gold upon her chin;
Open you the East Door and let the New Year in.
Sing levy-dew...

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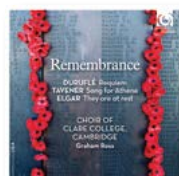
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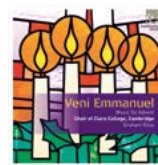


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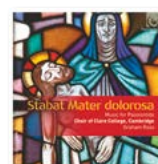
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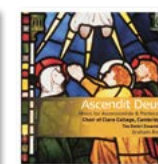
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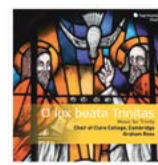
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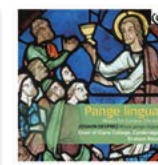
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Médiapôle Saint-Césaire, Impasse de Mourgues, 13200 Arles © 2020

Enregistrement : Juin 2019, All Hallows' Church, Gospel Oak
& St Michael's Church, Highgate, Londres (Royaume-Uni)

Prise de son, direction artistique, montage : John Rutter

Partitions : © Oxford University Press (1), © Boosey & Hawkes (2-8, 10, 12-26),

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