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CLASSICS

CIRCLESONG

BOB CHILCOTT



Houston Chamber Choir | Treble Choir of Houston | Robert Simpson *conductor*

CIRCLESONG | BOB CHILCOTT (b. 1955)

CIRCLESONG

[1]	Introduction	Beauty before me / We wait in the darkness	Navajo / Iroquois	[5.00]
[2]	Part I: Birth	Song for bringing a child into the world	Seminole	[3.24]
[3]		Newborn	Pueblo	[2.31]
[4]	Part II: Childhood	Yaqui song	Yaqui	[1.03]
[5]		A child's song Solo: Ella Theurer	Kwakiutl – Kwakwaka'wakw	[0.49]
[6]		Give me strength	Sioux – Lakota	[3.18]
[7]	Part III: Lover	Chinook songs	Chinook	[1.20]
[8]		Over the wave	Ojibwa	[2.35]
[9]	Part IV: Adulthood	Summer song	Inuit	[2.30]
[10]	Part V: Middle Age	O great spirit	Dakota	[6.25]
[11]	Part VI: Old Age	In the house made of dawn	Navajo	[5.08]
[12]	Part VII: Death	Farewell, my brother Solo: Ella Theurer	Navajo	[1.46]
[13]		The sun's beams are running out / We wait in the darkness	Comanche / Iroquois	[5.13]

Houston Chamber Choir • Treble Choir of Houston • Andreea Muț, Jessica Myers *piano*
• Richard Brown, Mark Stein, Leonardo Soto, Matt Richards *percussion* • Robert Simpson *conductor*

[14]	Like a rainbow	Guaymi Dawn Song	[3.50]
[15]	All things pass	Lau-Tzu, C. 6th BC	[4.19]
[16]	Circles of motion	Joy Harjo (1951)	[2.44]

Treble Choir of Houston
Andreea Muț *piano*
Marianna Parnas-Simpson *conductor*

[17]	Walking the red road	The Seven Sacred Virtues of the Lakota	[3.46]
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Houston Chamber Choir
Robert Simpson *conductor*

Total timings: [55.50]

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"In a world which can seem so confusing and chaotic, we are uplifted through these voices singing indigenous poetry and songs. The wisdom of the ages continues to build bridges of understanding through music and voice, touching our hearts and minds, bringing us to a place of mutual appreciation and shared humanity.

Circlesong reminds me of where my people have come from, and of where we are going, as we endeavour to make decisions for the seven

generations yet to come. We must remain mindful of our responsibility to everything in the web of life, not just of ourselves. I'm reminded of the resilience and strength of our ancestors through their timeless words as shared by them, historically, and through Circlesong. We are still here."

© Renée Roman Nose

Renée Roman Nose, MAIS, is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma. She is an activist, artist, actor, poet, painter, photographer, and cultural anthropologist.

In the late 1990s, when I started writing a good deal of music for young voices, I spent time searching for texts to inspire singers through narratives and messages that might make us all reflect in a positive way on how we relate to ourselves and to others. I discovered many such texts and prayers from various sources and after setting several for upper voice choir, including *Like a rainbow*, *Circles of motion*, and *All things pass*, as recorded here, I was inspired to write a larger work, a life-cycle piece, based on First Nations poetry from North America.

The texts for *Circlesong* come from a number of publications, including *American Poetry*, Volume 2, published by The Library of America, and *Native American Songs and Poems*, edited by Brian Swann. There are translations by Charles Fenno Hoffman from 1839, by Franz Boas from 1887, 1888, and 1896, and by Washington Matthews from 1902.

A recurring image in the poetry was that of a circle and I became fascinated by this. On a musical level the circle is the shape of the musical notehead, a written symbol that comes to life in sound. The circle is the shape of our world, of the sun and of the moon. The circle symbolizes the day and the night, the pattern of the seasons, and

the cyclical round of our natural world. The circle also symbolizes our interdependence and, most importantly, our unity. I found a beautiful poem, *Song for bringing a child into the world*, written on the page in the shape of a circle, and this set me on my way. I decided to cast this piece within a concept loosely modelled on the seven ages of man – Birth, Childhood, Lover, Adulthood, Middle Age, Old Age, Death – using these beautiful poems ultimately to articulate the importance of living life with care and respect, not only for our world, but also for ourselves and each other, with all that that entails.

Translations of any writings from their original language, be they the Bible, poems by Basho, ancient Chinese writings, indigenous poems, poems by Rilke, or indeed a contemporary Swedish crime novel, are by their very nature subjective. But the act of translating a text shows the desire to enable wider access to what that text has to say and to give. It is perhaps one way of sharing our different voices, surroundings, upbringings, and the circumstances that help us to identify the ideas, thoughts, and feelings that we do in fact share.

As a composer I am aware that in choosing texts to set I am in essence an interpreter of these

texts, and in my efforts to do so I am also, like the translator, presenting a subjective view. This may involve a degree of manipulation of the text, as nowadays many singers feel uncomfortable defining certain terminology, particularly in sacred texts, which may divide us. There are many other composers who set sacred and secular texts from all sources, and we do our utmost to honour traditions and identify, based on our own experience, what it is in any text that expresses our integrity as people, and our communality.

The importance of this to the choir singer is paramount. Choral singing is, by its very nature, a great leveller. People come together, regardless of background, race, perceived social standing, belief, and sexual preference to form an expression of unity through music. The singers may not all share the ideas of the sentiments they sing, but one of music's powers is the ability to give dimension to words that can help us understand concepts, thoughts, and each other in a better and more positive way.

As a composer, I feel it is my responsibility to find texts that open worlds for myself and for people through singing them together, whether they be texts of indigenous peoples, biblical texts, Renaissance poetry, or ancient Chinese wisdom. If

the same poem was set by an American composer, or an African, a Latvian, or Japanese one, or by me, we would all do it in a completely different way based on our own life experiences, and each one would be valid in its own way. That is what unites us.

Circlesong was originally written in 2003 for the Birmingham Festival Chorus and City of Birmingham Young Voices and premiered in Birmingham, England in 2004. The work was revised in 2019 for Robert Simpson and the Houston Chamber Choir and first performed in Houston in February 2020. It is scored for upper voice choir, mixed choir, two pianos, and four percussion players.

I wish to express my thanks to Robert Simpson and all those associated with the Houston Chamber Choir, Marianna Parnas-Simpson and the Treble Choir of Houston, Val Withams of Choral Connections, Amy Chang from Oxford University Press, audio engineer Ryan Edwards, and to Mike Hatch from Signum Records for the warmth, dedication, and commitment they have shown to help bring this project to life.

© Bob Chilcott

CIRCLESONG

Introduction

1 Beauty before me (*Navajo*)

We wait in the darkness (*Iroquois*)

Beauty before me,
Beauty behind me.
Beauty, beauty.

We wait in the darkness!
Now no star is glowing;
Now no sun is shining;
Help in our journey.

Beauty below me,
Beauty above me.
Beauty, beauty.

Part I: Birth

2 Song for bringing a child into the world (*Seminole*)

Let the child be born	
circling around	you day sun
you wrinkled skin	circling around
circling around	you daylight
you flecked with gray	circling around
circling around	you night sun
you wrinkled age	circling around
circling around	you poor body

3 Newborn (*Pueblo*)

Newborn, on the naked sand
Nakedly lay it
Next to the earth mother,
That it may know her;
Having good thoughts of her, the food giver.

Newborn, we tenderly
In our arms take it,
Making good thoughts.

Housegod, be entreated,
That it may grow from childhood to adulthood,
Happy, contented;
Beautifully walking
The trail to old age.

Having good thoughts of the earth its mother,
That she may give it the fruits of her being.
Newborn, on the naked sand
Nakedly lay it.

Part II: Childhood

4 Yaqui song (*Yaqui*)

Many pretty flowers, red, blue, and yellow.
We say to the folk, 'Let us go and walk among
the flowers'.
The wind comes and sways the flowers.
They all are like that when they dance.

Some are wide open, large flowers, and some are
tiny little flowers.
The birds love the sunshine and the starlight.
The flowers smell sweet.
They all are sweeter than the flowers.

5 A child's song (*Kwakiutl* – *Kwakwaka'wakwup*)

When I am grown
I shall go and stoop digging clams.
When I am grown up
I shall go and splash in the water digging clams.
When I am grown up
I shall stoop down digging clams.
When I am grown up
I shall go picking berries.

6 Give me strength (*Dakota*)

Give me the strength to walk the soft earth.
Give me the eyes to see and the strength to
understand that I might be like you.
With your power only can I face the winds,
All over the earth we are all alike.

Look upon these faces of children without number
and with children in their arms.
With your power only can I face the winds
and walk the good road to the day of quiet.
Give me strength.

Part III: Lover

7 Chinook songs (*Chinook*)

Aya!

I don't care if you desert me,
Many other folk are in the town.
Soon I'll take another one,
That is not hard for me!

Whose sweetheart has gone away?
My sweetheart has gone away!
You do not like me!
I know you.

Very unhappy I was in Victoria.
Nobody said good-day to us in Victoria.

8 Over the wave (*Ojibwa*)

Who, my friend, makes this river flow?
The Spirit – he makes its ripples glow.
But I've a charm that can make the tide
Bring you over the wave to your lover's side.

Who, my friend, makes this river flow?
The Spirit – he makes its ripples glow.
Yet every blush that my love would hide,
Is mirror'd for me in the tell-tale tide.

And though you sleep on the farthest isle,
Round which these dimpling waters smile.
Yet I've a charm that can make the tide
Bring you over the wave to your lover's side.

Part IV: Adulthood

9 Summer song (*Inuit*)

Aya! Aya! Ayaya.
It is beautiful when the summer comes at last.
Aya! Aya! Ayaya.
It is beautiful when the reindeer begin to come.
Aya! Aya! Ayaya.
When the roaring river rushes from the hills in
summer.
Aya! Aya! Ayaya.

Part V: Middle Age

10 O great spirit (*Dakota*)

O Great Spirit, whose voice speaks in the wind,
whose breath gives life to all the world.
Hear me!

I am small and weak,
I need your power and wisdom,
Let me walk in beauty, let my eyes be glad
beholding the red and golden dawn.

Make my hands touch all things
you have made with love,
Make me wise that I may understand the
sacred teachings you have taught.
Help me learn the lessons hidden in
every leaf and every stone.

I seek strength not to be greater than my brother
but to conquer the enemy within myself.

Make me ready to come to you always
with a pure heart and with clear eyes,
so when my life fades away, like the setting sun,
my spirit may come to you with honour
and without shame.

Part VI: Old Age

11 In the house made of dawn (*Navajo*)

In the house made of dawn,
In the story made of dawn,
On the trail of dawn,
O talking God!
Your feet, my feet restore,
Your limbs, my limbs restore,
Your body, my body restore,
Your mind, my mind restore,
Your voice, my voice restore,
Your plumes, my plumes restore.

With beauty before you,
With beauty before me,
With beauty behind you,
With beauty behind me,
With beauty above you,
With beauty above me,
With beauty below you,
With beauty below me,
With beauty around you,
With beauty around me.

In the house of evening light,
From the story made of evening light,
On the trail of evening light,
It is finished in beauty.

Part VII: Death

12 Farewell, my brother (*Navajo*)

Farewell, my brother,
When the showers pass over you,
And the thunder sounds.
And when the harvests ripen, and you hear voices
Of all the beautiful birds,
You will say, 'There is the trail of his soul'.

13 The sun's beams are running out (*Comanche*) / We wait in the darkness (*Iroquois*)

The sun's beams are running out.
The sun's yellow beams are running out.
The sun's beams are running out.

We wait in the darkness!
Now no star is glowing;
Now no sun is shining;
Come show us the pathway;
Help in our journey.

We shall live again.

14 Like a rainbow

Let my life be like a rainbow
Whose colours teach us unity;
Let me follow the great circle,
the roundness of power.

One with the moon and the sun,
And the ripple of the waters,
Following the way of honour,
A guide to the weak,
A rock of strength in my word
that shall say no lie,
No lie or deception.

Be kind, be kind, be brave,
be humble as the earth,
And be as radiant as the sunlight!

Guaymi Dawn Song (adapted Bob Chilcott)

15 All things pass

All things pass,
A sunrise does not last all morning.
All things pass,

A cloudburst does not last all day.
All things pass,
Nor a sunset all night.

All things pass.
What always changes?
Earth, sky, thunder, mountain, water,
Wind, fire, lake.

These change,
And if these do not last,
Do man's visions last?
Do man's illusions last?
Take things as they come.

All things pass.

Lau-Tzu (6th Century BC)

16 Circles of motion

To pray you open our whole self
To sky, to earth, to sun,
To one whole voice that is you.

And know there is more
That you can't see, can't hear,
Can't know except in moments
And in circles of motion.

Like eagle that Sunday morning
Circled in blue sky, swept our hearts
With sacred wings.

We see you, see ourselves and know
That we must take the utmost care
And kindness in all things.

Breathe in, knowing we are made of all this,
And breathe in,
Knowing we are truly blessed
Because we were born within a circle of motion.

Like eagle rounding out the morning,
We pray it will be done in beauty.

Joy Harjo (born 1951)

17 Walking the red road

Prayer.
Respect.
Honesty.
Compassion.
Generosity.
Humility.
Wisdom.

The Seven Sacred Virtues of the Lakota

*Circlesong, Walking the Red Road, Circles of Motion, Like a Rainbow,
and All Things Pass © Oxford University Press*

BOB CHILCOTT

Hailed by The Observer as 'a contemporary hero of British Choral Music', composer and conductor Bob Chilcott has spent his working life dedicated to the art of choral music and the joy of enabling people to sing together.

His extensive catalogue of works, published since 1994 by Oxford University Press, reflects his broad view of musical styles and genres. His large canon of sacred works ranges from extended works including *St John Passion*, *Requiem*, and *Christmas Oratorio* to shorter pieces including *The King shall rejoice*, written in 2012 for the Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. His secular works include *The Angry Planet*, composed in 2012 for the BBC Proms and *The Voyage*, commissioned by Age UK, which was nominated for a Royal Philharmonic Society Award. He has written a number of jazz-influenced works including *A Little Jazz Mass* and he has shown a large commitment to young singers through his many works written for upper voices, including *Can you hear me?* which was performed in 2004 by over 7000 singers at the Song Festival in Estonia. Christmas music features strongly in his catalogue, ranging from his extended work *On Christmas Night* to *The Shepherd's Carol*,



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written in 2000 for the Choir of King's College, Cambridge. In 2020 he has composed, for the American Choral Directors Association Raymond Brock Memorial Commission, *Songs my heart has taught me*, *The Song of Harvest* for the Royal School of Church Music, and *Sky Pictures*, a song cycle for the distinguished British mezzo soprano, Dame Sarah Connolly.

Bob has been Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC Singers since 2002. He was Conductor of the Chorus of the Royal College of Music in London between 1997 and 2004, and since 2019 he has been Principal Conductor of the Birmingham University Singers. He has conducted as a guest for festivals and events in more than thirty countries worldwide and has worked with thousands of amateur singers in the United Kingdom through a continuing programme of singing days. He has championed the work of young and amateur singers through regular

appearances at festivals in North America, Europe, and Japan. In 2020 Bob became Musician in Residence at Downe House School, Newbury, and from 2021 Composer in Association with the Children's Chorus of Washington DC.

His works are widely recorded by many groups including The Sixteen, Tenebrae, The King's Singers, The Choir of King's College, Cambridge, Westminster Abbey Choir, Wells Cathedral Choir, Ora, and Commotio. In 2016 he collaborated with the celebrated singer songwriter Katie Melua and the Gori Women's Choir on the album *In Winter*.

HOUSTON CHAMBER CHOIR

Soprano

Rebecca Castillo
Kammi Estelle
Stacey Franklin
Briana Kerner
Kelli Lawless
Regina Morgan
Emily Wolfe

Alto

Joshua Chavira
Jennifer Crippen
Clipper Hamrick
Marianna Parnas-Simpson
Emily Premont
Ryan Stickney

Tenor

L. Wayne Ashley
Derrick Bready
Jack Byrom
Jeffrey Ragsdale
Alphonso Seals

Bass

Rameen Chaharbaghi
Greg Goedecke
Randy Murrow
Patrick Schneider
Alex Taylor
Joshua Wilson



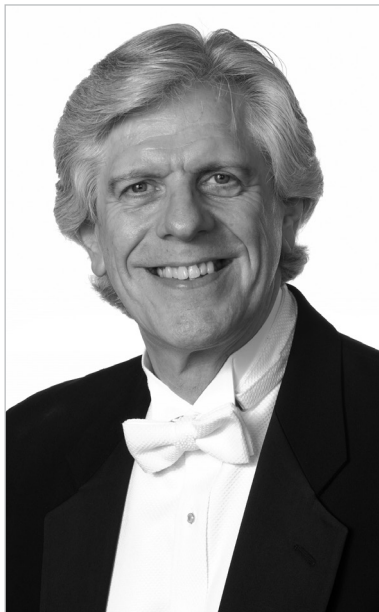
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Founded in 1995 by Artistic Director Robert Simpson, the Houston Chamber Choir received the 2019 Grammy® Award for Best Choral Performance for its recording of the complete works of Maurice Duruflé. Other honours include Chorus America's Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence and the American Prize, Professional Choir Division. Dubbed by Jamie Bernstein as "*the choral equivalent of the Harlem Globetrotters*" the Houston Chamber Choir is as comfortable singing jazz with Christian McBride and Dave Brubeck as performing Morton Feldman's *Rothko Chapel* with violist Kim Kashkashian, and *Mass Observation* by Tarik O'Regan. Of

that performance O'Regan wrote, "*I was simply astounded...it felt like time stood still*". A champion of new music, the Houston Chamber Choir has premiered commissioned works by Christopher Theofanidis, Jocelyn Hagen, Mark Buller, David Ashley White, Dominick DiOrio, and Christian McBride. They have performed on tour at Trinity Church, Wall Street, New York City, Yale University and the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. The Houston Chamber Choir was invited to appear at the 2020 World Symposium on Choral Music in New Zealand.

ROBERT SIMPSON

Robert Simpson is Founder and Artistic Director of the Houston Chamber Choir and Canon for Music at Christ Church Cathedral, Houston, Texas. He also serves on the faculty of the Shepherd School of Music, Rice University. The 2010 recipient of Chorus America's Michael Korn Founders Award for Development of the Professional Choral Art, he has also been awarded the American Prize. Invitations to perform and teach have taken him throughout the United States, Europe, and China. His choirs have appeared at national conventions of the American Guild of Organists, the American Choral Directors Association, and on CBC and ABC television and National Public Radio. An honours graduate of Brown University and the School of Sacred Music, Union Theological Seminary, New York City, he spent two years studying at the Conservatory of Music, Cologne, Germany. His teachers include organists Barclay Wood, Robert Baker, and Michael Schneider, and conductors Peter Neumann, Eric Ericson, and Gustof Sjökvist.



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THE TREBLE CHOIR OF HOUSTON



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Angelique Álvarez
Amy Anawaty
Lilliana Baker
Ardiana Batuigas
Carmela Batuigas
Carissa Beil
Alexandra Bruk
Amanda Cedillo
Mia Chávez
Maille Craig

Amelia Craypo
Leah Ellis
Emma Endlich
Maggie Euscher
Cecilia Grand
Jadyn Grannis
Natalie Guerrero
Marin Hart
Sabina Houston
Briana Hubbard

Anaya Johnson
Ava Kolojaco-Harris
Hailea Lattimore
Emma Lewis
Ivanna López
Annie Mello
Madison Morgan
Joanna Pérez
Lark Perry
Julissa Ramírez

Jade Rea
Vanessa Reyes
Sophia Spano
Wilson Terry
Ella Theurer (soloist)
Jaden Walker
Evelyn Watson
Joanna Wilson
Alice Wilson
Victoria Wilson
Rebekah Wood

The Treble Choir of Houston at Christ Church Cathedral is an acclaimed ensemble of young women from grades six to twelve that provides outstanding musical training in a nurturing environment. Coming from diverse backgrounds, these young women are united in their pursuit of musical excellence. The Treble Choir's mission is to help each singer realize her full potential as a person and as a musician. Self-esteem, confidence, and leadership skills are cultivated through an environment of love, respect, and support. The Treble Choir was founded in 2006 by Marianna Parnas-Simpson. The ensemble performs widely in the community and serves as the resident children's choir at Christ Church Cathedral (Episcopal), Houston. Some of the choir's performance highlights include appearances at Carnegie Hall, the International Choral Festival in Powell River, British Columbia, and the Washington National Cathedral.

MARIANNA PARNAS-SIMPSON

Marianna Parnas-Simpson is a graduate of the St Petersburg Conservatory, Russia. She founded KAMERTON, an award-winning St Petersburg girls' choir which she directed for ten years before coming to the United States. Since 1999, she has been teaching at Parker Elementary School, an Houston ISD magnet school for music, where she has developed the choral programme from 30 students to over 250 students. In 2005, she



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was named Teacher of the Year. From 2008 to 2010, Marianna served as the Artistic Director of the American Boychoir summer programme in Princeton, New Jersey.

In 2006, Marianna founded the Treble Choir of Houston at Christ Church Cathedral. Her choirs have performed at Carnegie Hall with the Houston Symphony Orchestra and have been selected to perform for the Organization of American Kodály Educators, the national convention of the American Guild of Organists, the national convention of the American Choral Directors Association, and Texas Music Educators Association convention.

Marianna is in demand as a clinician and guest conductor, offering masterclasses and conducting honour choirs throughout the United States and abroad. Additionally, she is a founder member of the Houston Chamber Choir.

ANDREEA MUȚ

Andreea Muț is a prolific collaborative pianist and recitalist based in Houston, Texas. She has performed recitals throughout Romania, France, Spain, Colombia, Mexico, and the United States, and won numerous prizes in national and international competitions in her native Romania. She moved to Texas in 2009, and completed her Doctorate in Collaborative Arts at the University of Houston in 2015. Dr Muț holds the keyboard



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chair for River Oaks Chamber Orchestra Houston, and has enjoyed collaborations with organizations such as Da Camera Houston, APERIO - Music of the Americas, Opera in the Heights, the Foundation for Modern Music, the Texas New Music Ensemble, Houston Symphony Chorus, the Texas Music Festival, Opera San Antonio, Houston Youth Symphony, and the Classical Music Institute in San Antonio, Texas. She also performs regularly as part of the Gerling-Muğ duo with violinist Dr Ingrid Gerling. In addition to her numerous performance obligations, Dr Muğ is currently serving as a staff pianist and vocal coach at the University of Houston, organist and pianist at St Stephen's United Methodist Church, Houston, and pianist for the Houston Chamber Choir.

JESSICA MYERS

Jessica Myers, based in Houston, Texas is a staff pianist for the Moores School of Music at the University of Houston. She has collaborated with many of the top musicians and conductors in Houston, including members of the Houston Symphony, Houston Grand Opera Orchestra, Houston Ballet Orchestra, Moores School of Music Faculty, Texas Music Festival, Houston Chamber Choir, and the Houston Symphony Chorus. She has also performed in venues across the United

States and in Europe. Equally passionate about music education and arts advocacy, she has held leadership positions in community arts schools and music teacher organizations and currently serves on the faculty of the Bridges Academy in Houston. Jessica holds degrees in piano performance and collaborative piano from the University of Missouri-Kansas City and the University of Houston.



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Recorded in South Main Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, from 24th to 26th February 2020

Co-producer – Bob Chilcott

Co-producer and Recording Engineer – Ryan Edwards

Assistant Recording Engineer – Shannon Smith

Editor – Jennifer Howells

Co-Producer (Mixing and Mastering) – Mike Hatch

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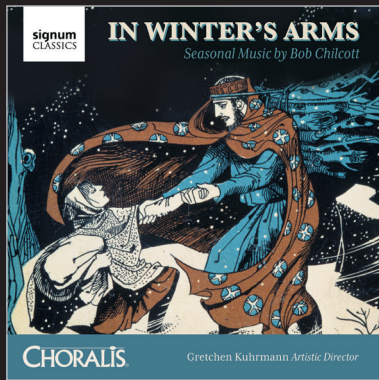
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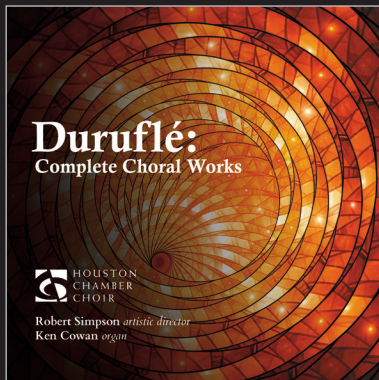
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Chilcott: In Winter's Arms
Choralis
Gretchen Kuhrmann *artistic director*
SIGCD512

"Chilcott's music undeniably sounds great when sung by a small scale professional chamber choir (such as here) but there's something equally appealing in the inclusive joy of a performance by a larger group of amateurs. This is a tribute to them, as much as to the composer of the music they sing"

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