



English Choral Music

DDD

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LEIGHTON

Sacred Choral Music

An Easter Sequence • Crucifixus pro nobis

Choir of St John's College, Cambridge

Christopher Robinson



Kenneth Leighton (1929-1988)

Sacred Choral Works

Kenneth Leighton was born in the northern English city of Wakefield and started composing at the age of eight. He gained many formative musical experiences while a chorister at Wakefield Cathedral, before he went up to Queen's College, Oxford, where he read Classics, and then the BMus. At Oxford his composition teacher was Bernard Rose, and after being awarded the Mendelssohn Scholarship, he studied with Goffredo Petrassi in Rome. During his career he held several university appointments at Leeds, Edinburgh and Oxford, and in 1970 returned to Edinburgh as Reid Professor of Music until his untimely death.

Leighton's compositions include three symphonies. The first of these (1964), a purely orchestral essay, was followed by two including voices (1974, 1984). He was drawn to writing for virtuosi which resulted in several concertos. There are three of these for piano (1951, 1960, 1969), and, amongst others, concertos for violin (1952), cello (1956) and organ (1970). His choral music includes the large-scale *The Light Invisible* (1958), and the well-known carol *Lully, lulla, thou little tiny child* (1948). He wrote an opera, *Columba* (1978), as well as vocal and chamber music, and a fine body of piano works that reflect his skills as a pianist. Characteristics of his music are its lyricism, rhythmic energy, virtuoso writing, and a penchant for instrumental colour.

The legacy of Leighton's experience at Wakefield Cathedral was profound, and accounts for the reason why he was drawn to compose for the church throughout his career. As he commented: 'Any natural composer is a product of his background, experience and training ... With my upbringing and my boyhood as a cathedral chorister this is perhaps why I respond emotionally to Christian subjects and texts ... church music is undoubtedly a channel of communication for me ... early experiences are of immense and fundamental importance in musical as in all other kinds of development and I therefore speak as one who comes from *inside* the church'.

Leighton's first setting of the *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis* is subtitled *Collegium Magdalenae Oxoniense* being composed for the choir of Magdalen College in 1959 and dedicated to its choirmaster Bernard Rose. In both canticles the organ part is elaborate, providing a buoyant texture that underpins the words. The *Magnificat* is bright and joyous with its sections bound together by the two-bar organ call to attention at the opening. Its *Gloria* ends fervently with the words 'world without end' as an exultant descending phrase punched out by the voices. In the *Nunc dimittis* the organ part becomes more and more elaborate until it reaches its full glory in the triumphant *Gloria*.

Give Me the Wings of Faith was composed in 1962 to a commission from the church of St John the Baptist, Leytonstone, for its Patronal Festival. It is written for soloists, choir and organ and within its short span Leighton achieves a variety of sonorities and moods, which culminate in a sonorous unison melody.

An Easter Sequence was commissioned by the Berkshire Boy Choristers of the United States for their service in St Severin, Paris, on Low Sunday 1969. For his texts Leighton used the Propers for the Sundays after Easter, the Antiphon at First Vespers on Ascension Day and Psalm 23. It is scored for two-part boys' or female voices, organ and trumpet. The music of the *Introit* is vigorous, built around fanfare-like figures for trumpet and voices as if heralding the risen Lord. Gently rocking voices begin the *Gradual* over which a solo treble intones Christ's prophecy. His words 'Peace be to you' are cast as a benign descending spread chord, which is followed by joyful Alleluias. The organ takes over the rocking figure in the *Offertory*, as the Angel greets the women in the garden, and a pean of dancing praise bursts out with trumpet and voices echoing each other suggesting the perpetually ecstatic voices of the heavenly host. For *At the Communion*, an organ solo marked by florid writing forms a prelude to a serene setting of *Psalm 23*, whilst the linked *Communion* is

built around an exquisite oscillating melodic fragment. Another organ solo with chord clusters leads to a final allegro in which the trumpet returns and the voices unite for a flowing melody of affirmative strength.

In the last decade of his life Leighton was striving to compose music that spoke more directly to the listener, music that was, he suggested, 'more static, but perhaps more varied and relaxed, with greater emphasis on colour and harmony'. An example of this tendency is the motet *What Love is This of Thine?* composed in 1985 for Dennis Townhill to mark his 25 years as organist and master of the choristers at St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh. It is written for unaccompanied chorus with soloists and exemplifies Leighton's superb skill at word-setting in the context of melody and harmony that colours and heightens the text, as, for instance, the mellifluous blossoming of the choral textures at the words 'O matchless love'.

During his thirties and forties much of Leighton's music was austere in mood, using a highly chromatic harmonic language. Such dark astringency is apparent in the cantata *Crucifixus pro nobis*, a masterpiece in miniature, composed in 1961 for David Lumsden and the Choir of New College, Oxford. Its four movements are, in effect, a concentrated, intense Passion, scored for tenor, choir and organ. The metaphysical seventeenth-century texts, three by Patrick Carey and the last by Phineas Fletcher, are redolent with vivid imagery to which the composer was manifestly drawn. A stark, chill organ motif heard at the opening recurs as a unifying element within the cantata, and the raw melody of the tenor evokes the wintry images of *Christ in the Cradle*. In *Christ in the Garden* the chorus portrays the emotion of the Lord in the garden of Gethsemane in impassioned music that reflects words in the text such as 'flame' and 'fire'. For *Christ in his Passion* the tenor and chorus are combined, and its central six-part section rises to an anguished, dissonant climax as it dwells on the agony of the crucifixion. The almost unbearable build up of tension of the successive movements is

typical of Leighton's music at this time; its musical and emotional catharsis is reserved for Fletcher's *Hymn* with its soothing harmonies and affecting vocal line.

Throughout his life Leighton found inspiration in hymns, chorales and plainsong chants which were quarried as musical material for pieces. An example is *Veni creator spiritus* for organ composed for the Dunfermline Abbey Festival in 1987. The ancient melody is used in the manner of a Bachian chorale prelude, as is the hymn tune *Rockingham*, composed in 1975 to a commission by Oxford University Press for inclusion in their collection *Chorale Preludes on English Hymns*. The tune is set to the familiar words *When I survey the wondrous Cross*, which is heard against a haunting, lilting rhythm that creates a mood of hushed awe.

Leighton's second setting of the evening canticles, *The Second Service*, dates from 1971 and was commissioned by the Cathedral Organists Association. It was dedicated to the memory of Brian Runnett, the outstanding, organist and choirmaster of Norwich Cathedral, who died tragically at the age of 35 in a car accident. Cushioned by gentle note clusters, the lyrical, melismatic melody of the trebles floats above them, and is extended to the other voices. A dance-like accompaniment for organ is established, recalling that Leighton used to insist that in performance his music should be made to dance, and over its syncopated rhythms the voices have long-limbed melodies that are often sung in unison. The peaceful *Gloria* is built from the opening motif and particularly effective is the overlapping descending phrase at the words 'world without end'. A sombre mood characterizes the *Nunc dimittis*, as its opening words so aptly befit the work's dedication, as do the tolling bells in the accompaniment that commence at the word 'peace'. It concludes with a consoling 'Amen'.

Andrew Burn

The Choir of St John's College, Cambridge



St John's College was founded in 1511 and is one of the Colleges of the University of Cambridge. The College Choir, which has a world-wide reputation for its unique sound and for the quality of its music-making, has had as its main duty since the 1670s the singing of the daily services in the College chapel during the University Term. The Services follow the Church of England Cathedral Tradition with Evensong six times a week and a Sung Eucharist on Sunday mornings.

The all-male Choir consists of fourteen Choral Students and seventeen Choristers. The alto, tenor and bass parts are taken by Choral Students who are admitted as undergraduates to the College to study a variety of subjects. Apart from its liturgical commitments, the Choir gives a number of concerts each year both in the United Kingdom and overseas. Recent tours have taken the

Choir to Australia, South Africa, Canada, the United States, Holland, Belgium, Sweden and Japan.

The repertoire of the Choir stretches from the fifteenth century to the present day. Many highly acclaimed recordings have been made and these are available world-wide. The Advent Carol Service, the Lent Meditation, and Evensong on Ash Wednesday (when Allegri's *Miserere* is sung) are broadcast annually on BBC Radio 3. This is the choir's ninth recording in an English Choral Music series to be issued on the Naxos label. The series, including discs of Howells (Winner of the Cannes Classical Award 2001), Britten (nominated for a Gramophone Award 2000), Tavener (nominated for a Classical Brit Award and a Gramophone Award 2001), Rubbra (nominated for a Gramophone Award 2001) Walton (nominated for a Gramophone Award 2002), Finzi and Lennox Berkeley, has sold more than 100,000 copies to date. Many composers have written for the Choir, including Tippett, Howells, and Langlais; more recently works have been commissioned from Francis Grier, Andrew Gant, John Tavener and Judith Bingham.

Christopher Robinson CVO, CBE

Christopher Robinson retired as Organist and Director of Music at St John's College, Cambridge, in 2003 after twelve years' service. His expertise as a choral and orchestral conductor is well known following his time at St John's, and previously at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle (1975-91) and at Worcester Cathedral (1963-74), where the Three Choirs' Festival provided opportunities to plan programmes, conduct large-scale repertoire, and commission new works. He was conductor of the Oxford Bach Choir from 1977 to 1997 and City of Birmingham Choir from 1964 to 2002. He was then the longest serving regular conductor of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and has conducted most of the other major British orchestras. Throughout his career he has contributed steadily to the record catalogues, culminating in the widely acclaimed English Choral Music series of ten discs for Naxos.

In his retirement from St John's College Christopher pursues an active life conducting, accompanying and training choirs. Recently he conducted the Cambridge University Festival Chorus in a performance of Berlioz's *Messe Solennelle* in King's College Chapel and he will conduct the Philharmonia Orchestra at the Gloucester Three Choirs Festival in 2004, as well as undertaking work in Canada. He enjoys having more time to pursue his love of performing chamber music.

Christopher Robinson was elected an honorary member of the Royal Academy of Music in 1980 and was President of the Royal College of Organists from 1982 to 1984. He holds honorary degrees from Birmingham University and the University of Central England and was awarded a Lambeth Doctorate in 2002 in recognition of his contribution to Church music in this country and abroad.

In 1992 the Queen honoured him with appointment as Commander of the Royal Victorian Order in recognition of his work at Windsor Castle. He was appointed CBE in the New Year's Honours in 2004 in recognition of his services to music.

St John's College Choir, 2001/2002

Choristers

Theo Bamber
Quintin Beer
Hugh Bushell
Thomas Curran
Benjamin Durrant
Joseph Gardom
James Geidt
Jamie Budgett
Julian Gregory
Simon Horner
Benjamin Howson
Alexander Jones
Nicholas Morton
Joshua O'Connor
Brindley Wallis
Thomas Welham

Organ Scholars

Christopher Whitton
Jonathan Vaughn

Choral Students

Altos

Aaron Burchell
Peter Crawford
Iestyn Davies
Lester Lardenoye

Tenors

Michael Anderson
Alastair Brookshaw
Allan Clayton
Stephen Shorter
Andrew Staples

Basses

James Birchall
Ronan Collett
George Humphreys
Gareth Jones
Oliver Wright

Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis ‘Collegium Magdalenae Oxoniense’

1	Magnificat	5:06
2	Nunc Dimittis	3:12
3	Give me the wings of faith	4:52

An Easter Sequence

4	Introit (for the First Sunday after Easter)	0:57
5	Gradual (for the First Sunday after Easter)	1:22
6	Offertory (for the First Sunday after Easter)	2:25
7	Communion (for the Second Sunday after Easter)	4:51
8	Sortie (Antiphon at First Vespers of Ascension Day)	4:08
9	Veni creator spiritus	5:03
10	What love is this of thine?	6:17

Crucifixus pro nobis, Op. 38

11	Christ in the Cradle	3:27
12	Christ in the Garden	3:37
13	Christ in his Passion	6:04
14	Hymn	2:13
15	Rockingham: Chorale Prelude on ‘When I survey the wondrous Cross’	3:12

Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis (The Second Service), Op. 62

16	Magnificat	6:36
17	Nunc Dimittis	4:02

① & ⑩ Magnificat

My soul doth magnify the Lord;
and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
For he hath regarded
the lowliness of his hand-maiden.
For behold from henceforth
all generations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath magnified me,
and holy is his Name.
And his mercy is on them that fear Him
throughout all generations.
He hath showed strength with his arm;
he hath scattered the proud
in the imagination of their hearts.
he hath put down the mighty from their seat,
and hath exalted the humble and meek.
he hath filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he hath sent empty away.
he remembering his mercy
hath holpen his servant Israel,
as he promised to our forefathers,
Abraham and his seed, for ever.

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 & ⑪ Nunc Dimittis

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,
according to thy word;
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
which thou hast prepared before the face
of all people,
To be a light to lighten the Gentiles,
and to be the glory of thy people Israel.
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.

③ Give me the wings of faith

Give me the wings of faith to rise
Within the veil, and see
The Saints, how great their joys
How bright their glories be.

Once they were mourning here below,
And wet their couch with tears;
They wrestled hard, as we do now,
With sins and doubts and fears.

I ask them whence their victory came;
They, with united breath,
Ascribe their conquest to the Lamb,
Their triumph to his death.

They marked the footsteps that he trod,
His zeal inspired their breast,
And following their incarnate God,
Possess the promised rest.

Our glorious Leader claims our praise
For his own pattern given;
While the long cloud of witnesses
Show the same path to heav'n.

Isaac Watts

An Easter Sequence

④ Introit

Alleluia! Alleluia!
Rejoice to God our helper:
Sing aloud to the God of Jacob.

⑤ Gradual

Alleluia!
On the day of my resurrection, saith the Lord
I will go before you into Galilee.
After eight days, the door being shut,

Jesus stood in the midst of his disciples, and said:
'Peace be to you.' Alleluia.

[6] Offertory

An angel of the Lord descended from heaven
and said to the women:
'He whom ye seek is risen, as he said.'
Alleluia.

[7] At the Communion

The Lord is my Shepherd,
therefore can I lack nothing.
He shall feed me in a green pasture,
and shall lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.
He shall convert my soul,
and shall bring me forth in the paths of
righteousness, for His Name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through
the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me,
Thy rod and Thy staff comfort me.
But Thy loving kindness and Thy mercy shall follow
me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Alleluia.
I am the good shepherd,
I know my sheep, and my sheep know me.
Alleluia.

[8] Sortie

God is ascended,
God is ascended in Jubilee
and the Lord in the sound of the trumpet,
Alleluia!
Rejoice to God our helper:
Sing aloud to the God of Jacob.

[10] What love is this of thine?

What love is this of thine that cannot be
In thine infinity, O Lord, confined?
Unless it in thy very person see
Infinity and finity conjoined?
What! Hath thy Godhead as not satisfied
Married our manhood, making it its bride?
Oh, matchless love!
Filling Heaven to the brim!
O'er running it, all running o'er beside this world!
Nay, over-flowing hell, wherein
For thine elect there rose a mighty tide,
That there our veins might through thy person bleed
To quench those flames that else would on us feed!
Oh, that thy love might overflow my heart,
To fire the same with love!
For love I would.
But oh, my straitened breast!
My lifeless spark!
My fireless flame!
What, chilly, love, and cold?
In measure small?
In manner chilly?
See! Lord, blow the coal,
Thy love inflame in me.

Edmund Taylor, c. 1642 - 1729

Crucifixus pro nobis

[11] Christ in the Cradle

Look, how he shakes for cold!
How pale his lips are grown!
Wherein his limbs to fold
Yet mantle has he none.
His pretty feet and hands
(Of late more pure and white
Than is the snow
That pains them so)
Have lost their candour quite.
His lips are blue

(Where roses grew).
He's frozen everywhere:
All th'heat he has
Joseph, alas,
Gives in a groan; or Mary in a tear.

Patrick Carey, d. 1651

12 Christ in the Garden

Look how he glows for heat!
What flames come from his eyes!
'Tis blood that he does sweat.
Blood his bright forehead dyes:
See, see! It trickles down;
Look, how it showers amain!
Through every pore
His blood runs o'er,
And empty leaves each vein.
His very heart
Burns in each part;
A fire his breast doth sear:
For all this flame,
To cool the same
He only breathes a sigh, and weeps a tear.

Patrick Carey

13 Christ in his Passion

What bruises do I see!
What hideous stripes are those!
Could any cruel be
Enough, to give such blows?
Look, how they bind his arms
And vex his soul with scorns,
Upon his hair
They make him wear
A crown of piercing thorns.
Through hands and feet
Sharp nails they beat:
And now the cross they rear:
Many look on;

But only John
Stands by to sigh, Mary to shed a tear.

Why did he shake for cold?
Why did he glow for heat?
Dissolve that frost he could,
He could call back that sweat.
Those bruises, stripes, bonds, taunts,
Those thorns, which thou didst see,
Those nails, that cross,
His own life's loss,
Why, oh, why suffered he?
'Twas for thy sake.
Thou, thou didst make
Him all those torments bear:
If then his love
Do thy soul move,
Sigh out a groan, weep down a melting tear.

Patrick Carey

14 Hymn

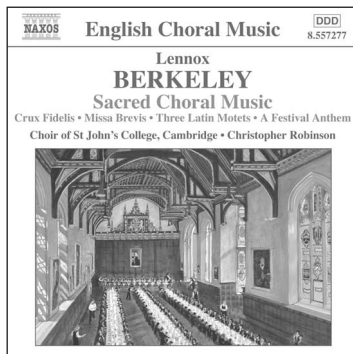
Drop, drop, slow tears,
And bathe those beauteous feet
Which brought from Heaven
The news and Prince of Peace:
Cease not, wet eyes,
His mercy to entreat:
To cry for vengeance
Sin doth never cease
In your deep floods
Drown all my faults and fears:
Nor let His eye
See sin, but through my tears

Phineas Fletcher, 1582 - 1650

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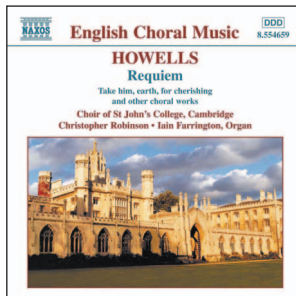
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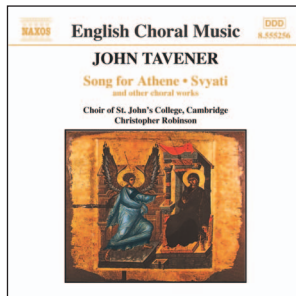
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Playing Time
67:25

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Booklet notes in English
Includes sung texts
Made in Canada

Kenneth Leighton's distinctive compositional voice is characterized by rich, lush harmonies, subtle dissonance, rhythmic energy and a lilting, angular lyricism. Pithy thematic ideas and syncopated rhythms are allied to a brilliant mastery of counterpoint and a unique sense of melody borne of a lifelong love of hymns, chorale and chant. This collection features the two contrasting Canticle Settings, the *Easter Sequence* scored for boys' voices, organ and trumpet (played here by Crispian Steele-Perkins) and *Crucifixus pro nobis*, the austere, miniature masterpiece of a Passion setting for tenor, choir and organ which climaxes with one of English choral music's remarkable icons "Drop, drop, slow tears".

Kenneth LEIGHTON

(1929-1988)

Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis 'Collegium Magdalenae Oxoniense'		8:18
1	Magnificat	5:06
2	Nunc Dimittis	3:12
3	Give me the wings of faith	4:52
4-8	An Easter Sequence ^{† 0}	13:44
9	Veni creator spiritus	5:03
10	What love is this of thine? ⁰	6:17
11-14	Crucifixus pro nobis [*]	15:21
15	Rockingham: Chorale Prelude on 'When I survey the wondrous Cross'	3:12
Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis (The Second Service)		10:38
16	Magnificat	6:36
17	Nunc Dimittis	4:02

Choir of St John's College, Cambridge • Christopher Robinson
James Oxley, Tenor* • Crispian Steele-Perkins, Trumpet[†] • Christopher Whitton, Organ
Gareth Jones, Baritone Solo[†] • Benjamin Durrant, Treble Solo⁰

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A full track listing can be found on page 6 of the booklet