SOMM RECORDINGS

SIR GEORGE

DYSON



Violin Concerto

Hierusalem · At the Tabard Inn

Charlie Lovell-Jones *violin* · Olivia Carrell *soprano*

Choir of Merton College, Oxford

BBC Concert Orchestra

JOHN ANDREWS

BBC RADIO 3

This recording celebrates three mature works by Sir George Dyson (1883–1964) composed between 1941 and 1956 at the height of his professional and creative powers. A working-class Yorkshireman by birth, with no distinguished social or musical pedigree beyond his own inherent and prodigious enthusiasm for the organ, Dyson's musical legacy might reasonably be said to rest on a relatively small number of choral works: notably his popular evening canticles (settings of the *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis*) and *The Canterbury Pilgrims* (1931), a large-scale setting of the 'Prologue' from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* for soloists, chorus and orchestra.

Whilst music for liturgical use and concert works inspired by sacred themes are indeed threads that run throughout several of Dyson's best-known compositions, this enduring (if rather limiting) focus obscures a much greater and more varied musical spirit and output. His catalogue includes songs, chamber music, solo piano pieces, concertos and orchestral works. Although he never completed an opera (despite starting one in his youth), Dyson did produce choral works of considerable dramatic scope, including *The Canterbury Pilgrims* and the monumental *Quo Vadis?* (1939–45) which any theatrical composer might have been proud to claim.

Nonetheless, for Dyson (as for so many musicians), the church is where it all began, and by the age of 13 he was already accompanying services in his native Halifax. Three years later he was awarded a Fellowship of the Royal College of Organists (RCO) and, shortly before his 17th birthday, he won an open scholarship to study at the Royal College of Music (RCM). There his teachers included Dr William Stevenson Hoyte (1844–1917) for organ and Sir Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924) for composition.

Viewed through the lens of these formative influences (Stanford himself another composer whose musical reputation has been lamentably reduced to a small number of choral works) alongside Dyson's background as a church organist (including a student post at St Alfege Church in Greenwich, to supplement his RCM scholarship), his early career and education bear all the hallmarks of a man destined for a career in the 'English choral tradition'. As Director of Music or organist at either a major Anglican cathedral, or at one of the many Oxbridge colleges, Dyson would surely have excelled as a worthy successor in the lineage of Sir John Stainer (1840–1901). However, while Dyson would indeed occupy several school positions, the rejection of such a path suggests that the restrictions of a predictable and largely insular life spent exclusively amongst the cloisters and choristers of chapel or college were clearly too tight to rein in what was in fact a far more fertile and ambitious musical imagination.

The award of a Mendelssohn Scholarship in 1904 enabled Dyson to travel and study abroad, exposing him to the richness and diversity of continental musical life. Amongst his experiences, he recalled attending an early production of Richard Strauss's provocative *Salome* in Dresden. Despite such influences, Dyson later reflected that he felt his reputation was that of 'a good technician…not markedly original', adding that he was '…familiar with modern idioms but they are outside the vocabulary of what I want to say.' By his own admission, then, his musical language was firmly a product of the previous century. Yet, whilst ignoring the more radical developments of 20th-century modernism (including jazz and serialism), Dyson's most impressive works balance traditional harmonic language with a refined lyricism, a gift for orchestration, and considerable emotional and intellectual depth.

By the early 1940s, Dyson's professional life was both secure and multifaceted, and his creative powers had reached their zenith. His career encompassed roles as organist, teacher, composer, administrator, author, and broadcaster, alongside significant military service in both the Army and the Royal Air Force. Following his appointment as Director of the RCM in 1937 (the first alumnus to attain the position), several of his most impressive compositions were received with enthusiasm by both the press and the public.

Dyson himself conducted the London Symphony Orchestra in the premiere of his Symphony in G at the Queen's Hall in London on 16 December 1937. Shortly after, with remarkable creative energy, he embarked on the composition of his magnum opus, *Quo Vadis?*, intended for the 1939 Three Choirs Festival at Hereford. The outbreak of war led to the cancellation of that performance, and although this work did not achieve a complete performance until 1949, the intervening years were strikingly productive.

Among the most notable works of this period is the **Violin Concerto**, premiered on 16 February 1942 at the Cambridge Theatre, London, by the distinguished violinist Albert Sammons, with Adrian Boult conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra. The work was received favourably, and, following its publication in 1943 by Novello, it was examined in detail by the critic and violinist Ferruccio Bonavia (1877–1950) in *The Musical Times*. In his introduction, Bonavia advanced the view that Dyson's concerto represented a significant addition to the violin repertoire, which he regarded as historically limited in its provision of works of genuine distinction, irrespective of national origin. Such a claim, however, is difficult to sustain. Even a cursory survey of the violin concerto repertoire of the 19th and 20th centuries reveals an enormous degree of richness and variety.

Though undoubtedly reinforced by the persistent tendency within Britain to undervalue its native composers, the issue was not a scarcity of worthy works; rather, both then and now, the initial enthusiasm surrounding premieres has seldom translated into sustained performance. Consequently, a substantial body of British works for violin and orchestra has failed to secure a regular place in the concert repertory. Even in the present day, the number of British violin concertos that maintain a consistent presence on the international stage remains comparatively limited, and is arguably confined to those by Elgar, Walton, and Britten. Nonetheless, Bonavia considered Dyson's efforts remarkable, praising the well-handled balance between orchestra and soloist and highlighting that '…every note, every phrase is essentially 'violinistic,' conforming in every way to the special genius of the instrument.' Other critics too were keen to praise Dyson's skill in orchestration; Eric Blom for example, who, writing for *Music & Letters*, highlighted the concerto as 'fascinating' and 'immaculately turned out'.

The work is structured more like a symphony than a concerto, unfolding across four movements rather than the traditional three. The opening movement is a free interpretation of sonata form: an exposition of contrasting ideas, their development, and a recapitulation of the original themes. The second movement, unusual for a concerto, is a rapid, effervescent scherzo, bubbling along with childlike energy. The emotional core of the piece lies in the third movement, a theme and variations in E major. Here, with muted strings and a gentle melancholy, Dyson offers a moment of lyrical beauty before, finally, the concerto waltzes towards a triumphant finale.

Following the success of his Violin Concerto, Dyson returned to *The Canterbury Pilgrims*, an enduring choral masterpiece that had cemented his international reputation as a bold and original musical voice. Dramatically speaking, this was the closest Dyson came to composing an opera, and so the addition of a full-scale overture, **At the Tabard Inn** (1943), was entirely appropriate. Dispensing with conventional plot and dialogue, *The Canterbury Pilgrims* vividly brings to life a selection of distinct personalities drawn from the 'Prologue' of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in a sequence of richly coloured musical vignettes.

Led by their host, Harry Bailly, the 29 fictional travellers, journeying to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral, pass the time with a storytelling contest, representing a vivid cross-section of medieval English society, from nobles and clergy to tradespeople and labourers. The title *At the Tabard Inn* refers to the Southwark hostelry from which this eclectic congregation set out on their journey. In the same spirit, the overture serves as a musical point of departure, skilfully weaving together themes from *The Canterbury Pilgrims* and preparing the listener for the journey ahead. Dyson achieves this with charm and brilliance, creating a work whose orchestral light and shade masterfully introduces and varies the characters we will meet along the way. Following a performance at the St Cecilia's Festival on 22 November 1950 at the Royal Albert Hall, a critic for the *Musical Times* highlighted that 'The Festival Concert…had none of the austerity sometimes deemed inseparable from modern music. All consorted with the feeling of festivity. There could have been no happier opening than Dyson's Overture *At the Tabard Inn* – music brilliantly alive with character and brilliantly played under his baton.' Today, its neglect as an independent concert overture is particularly surprising considering the enduring British enthusiasm for 'light music'.

If *At the Tabard Inn* shows Dyson at his most exuberant, then **Hierusalem** is a model of calm and thoughtful introspection. Having retired from the RCM in 1952, Dyson returned to Winchester, where he had served as Master of Music at Winchester College from 1924 to 1937. Retirement, however, was far from idle. He continued to compose and immediately accepted the presidency of the RCO, whose premises (until 1991) stood close to the Royal Albert Hall, only a short walk from the RCM, ensuring his continued presence in London's musical life.

The RCO was founded in 1864, the result of an idea by Richard Limpus (1824–1875), organist of St Michael, Cornhill in the City of London. In 1956, Limpus's successor, Harold Darke (1888–1976), invited Vaughan Williams, Howells, and Dyson to contribute works for a special concert marking his 40 years as Director of Music. The resulting programme was a remarkable one, including the premieres of Vaughan Williams's *A Vision of Aeroplanes*, Howells's *An English Mass*, and Darke's own *A Song of David*.

For Dyson, this commission was rich in both personal and professional resonance. As President of the RCO, he could hardly have overlooked the importance of contributing to a celebration in the church of its founder.

Scored for soprano soloist, choir, string quartet, and string orchestra, *Hierusalem* evokes a vision of heaven that is at once melancholy and tender, yet also luminous, delicate, and joyful. There is a sense of retrospective contemplation, as though Dyson, in declining health, were reflecting on the nearness of his life's end. (The musical parallels with Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* and, perhaps more distantly, the soprano solo 'Das himmlische Leben' in Mahler's Fourth Symphony are difficult to ignore.)

Despite a more elaborate orchestration than the straightforward choir and organ of his youth, *Hierusalem* does represent something of a return to roots, musically. Its text reflects the familiar 8.6.8.6 metre (number of syllables per line) of many Victorian hymns. However, its scale is outside the scope of the traditional Anglican anthem and it remains therefore very much a concert work: too extended and inward for liturgical routine, it instead inhabits a more personal, meditative space. In an altogether different vein from the bustling vitality of his earlier works, this is music of restraint and solemn reflection – a final reaffirmation of Dyson's instinctive, almost habitual introspection.

A reprint of the *Hierusalem* hymn verses, along with an explanation of their extraordinary origins, appears on the final pages of this booklet.

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for CL-J and JA

For a comprehensive account of Dyson's life and music, please see
Paul Spicer, *Sir George Dyson: His Life and Music* (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2014)



Photo: © AKTA

Lyric soprano **Olivia Carrell** is based in London and performs widely in opera and concert repertoire in the UK and abroad. Her work encompasses staged productions and concert engagements at festivals and venues including The Royal Ballet & Opera, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Wexford Festival Opera, Buxton Opera Festival, Opera Holland Park and Opéra de Lille.

Her operatic repertoire includes Blanche de la Force (*Dialogues des carmélites*), Micaëla (*Carmen*), Fiordiligi (*Così fan tutte*), Helena (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Euridice (*Orfeo ed Euridice*), Tamiri (*Il re pastore*) and Iris (*Semele*) and more. Reviewing her performances, *Bachtrack* noted her "silvery soprano", while *North West End* described her singing as "stunning", and *Northern Soul* observed that "her skill as a singer and talent as an actor was astounding". On the concert platform, she regularly collaborates with early music ensembles including Arcangelo, Gabrieli Consort and Emmanuelle Haïm's Le Concert d'Astrée.

Olivia has a particular interest in contemporary classical music. She recently premiered the one-woman operetta *Growth of the Silk*, written especially for her and presented at London's Tête à Tête festival, where it was described by founder Bill Bankes-Jones as "the highlight of the festival". She also recently recorded the role of Polly in Richard Stoker's opera *Johnson Preserv'd* (1966). She holds a Master's degree in Performance from the Royal Northern College of Music and studies under Marie McLaughlin.



Photo: © Piotr Markowski

Welsh violinist **Charlie Lovell-Jones** (b.1999) has been recognised as one of the most promising international soloists of his generation. Since making his sold-out Royal Festival Hall debut at the age of 15, he has appeared as both soloist and concertmaster with leading orchestras worldwide including the Sinfonia of London, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Concert Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, English Chamber Orchestra, Sendai Philharmonic Orchestra, Yamagata Symphony Orchestra, Noord Nederlands Orkest, Sinfonietta Cracovia, RTÉ Concert Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra and Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Charlie was the youngest-ever member of the John Wilson Orchestra and has since served as leader of John Wilson's multi-award-winning Sinfonia of London at the BBC Proms, on international tours, and on numerous critically acclaimed recordings. His debut solo recital album, *Piercing Silence*, was released on Linn Records. As concerto soloist, his critically acclaimed recordings include his Gramophone Award-nominated recording of Walton's Violin Concerto with the Sinfonia of London and John Wilson, and Ruth Gipps's Violin Concerto with the BBC Philharmonic and Rumon Gamba. Charlie studied with Rodney Friend MBE, read Music at the University of Oxford (Christ Church Prize Scholar and William Ewald Instrumental Exhibitioner) and subsequently at the Royal Academy of Music (Bicentenary Scholar) and the Yale School of Music with Augustin Hadelich. His studies were generously supported by the Harriet Cohen Music Award, the Hattori Foundation, the Drake Calleja Trust, the Countess of Munster Trust, and the John Fussell Trust. A Beare's International Violin Society Artist, Charlie performs on a 1777 Giovanni Battista Guadagnini violin, generously loaned by a private benefactor.



Photo: © Edmond Choo

John Andrews is Artistic Director of Red Squirrel Opera, Principal Guest Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra, and Conductor-in-Association with the English Symphony Orchestra.

He has conducted many of the UK's leading orchestras and ensembles including the BBC Orchestras, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Royal Ballet Sinfonia, London Mozart Players, Academy of Ancient Music and the Manchester Camerata.

With a special affinity for Italian *bel canto* and the English baroque, he has conducted over 40 operas with companies including English Touring Opera, Garsington Opera, Grange and Buxton Festivals, West Green House Opera, Opéra de Baugé and Volkstheater Rostock.

An exponent of neglected English music, his many recordings include works by Sir Arthur Sullivan including *The Light of the World* and *Haddon Hall*, *The Mountebanks* (Gilbert/Cellier) and *The Judgement of Paris* (Arne) for Dutton Epoch, Ethel Smyth's *Der Wald* for Resonus Classics and Bantock's *The Seal-Woman* for Retrospect Opera. His recordings have twice won the *BBC Music Magazine* Opera Award, in 2021 for Malcolm Arnold's *The Dancing Master* and in 2023 for Lampe's *The Dragon of Wantley*. His recording *Works for Piano & Orchestra* featuring compositions by Elizabeth Maconchy, Elisabeth Lutyens and Errollyn Wallen for Resonus won the *BBC Music Magazine* Premiere Award 2024.



Photo: BBC

The mission of the **BBC Concert Orchestra** (BBC CO) is to bring inspiring musical experiences to everyone, everywhere, with the ensemble's versatility as the key.

For BBC Radio 3, the Orchestra explores a wide selection of classical and contemporary music and is broadcast weekly on *Friday Night is Music Night*. It has performed on many soundtracks including *Blue Planet, Serengeti* and *Wild Isles* for BBC One, as well as recording new music for BBC Sounds' *Music & Meditation* podcast and George the Poet's award-winning, *Have You Heard George's Podcast?* The orchestra also recorded Isobel Waller-Bridge's score for Charlie Mackesy's Oscar-winning animated film, *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*.

The BBC CO performs in BBC Radio 2's *Piano Room Month* for BBC iPlayer and BBC Sounds, which has featured over 100 collaborations with pop artists, including Raye, Mumford & Sons and Brandi Carlile.

The orchestra appears annually at the BBC Proms and regularly at London's Southbank Centre; Alexandra Palace Theatre where it is Associate Orchestra; and in Nottingham where it has a formal partnership with the University of Nottingham; Nottingham Trent University and Nottingham Royal Concert Hall.

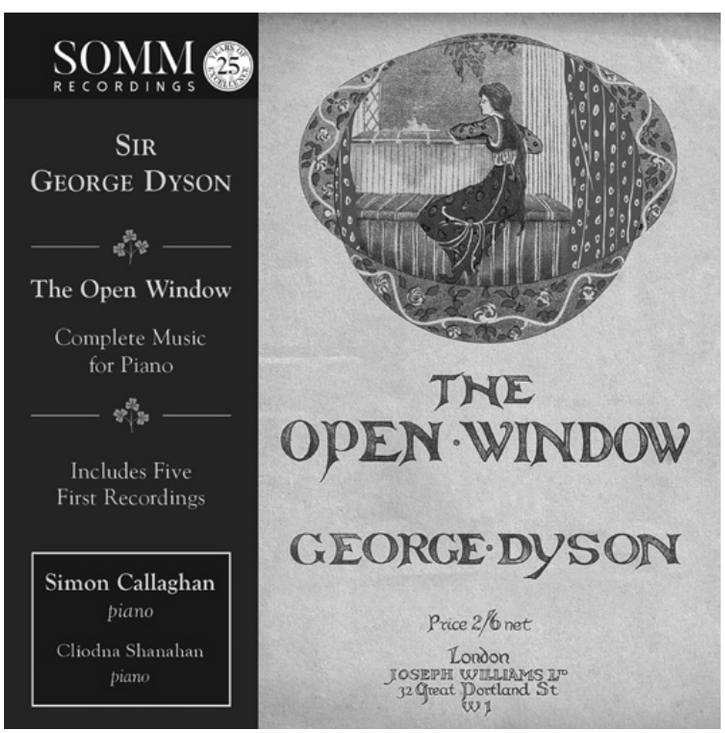
The BBC Concert Orchestra offers enjoyable and innovative education and community activities. In addition to its commitments with the Universities of Nottingham partnership, it is also involved in BBC Ten Pieces, the BBC Young Composer competition and the BBC Open Music programme.

Author of the cover painting, **Annabel Kennedy**, is a mezzo-soprano and artist from Devon. A graduate of the Royal College of Music, she recently completed a position as a member of the Opera Studio at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein in Düsseldorf. Annabel is a Glyndebourne Jerwood Artist, a Garsington Opera Alvarez Artist, and a Britten Pears Young Artist. Alongside her singing career, Annabel is a professional painter and the founder of Annabel Kennedy Artwork. Working in acrylics and mixed media, her work is inspired by the natural world, animals and architecture.





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SOMMCD 0622–2

George Dyson:
The Open Window: Complete Music for Piano
Simon Callaghan

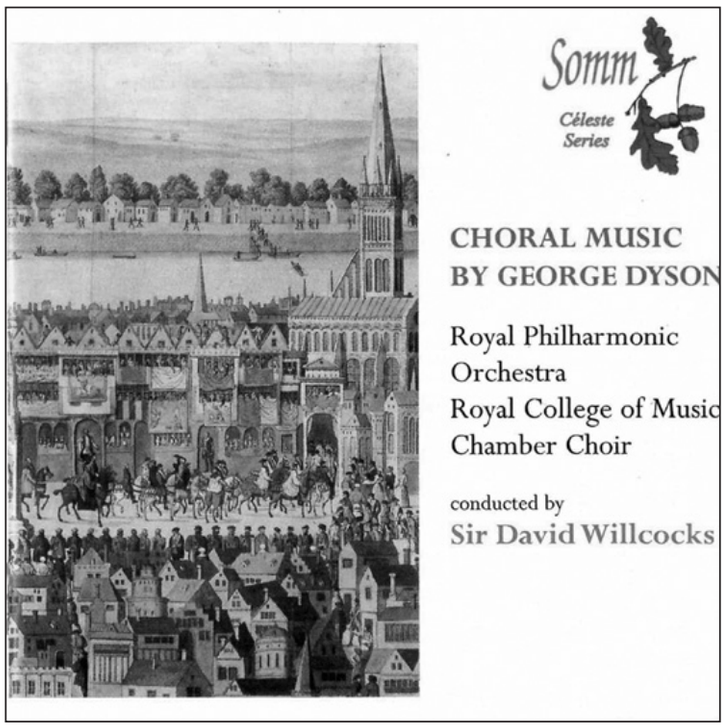
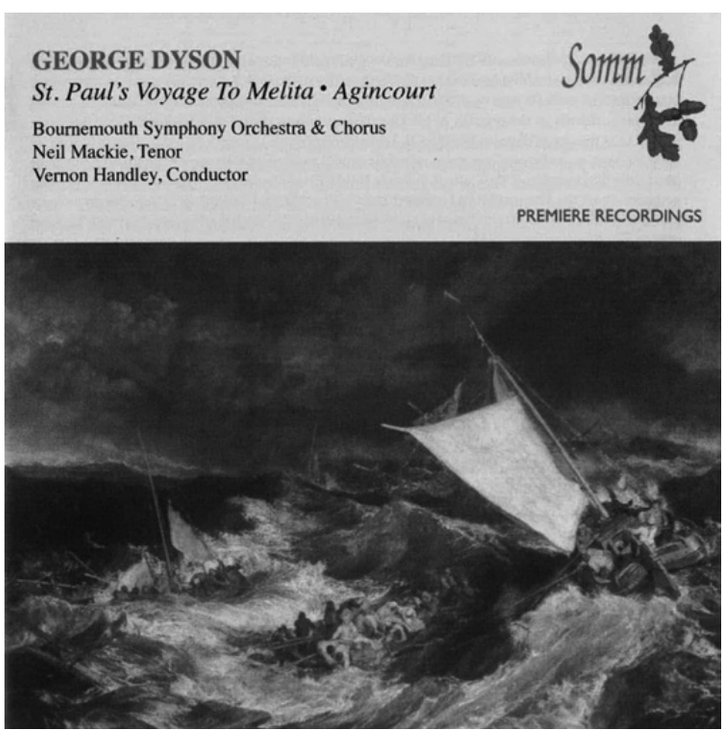


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SOMMCD 014

Choral Music by George Dyson:
In Honour of the City
Sweet Thames, Run Softly
A Spring Garland
The Blacksmiths
To Music

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
Royal College of Music Chamber Choir
Sir David Willcocks



SOMMCD 234

George Dyson:
St. Paul's Voyage to Melita
Agincourt
Quo Vadis?: IV. 'Night hath no wings'

Neil Mackie · Bournemouth Symphony Chorus
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra
Vernon Handley









Photos: © Andrew H. King

Hierusalem (1956)

The hymn has its roots in a Latin text, *Mater Hierusalem, civitas sancta Dei* (Chapter XXV in the spuriously named *Meditations of St Augustine*). The texts in that collection are not by Augustine but stem from an 11th-century codex from the Monastery of St Arnulf in Metz. *Mater Hierusalem* is signed by a "Johannes", almost certainly Jean, the abbot of Fécamp (*c*.990–1079).

The English text beginning "Jerusalem, my happy home" is less a translation from the Latin than an adaptation inspired by the same ideas. The oldest known copy of it is found in a British Library manuscript (Add. 15225) dated by some scholars to *c*.1593 and attributed to an "F.B.P." It contains 26 stanzas of four lines. The author, whose identity remains unknown, is believed to have been a Catholic under persecution in the late 16th century.

Dyson selected 15 of these verses to set to music.

Hierusalem, my happy home,
When shall I come to thee?
When shall my sorrows have an end?
Thy joys when shall I see?

O happy harbour of the saints,
O sweet and pleasant soil!
In thee no sorrow may be found,
No grief, no care, no toil.

Thy walls are made of precious stones,
Thy bulwarks diamonds square;
Thy gates are of right orient pearl,
Exceeding rich and rare.

Thy houses are of ivory,
Thy windows crystal clear;
Thy tiles are made of beaten gold –
O God that I were there!

Thy vineyards and thy orchards are
Most beautiful and fair,
Full furnished with trees and fruits
Most wonderful and rare;

Thy gardens and thy gallant walks
Continually are green;
There grow such sweet and pleasant flowers
As nowhere else are seen.

Quiet through the streets with silver sound
The flood of life doth flow,
Upon whose banks on every side
The wood of life doth grow.

There trees for evermore bear fruit
And evermore do spring;
There evermore the angels sit
And evermore do sing.

Hierusalem, my happy home,
When shall I come to thee?
When shall my sorrows have an end?
Thy joys when shall I see?

Thy saints are crowned with glory great;
They see God face to face;
They triumph still, they still rejoice:
Most happy is their case.

There David stands with harp in hand
As master of the choir;
Ten thousand times that man were blest
That might this music hear.

Our Lady sings Magnificat
With tune surpassing sweet;
And all the virgins bear their parts,
Sitting about her feet.

Te Deum doth Saint Ambrose sing,
Saint Austin doth the like;
Old Simeon and Zachary
Have not their songs to seek.

There Magdalene hath left her moan,
And cheerfully doth sing
With blessed saints, whose harmony
In every street doth ring.

Hierusalem, Hierusalem,
God grant I yet may share
Thy holy light, thy tuneful song,
Thy bliss beyond compare.

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COMPACT disc DIGITAL AUDIO

SIR GEORGE DYSON 1883 – 1964

Charlie Lovell-Jones *violin* [a] · Olivia Carrell *soprano* [b]
Choir of Merton College, Oxford [c]
BBC Concert Orchestra
John Andrews *conductor*

1	**At the Tabard Inn** (1943) Overture to *The Canterbury Pilgrims* (1931)		11:04
	Violin Concerto in E flat (1941) [a]		
2	I.	Molto moderato	14:26
3	II.	Vivace	4:25
4	III.	Poco andante	9:54
5	IV.	Allegro ma non troppo	7:08
6	**Hierusalem** (1956) [b c] Hymn		15:51
Total Duration			**63:07**

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BBC Concert Orchestra

BBC RADIO 3

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