



CHORAL CONTEMPLATIONS

Sacred Introits & Motets

Phoenix Consort | Adam Whitmore

TRACKLIST

CHORAL CONTEMPLATIONS

1	Ask, seek, knock	Derek Saunders	2:05
2	O most merciful	Adrian Green	2:12
3	Set me as a seal	David Fletcher	2:36
4	For the Fallen	Noel Skinner, arr. Matthew Coleridge	2:45
5	O Oriens	David Goymour	1:20
6	A new commandment	John-Paul Bowman	2:05
7	In Rama a voice is heard	David Fletcher	2:54
8	And he arose	Rosemary Broadbent	1:48
9	My beloved spake	David Fletcher	2:20
10	What is man?	Peter Blumsom	2:27
11	To Cecilia	Bruce Ramell	1:45
12	The Absorbeat (Prayer of St Francis)	Adrian Green	5:38
13	Be still, and know that I am God	Derek Saunders	3:43
14	The earth is the Lord's	Noel Skinner	1:45
15	Every good gift	Adrian Green	3:39
16	O Adonai	Bruce Ramell	2:40
17	Dum medium silentium	John-Paul Bowman	4:43
18	Sing we merrily	David Fletcher	1:25
19	Lighten our darkness	David Goymour	2:35
Total running time			50.30

INTRODUCTION

Be still, and know that I am God.

Psalm 46

Profound words from sacred texts have always inspired composers over the course of history. Think of the countless large-scale oratorios, passions, and requiems, the innumerable masses and motets and then the enormous volume of music that is integral to all religious cultures. Why might this be? Possibly, because music has the ability to connect more fully with the meaning of the words, to convey the underlying emotions present in the text, and then bring us as listeners to a stillness in which the essence of the words is experienced and understood.

The source of music is silence, which is the ground of our musical being, the fundamental note of our life.

Paul Hillier*

This could also be why music is so valued within so many traditions across

the world. When sacred words are set to music, they can help us to recognise a greater truth about ourselves, clarify our relationship with those around us, and inspire us to realise the universality of the message in the texts.

Creativity is a fundamental aspect of being human, it's our birthright and it's for all of us. **Rick Rubin****

For composers, the challenge is to find a way to connect with that universality. By connecting fully and allowing this to happen, the listeners (and most importantly the performers) are drawn to the same vision of the creative artist.

'In the beginning', says the evangelist, 'was the Word'. But saying that, he is implying that the Word is not only in the beginning, but also in the end, and in everything which lies between. Whether we know it or not, we are vibrating in harmony with it now, at this very moment. If we did not do so, we would

INTRODUCTION

immediately cease to exist, because it is only by virtue of our 'tuning' to that note that we have life and being at all.
Cyprian Smith***

"Everything which lies between" poses a philosophical question and is the subject of being present in life and being ourselves. In some ways it is the most natural thing in the world to be present, but to do this as a creative artist means letting go of all the thoughts and ideas and feelings which take up our mental mindscape, so that there can be space for music to arise from within us which isn't about our ego.

All the composers on this CD have endeavoured to work in this way. By good fortune some of the best of their work has been recovered from anonymity and recorded by this talented group of young singers. Most of this music has been written by musicians who would never have considered themselves professional or 'trained' composers. They have been brought together by their love of music, of philosophy, and of the Christian

tradition. They have also, all in some way been influenced by the teaching of Leon MacLaren who was a self-taught polymath in search of answers to life's far-reaching questions. He was also an amateur musician, and by all accounts he had an intuitive approach to the subject.

Leon MacLaren established a Music Group, under the aegis of the philosophy school he founded, The School of Philosophy and Economic Science as it is known today. The Music Group began to enquire about the nature of sound and silence; and to consider what fundamental principles might govern music.

This study gave rise to a way of working that allows music to arise out of the deeper meaning of the words. In many ways this is akin to the *seconda prattica* of the Renaissance, (which itself was based on the rediscovery of teachings by Plato and others). The approach lets the words profoundly inspire the music. One of the composers in this project recently recounted to me that Leon MacLaren would remind everyone that what matters

is "not what the words say, but where they're coming from, and music has the capacity to connect us with this."

One might say that the art of profound music is to connect to that place from which creativity and freedom arise. To bring us to the presence of that deep silence identified by Paul Hillier, and that sense of attuned being with the living Word described by Cyprian Smith.

Leon MacLaren's interest in music and sound extended to an exploration of systems of tuning and modes and their different effects, culminating in his publication titled *Music* (1972, rev 2013). The book outlines his approach to, and understanding of just intonation, which he termed the "Natural Octave". It was a tuning system which all composers involved in this project have been introduced to and studied.

Three in particular, Bruce Ramell, David Goymour, and David Fletcher, have continued to develop Leon MacLaren's ideas here, and this can be heard in the way they have avoided problematic tuning

issues of just intonation - music which they have termed 'modist'.

I hope that, if nothing else, this programme helps to inspire some listeners to hear something new in these texts, and to perhaps find a greater connection with the truth revealed by them. Having known all the composers presented here, I can be confident that this also would very much have been the aspiration behind their endeavours.

Adrian Green

Adrian Green

Managing Director, Convivium Records

* *Arvo Pärt, by Paul Hillier. Pub. OUP, 1996.*

** *The Creative Act: A Way of Being, by Rick Rubin. Pub. Canongate Books, 2023.*

*** *From The Way of Paradox: Spiritual Life as Taught by Meister Eckhart. Pub. Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004.*

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INTRODUCTION

TEXTS

1 Ask, seek, knock

Matthew 7:7-8 (KJV, adapted by Derek Saunders)

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.
For everyone that asketh receiveth; and those that seeketh findeth;
and to those that knocketh it shall be opened.

Ask, seek, knock (ASK for short) was specially written in 2015 for a service which had this text as its theme. The introit opened the event and proved to set an appropriate tone with its call and answer structure. The music endeavours to reflect the sentiment that if the search is genuine then the result will be just and even-handed. **Derek Saunders**

2 O most merciful

Reginald Heber (1783–1826)

O most merciful!
O most bountiful!
God the Father Almighty,
by the Redeemer's sweet intercession,
hear us, help us, when we cry.

This anthem was originally composed in 2012 for the men's voices of Portsmouth Cathedral Choir for use as part of the service of Choral Evensong. Here it is performed in the original key, but by a mixed voice (SATB) choir. The piece was inspired by Reginald Heber's hymn setting of the same text to a melody from Münster Gesangbuch, 1677. **Adrian Green**

TEXTS

3 Set me as a seal

Song of Solomon 8:6-7 (KJV)

Set me as a seal upon thine heart,
as a seal upon thine arm;
for love is strong as death;
jealousy is cruel as the grave;
the coals thereof are coals of fire,
which hath a most vehement flame.

Many waters cannot quench love,
neither can the floods drown it.

Set me as a seal was composed in 1993 for the Philosophy School's choir, Discantvs, which at the time was run by Bruce Ramell. David Fletcher was a keen singer in the group, and this piece became the inspiration for a larger setting of texts from the Song of Solomon titled *The Song of Songs*, later premiered by the choir in 1997. **Adrian Green**

TEXTS

4 For the Fallen

Laurence Binyon (1869–1943)

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted;
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

This setting of Laurence Binyon's poem of 1914 was composed in the mid-1980s for young voices at St James Junior School to celebrate Remembrance Day in a version for two voices and organ. The setting performed here has been arranged for SATB choir by Matthew Coleridge. Quiet contemplation of the words gave rise to this composition. **Jane Skinner** (wife of the late Noel Skinner)

TEXTS

5 O Oriens

Anon. 6-7C., Italy.

O Oriens,
Splendor lucis aeternae, et sol iustitiae:
Veni, et illumina sedentes in tenebris
et umbra mortis.

O Dayspring,
Splendour of eternal light, and Sun of righteousness:
Come, and enlighten them that sit in darkness
and the shadow of death.

O Oriens is one of the seven 'O antiphons' – short prayers traditionally sung before and after the Magnificat at Vespers during the last seven days of Advent. These prayers are the source of the words of the popular Advent hymn, *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*. *O Oriens*, which prays for the light from the east, it is sung on 21st December, the winter solstice, when hours of daylight in the northern hemisphere are at their shortest. **David Goymour**

TEXTS

6 A new commandment

John 13:34 (KJV)

A new commandment I give unto you,
That ye love one another; as I have loved you,
that ye also love one another.

A New Commandment was written in 2019 for my wedding, alongside Tallis's *If Ye Love Me*, with the biblical text adapted for the occasion. It was first performed as a tenor solo with organ accompaniment at the postponed wedding, and later in its choral version at a Berkshire School of Philosophy concert. **John-Paul Bowman**

7 In Rama a voice is heard

Matthew 2:18, Jeremiah 31:15/16 (KJV)

In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children, would not be comforted.

Thus saith the Lord; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears:
for thy work shall be rewarded, and they shall come again.

In the early 2000s, musicians in the Music Group, who had previously composed individually, began meeting more regularly to form a composers' group. Around this time, Ian Duncan, another member of the School, created a libretto for a musical drama based on the Gospels, titled *No Room at the Inn*. *In Rama a voice is heard* was composed around 2008 as part of this wider project to retell the Christmas story. **Adrian Green**

TEXTS

8 And he arose

Luke 15:20 (KJV)

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off,
his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

And he arose was commissioned in 2002 by a group of students as a gift for their spiritual teacher. The parable of the Prodigal Son was particularly dear to him, and this short anthem sets the concluding words of the story. It expresses the initial trepidation of the son's return, the excited response of his father, and the tenderness of their final embrace. **Rosemary Broadbent**

9 My beloved spake

Song of Solomon 2:10-13 (KJV)

My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.
For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;
The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell.
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

This piece is from the larger cantata, entitled *The Song of Songs*, which was premiered by Discantvs at Holy Trinity Church, Sloane Square, in 1997. It tells of a maiden in love with a shepherd, and of her steadfastness and loyalty to him. Despite the fiercest temptations and severest trials, she remains faithful. An interpretation of the story may best be summed up as an incentive to fidelity to God. **Adrian Green**

TEXTS

10 What is man?

Psalm 8 (Adapted by Peter Blumsom)

What is man, that Thou dost care for him?
O Lord our Lord whose glory is sung
By the mouths of babes, by the mouths of infants,
When I look at the heavens, the works of Thy fingers,
The moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained.
What is man, that Thou dost care for him?

O Lord our Lord, Thou hast given him dominion
Over sheep and oxen, over beasts of burden,
Over the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
When I look at the heavens, the works of Thy fingers,
The moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained.
What is man, that Thou dost care for him?

What is man? was commissioned for (and first performed at) a large Christian Trade Union conference by Tom Chapman held at Westminster Abbey, in 1971. Recorded that year in a professional recording studio in Greek Street in 1971 by singers who were all members of the School of Philosophy & Economic Science at the time, Peter's original version included guitar accompaniment so in later years, Noel Skinner penned a piano accompaniment which allowed for performances by children at St James Schools in the 1990s. The version as recorded in this album combines Peter's original SATB setting and Noel's piano accompaniment. **Adrian Green**

TEXTS

11 To Cecilia

Anonymous adaptation from Fishburn (fl. 1683)

To Cecilia, in a consort of voices we sing
And we celebrate this Holy Day with music we sing to you.
Harmony divine.

To Cecilia was composed in 2022 as part of the Modists' Songbook (a project to produce a number of pieces of music to extol the unique characteristics of specific modes). As such, it is intended as a piece for communal singing exemplifying the Mi mode. **Bruce Ramell**

12 The Absorbeat

(Prayer of St Francis) Traditional, attributed to St Francis.

May the power of your love, Lord Christ, fiery and sweet as honey,
so absorb our hearts as to withdraw them from all that is under heaven.
Grant that we may be ready to die for love of your love,
as you died for love of our love. Amen.

This piece was commissioned in 2020, to celebrate the 800th anniversary of St Francis of Assisi founding the Third Order in 1221. I took two musical ideas (the first, a melody for the first sentence of the prayer, the second, a melody for the last sentence). These were then interwoven in various iterations to create a meditative musical patchwork.
Adrian Green



TEXTS

13 Be still, and know that I am God

Psalms 46:10 (KJV)

Be still, and know that I am God.

Be still, and know that I am God was written in 2020, during the Covid crisis. A friend had recited the verse in this reductionist manner for one of our church celebrations. The way the text panned out appealed to my creative side and the music arrived swiftly. It has been performed on several occasions since. An alternative title is 'Be' - but that rather spoils the punchline! **Derek Saunders**

14 The earth is the Lord's

Psalms 24:1-10 (KJV)

The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; The world, and they that dwell therein.

For he hath founded it upon the seas, And established it upon the floods.

Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place?

He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart;

Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity,

Nor sworn deceitfully.

Noel worked with other composers and musicians in the School on settings of the psalms during the 1990s. This was around the same time he taught singing and piano at St James Schools. This piece was discovered after he died and is unlikely to have been performed prior to this recording. **Jane Skinner**

TEXTS

15 Every good gift

James 1:17-20 (KJV)

*Omne datum optimum, et omne donum
perfectum desursum est,
descendens a Patre luminum,
apud quem non est transmutatio,
nec vicissitudinis obumbratio.*

Every good gift and every perfect gift
is from above, and cometh down
from the Father of lights,
With whom there is no variableness,
neither shadow of turning.

*Voluntarie enim genuit nos
verbo veritatis,
ut simus initium aliquod creaturæ ejus.*

Of his own will begat he us
with the word of truth, that we should be
a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

*Scitis, fratres mei dilectissimi.
Sit autem omnis homo velox ad audiendum:
tardus autem ad loquendum,
et tardus ad iram.
Ira viri justitiam Dei non operatur.*

Wherefore, my beloved brethren,
let every man be swift to hear,
slow to speak, slow to wrath:
For the wrath of man worketh not
the righteousness of God.

I was educated at St James Independent Schools, in London. These were established by parents studying in the School of Philosophy and Economic Science in 1975, to offer an education which provided for the intellectual, emotional and spiritual development of pupils. Nicholas Debenham, (the headteacher of the boys' School from 1975–2004), had a deep faith in Christianity and these words from the book of St James would often be cited. Following his death in 2025, I decided to find a way to set them to music as a personal tribute to all that he did to help further my own education. **Adrian Green**

TEXTS

16 O Adonai

Anon. 6-7C., Italy.

<i>O Adonai, et Dux domus Israel, qui Moysi in igne flammae rubi apparuisti, et ei in Sina legem dedisti: veni ad redimendum nos in brachio extento.</i>	O Lord and Ruler the house of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the flame of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai: come, and redeem us with outstretched arms.
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O Adonai is part of a Modists' project where four of us (Bruce Ramell, David Fletcher, David Goymour, and John-Paul Bowman) collaborated to produce a set of the seven Advent liturgical *O Antiphons* for unaccompanied SATB choir. **Bruce Ramell**

17 Dum medium silentium

Wisdom 18:14-15 (Roman Missal 1962)

While all things were in quiet silence,
and the night was in the midst of her course,
Thy almighty word, O Lord, leapt down from heaven
from Thy royal throne.

Dum Medium Silentium was written in 2011 while I was at university. I had been studying the works of Vytautas Miškinis, whose setting of the Latin text is quite lively. Having read the translation of the text, I was inspired to write a piece that used silence as a key component of the work, whilst retaining in the celebratory context of its use as an Introit for the First Sunday after Christmas. **John-Paul Bowman**

TEXTS

18 Sing we merrily

Psalm 81, 1:3 (BCP)

Sing we merrily unto God our strength; make a cheerful noise unto the God of Jacob.
Take the psalm, bring hither the tabret, the merry harp with the lute.
Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, even in the time appointed,
and upon our solemn feast-day.

Commissioned in 2021, this duet was part of a set of three, which were performed for an annual event to celebrate Teachers' Day in the School of Philosophy and Economic Science. Composed in the Lydian mode, it was stylistically inspired by the Renaissance composers Sixt Dietrich, Girolamo Scotto, and Josquin Desprez. **Adrian Green**

19 Lighten our darkness

The Third Collect, for Aid against all Perils (BCP)

Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord;
and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night;
for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I fell in love with the words of this prayer as an 8-year-old church choirboy, hearing them said every Sunday at Evensong. Setting them to music was taken up as a project on a music retreat in the summer of 2000, with helpful guidance from David Stoll. It was one of my first experiments in writing a piece based on the note *La* in the sol-fa scale.

David Goymour

BIOGRAPHIES

Peter Blumsom (1942–2026)

Peter Blumsom, known professionally as Pete Dello, was an English singer-songwriter who was popular during the 1960s and 1970s, most notably as lead singer of the band Honeybus. During the 1950s, he and other members of the “59 Club” run by the Rev John Oates (later Canon of St Bride’s Fleet Street) taught themselves to play the new American skiffle guitar style. Peter later embraced rock ‘n’ roll, pop, choral and classical traditions and continued to write and perform into his sixties and beyond. He was a music teacher for most of his professional career and both a student and teacher of Platonic philosophy for the remainder of his life.



John-Paul Bowman (b. 1985)

John-Paul Bowman showed an interest in composing music from a young age culminating in studying Composition at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London. John-Paul’s compositions span choral, chamber and orchestral works as well as incidental music for theatre. Having taught music for 10 years in secondary schools, John-Paul now looks after Waterperry House as Bursar.



BIOGRAPHIES

Rosemary Broadbent (b. 1950)

Rosemary Broadbent read Music at Oxford University and has spent her career in music education, most recently as a tutor for musical analysis and composition at the Junior RNCM. Her compositions include a number of anthems, music for several Shakespeare plays and a collection of memorable, reflective songs for use on meditative retreats. She is a performance examiner for ABRSM and gives online talks on music under the title ‘Mornings with a Masterpiece’.

www.rosemarybroadbent.co.uk



David Fletcher (1931–2024)

Music was in various ways a large part of David's life, starting as a young boy in the church choir, and progressing to singing with, for example, the London Bach Society and encompassing such activities as playing trumpet in a New Orleans jazz band. He trained and worked as a picture restorer, before graduating from Newport Art School and then Chelsea Art College. Returning to his first love David studied at the Guildhall School of Music, in aural training and composition, subsequently writing instrumental works, songs and choral pieces, as well as scores for numerous musical productions for the children he taught.



BIOGRAPHIES

David Goymour (b. 1946)

David Goymour has been singing for most of his life, starting as a church choirboy. Music has been a spare-time interest, dabbling with piano, guitar and recorder alongside singing. While pursuing a career as a journalist, he joined the School of Philosophy and Economic Science in his mid-twenties; his experiments in composition are a practical application of the philosophy.



Adrian Green (b. 1985)

Adrian Green was educated at St James Schools (London) and has been a student in the School of Philosophy and Economic Science since 1995. He is currently head of the School's Music Group. He is the Managing Director of Convivium Records (est. 2009) and Convivium Singers, and a tenor Lay Clerk at Portsmouth Cathedral. Adrian has run Portsmouth Cathedral's "Cathedral Sing" programme since September 2008, which engages with thousands of primary school children each year.

www.adrian-green.co.uk



BIOGRAPHIES

Bruce Ramell (b. 1939)

Bruce Ramell started his working life in high temperature technology, but at the age of 28 felt that he should move across to music. Music studies resulted in him becoming a teacher of music and mathematics, ending up as headmaster of a London prep school. Since retirement, composition and music study have been very active, especially related to work of The Modists.



Derek Saunders (b. 1966)

Derek Saunders is a music teacher at the London Oratory School and is also director of music at St Mary with St Alban Church in Teddington. With both roles he plays an active part in directing choral performances, having recently conducted Mozart's *Requiem*, Handel's *Messiah* and regular services and concerts in the Teddington area. He has composed a number of pieces for his church position and enjoys being both reflective and creative within the Christian tradition.



BIOGRAPHIES

Noel Skinner (1947–2019)

Noel Skinner won a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music and studied with Leslie England and the accompanist Rex Stephens. During his studentship he won many prizes, including the Harold Samuel Bach Prize and the McFarren prize (at that time the highest award for Piano). He had wide experience as a soloist, accompanist, operatic répétiteur, teacher and composer.



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PERFORMERS

Phoenix Consort

Soprano

Anna Vines
Abby Helsby
Edie Tunnicliffe *
Lili Banev **
Tallulah Horton

Alto

Ella McAvoy
Emma Kerrigan
Jess Whitehead
Peter Hicks †

Tenor

Barnaby Sladden
James Kitchingman ‡
Matthew Holloway-Strong
Nathan Green

Bass

Alexander Lee
James Gooding
Miki Derdun ‡
Nick Stoner §
Will Pate #

Piano

Gillian Thompson

Director

Adam Whitmore

Soloists

* Ask, seek, knock ** The Absorbent † O Adonai
‡ Dum medium silentium § O Oriens # Every good gift

BIOGRAPHIES

Adam Whitmore

Adam studied Russian and Spanish at Durham University, where he directed the university's Chamber Choir and founded the Phoenix Consort. He is currently a Choral Director with the Diocese of Leeds and National Schools Singing Programme, delivering musical experiences to hundreds of children across West Yorkshire each week. Alongside directing, his singing work

includes Durham Cathedral Choir as a choral scholar, the early music ensemble Ottava Rima, the Seville Choral Society in Spain, and Voces Tallinn Chamber Choir in Estonia. He performs regularly as a soloist in recitals of English song, Lieder, and oratorio, with repertoire including Bach's *St John* and *St Matthew Passion*, Schubert's *Winterreise*, Handel's *Messiah*, and other major works.



BIOGRAPHIES

Phoenix Consort

The Phoenix Consort is an award-winning vocal ensemble, specialising in choral music from polyphony of the Renaissance to contemporary compositions.

The group consists of young artists, originally founded at Durham University, and has expanded to a UK-wide network of exciting young choral musicians. Since starting during the pandemic, the group has since performed across the United

Kingdom, achieved two prizes at the 54th Tolosa Choral Competition in Spain in 2023, and recorded several albums of contemporary choral music.

Described by Gramophone as a "leading group focusing on new music", the consort's main aims surround bringing new music to a wide variety of audiences and showcasing choral music as an art form among younger generations.

www.phoenixconsort.com



CREDITS

CHORAL CONTEMPLATIONS

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Adam Whitmore

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St John's, Upper Norwood, London, 20-21 February 2026

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Producers

Adrian Green & Tom Mungall



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