

THE CHOIR OF



ST JOHN'S
CAMBRIDGE

PIOUS ANTHEMS & VOLUNTARIES
FINNISSY | NETHSINGHA



PIOUS ANTHEMS & VOLUNTARIES

MICHAEL FINNISSY (b. 1946)

CD1

- | | | |
|-----|---|--------|
| [1] | Dum transisset Sabbatum | [8.07] |
| [2] | Dum transisset Sabbatum – double | [7.49] |
| [3] | Videte miraculum | [8.25] |
| [4] | Videte miraculum – double | [9.19] |

CD2

- | | | |
|-----|---|--------|
| [1] | Commentary on ‘Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern’ | [4.00] |
|-----|---|--------|

Cantata: ‘Herr Christ, der einge Gottessohn’

- | | | |
|-----|--|--------|
| [2] | I. ‘Herr Christ, der einge Gottessohn’ | [5.14] |
| [3] | II. ‘Ach führe mich, o Gott’ | [2.23] |
| [4] | III. ‘Ach, ziehe die Seele’ | [2.44] |
| [5] | IV. ‘O Wunderkraft der Liebe’ | [2.16] |
| [6] | V. ‘Bald zur Rechten’ | [3.24] |
| [7] | VI. ‘Für uns un Mensch geboren’ | [3.13] |

- | | | |
|------|-------------------------------------|---------|
| [8] | Commentary on BWV 562 | [5.32] |
| [9] | Plebs angelica | [7.59] |
| [10] | Plebs angelica – alternativo | [13.30] |

Total timings:	[83.56]
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THE CHOIR OF ST JOHN’S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE
GLEN DEMPSEY ORGAN
JAMES ANDERSON-BESANT ORGAN
SARAH O’FLYNN FLUTE · CECILY WARD VIOLIN
ANDREW NETHSINGHA DIRECTOR

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COMPOSER’S NOTES

1. How to commemorate the Chapel of St John’s College? The chapel is ‘Victorian Gothic’, asserting **spiritual values** against the rampant materialism of the Industrial Revolution, and in doing so partly through the presence of Music. Maybe this is a mis-reading, but it gives some sense of purpose to my composing, something useful, with guts and brains, and beyond the mere provision of feel-good trivialities.

2. The choir has a repertory extending from Hildegard von Bingen to the present. I wonder how this challenging concept works in practice, on the congregation. Is this held to be significant here?

3. Andrew Nethsingha wants me to write four ‘a cappella’ anthems. This seems very little to ask of a three year ‘residency’. I need to start somewhere, so I ask him to suggest representative works that might serve as templates, or as ‘found objects’ in the choir’s library, to which I could respond.

4. I want to expand my compositional knowledge, so we alight on Tudor music and the *Dum transisset Sabbatum* by John Taverner, and

I begin my researches. Not just the music, but historical context, and the setting of text - which exhibits a degree of tension between Gospel narrative and liturgical ritual, and between plainsong and polyphony.

5. I replicate Taverner’s structure, and retain elements of modal ‘tonality’, and find much that guides me towards further musical adventure.

6. I think of partnering the anthems with organ ‘commentaries’, documenting and exploring ‘the material’ with ‘greater freedom’ - whatever these expressions within inverted commas seem to imply.

7. A second Tudor anthem is proposed, *Videte miraculum* by Thomas Tallis. I start, but get nowhere; the content is a little too close to Taverner. I think about the crisis of the Reformation. I think about William Byrd, finding what seems to me a heightened passion and expressivity, more attractive than Tallis. I chance upon John Donne’s *Divine Poems*, and his vision of the ‘Annunciation’, and decide to trope the Latin ‘Videte miraculum’ - evoking something akin to the Humanism of the Renaissance, or to the use of the common tongue in church. Windows open.

8. I then perceive some kind of over-arching structure for the anthems and their commentaries. I discover that, on occasion, the choir integrate Bach cantatas as a part of the Evensong service. Would it be possible to use one of these as a found object, and would it be possible to add small-scale instrumental forces to the organ? Could I even move as far as Tippett, or - as I later discover - Arvo Pärt, taking in a much wider expanse of the musical content of current Evensongs?

9. I do not feel this breadth of vision or enthusiasm to be at all incompatible with the Victorian Gothic Revival, and hence the chapel I am supposed to celebrate. I might have a greater fondness for William Morris than for the personalities of the Oxford Movement, but their collective responses to the dark times in which they lived continue to resonate in the England of 2015-19.

10. So the design of what is a **cycle** of pieces has emerged. At the centre the four choral anthems, and, surrounding and alternating with them, five instrumental commentaries. In a church service the commentaries are, in effect, voluntaries; and are also named 'double' and 'alternativo', types of variation, re-write,

or further exploration. Two are for solo organ, one for two organs, and two for the trio of instruments used in the 'Bach cantata'.

They are truly 'pious' as a snub to consumerism and trash-culture. The nine sections oddly recall the design of Boulez's *Le Marteau sans maître*.

11. Two of the sections, the first (Taverner) and sixth (J.S. Bach) are close to their originals, taking structure and some content and analogies from source. There is a unifying series of chords (setting the word 'Jesus' in the first piece) which reappears throughout. There are numerous musical cross-references. These compositional ideas were fuelled by a series of paintings by David Hockney: examining and commenting on Claude Lorrain's *Sermon on the Mount* - and to Susan Grace Galassi's perception, re-applied to Hockney, that "the schema of the original is preserved, while style, technique, and, most significantly, content undergo transformation" ['Confrontations with the Past: Picasso's Variations on the Masters'].

Michael Finnissy

CONDUCTOR'S REFLECTIONS INTRODUCTION

This is extremely beautiful music - rich, deep, full of colours, emotions and allusions. The music requires time to marinate in the listener's mind. Connoisseurs may wish to jump in and listen to the entire sequence at one sitting. Others may choose to immerse themselves in the three choral motets before getting to know their organ parallels. Likewise listening a few times to the short, even-numbered movements of the Cantata can be a way to familiarise oneself with the beauty of Finnissy's language. The shapes and chords have become more alluring to me each time I have heard them. I have gradually got to know the music, one piece at a time, over a four year period - this has been a deeply enriching experience which I want others to share.

My initial ideas for this cycle of works were formulated in 2015, following the Advent commission which Michael Finnissy wrote for us in 2014, *John the Baptist*. After the recording of our 2015 Jonathan Harvey disc, DEO, I looked for another contemporary composer in whose music we could immerse ourselves. Like Harvey, Finnissy is one of the greatest

composers of our time. It has been fascinating to observe the cycle's evolution, to develop a deep relationship with one composer and to gain an insight into his compositional processes. I appreciate it having been a two-way process, with Michael being receptive to what is and isn't possible for a choir like ours - whilst also stretching us to our limits! We are privileged to have had Michael as the College's Composer in Residence for three years. The project was coordinated so as to reach its fulfilment as we celebrated the Chapel's 150th anniversary. Of the Chapel Finnissy has said: *it is so special for its windows; your gaze freewheels from one to another - and this cycle of works is like that*. I was pleased that the completed work's premiere took place on a summer evening with light streaming into the Chapel. The sequence of music forms an act of contemplation - a spiritual experience.

The original plan was for four choral pieces, surrounded and interspersed by five complementary solo organ works. Our College has its roots around 1200 in the St John's Infirmary, including the original Chapel, whose outline one can still see in First Court. The College itself was founded in the early sixteenth century; new buildings have been added over the centuries right up to the present day.

When I approached Michael I was seeking to create a musical parallel to this architectural layering. My concept was that each new piece should be based on a motet from the early sixteenth century - a Respond or Votive Antiphon - each of which had in turn been based on a plainchant melody dating back several more centuries. It was exciting to see the way in which that relatively modest idea evolved! The first amendment was to add five works for solo organ, to alternate with the choral pieces. These works ended up involving extra instruments, including a second organ! Then Michael decided that rather than taking a Sheppard motet as his next model, he would use a Bach cantata. In 2008 I started a tradition of termly Cantata Evensongs in which one or two Bach cantatas form part of our (lengthened!) Saturday Evensong. For Finnissy's cantata he chose to use as his model Bach's BWV 96, *Herr Christ, der einge Gottessohn*. Finnissy's fourth choral model was in the end by Michael Tippett, of whom more is written later. Michael's stimulating three-year residency was timed to culminate in the 150th anniversary of the building of the College Chapel.

The project began according to this original plan. *Dum transisset Sabbatum* is based on Tavener's Eastertide motet of the same name. *Videte miraculum* is based on Tallis's work for the Feast of the Purification. Both these sixteenth-century models have a plainsong melody running through them in long notes in one of the lowest voice parts, while the other 4 or 5 voices weave around them imitatively. Their complementary organ pieces are called 'Doubles' - meaning 'Variations' - reworking the melodic fragments, harmonies and textures of the choral works.

Halfway through the composition, Finnissy spoke to me of seeing the complete cycle as a meditation on finding one's way, with Jesus as a guide. In *Dum transisset* the women come to the tomb; Jesus is not there, but eventually they find him. The listener is then to have a flashback to the start of the miracle in *Videte miraculum*; Jesus is there to guide people to the right way. Both arias of the Cantata are concerned with a loss of direction and getting back on track. In *Plebs angelica* the purpose of the angels is to guide and transfer us to Paradise. The cycle speaks of a transit from earthly life to life after death. This is one of many recurring themes of the cycle; others

include considerations of time and space, the use of silence, the life of Jesus, heaven and earth, floating textures, birth (of Christ, of fugue, of time?) - and of course we were involved in the birth of the work itself. The movements of the cycle move from one thing to another - but as *reminiscence*. The cycle starts with the death of Christ, but then has a flashback to His birth. *Commentary on BWV 562* contains the Birth of the Fugue, having already heard fugue in the cantata - another flashback. At other times there is a foreshadowing of something later in the cycle; for instance, the first organ work contains much material from the end of the last motet. We don't necessarily need to listen to this cycle linearly, in a stipulated order. Having said that, the overall shape of the cycle is a clear journey if experienced from start to finish, from the two Marys on earth to the angels in heaven, from the initial low G of *Dum transisset* to the final high G of *Plebs angelica* and the subsequent war in heaven.

Finnissy takes objects and remakes them. He feels indebted to David Hockney, Andy Warhol and Pablo Picasso for this. Cubism is a clear influence. Sketches need to be *worked on, and sculpted - worn down, worn in*. I feel rather the same about musical performance and indeed

about the activity of listening to Finnissy's music; it benefits from repeated listening. This is not music that reveals all its secrets and flavours on first hearing.

In Michael's notes, printed above, he avoids colourfully descriptive and anecdotal material; he concentrates on his thoughts as a composer while writing the work. I offer my own thoughts with humility as I am no musicological expert, but I hope it may be interesting to compare Michael's thoughts on the evolution of the cycle with my own as the recipient of the music. These represent my own feelings rather than anything authoritative. However, I have lived and breathed this music for four years; I love the music and this is quite the most significant and substantial of the hundred new works I have commissioned and performed. Like Jonathan Harvey, Michael Finnissy is unusual among composers in being the antithesis of a self-publicist; that makes me all the more eager to share my enthusiasm for the music.

I would like to pay tribute to our amazing singers and instrumentalists, who have worked with such devotion, professionalism and musical empathy throughout this project. I can't recall a single occasion when the singers failed to be

utterly committed - even the nine-year olds; that is a great tribute both to them and to the music. I would like to offer particular thanks to Glen Dempsey, one of the finest musicians I have ever known, who contributed so much to the choir in addition to his fine playing.

DUM TRANSISSET SABBATUM

The first motet unfolds in a mysterious and contemplative manner, as the sun rises on the first Easter morning. The two Marys arrive at the tomb to anoint the Son of God's body, and one can almost smell the sweet spices which they bring. The text is the Respond to the third lesson at Matins on Easter Day. John Tavener made two settings of these words, in five and four parts respectively. Michael chose to use the first of these as his model. Peter Phillips has written of the *rhapsodic atmosphere* which Tavener creates, and this is surely also true of Finnissy's reimagining. There is jubilation at *ut venientes* and *Alleluia*, as though the two women are anticipating the joy of the Resurrection. The three *Jesum* chords exemplify the range of ways in which a Christian might address God - from awed reverence to anger or a despairing cry. The first brings to mind the Catholic tradition for worshippers to drop

to their knees as Jesus's name is uttered. This passage demonstrates Finnissy's deep understanding of the power of silence within an act of worship. Silence takes on structural significance in many of the works of the cycle, such as in the second instrumental *Commentary*.

The three *Jesum* chords provide unifying musical material for the whole cycle. They are each built from five pitch classes (e.g. G, A, B, C, E) the intervals between which are always one Third and three Seconds. The pitches are then rearranged in different octaves. The third *Jesum* contains a squashed version, using only tones and semitones, creating the climatic chord of the sequence. Sometime after the first performance of *Dum transisset* the composer made a change to the original *Jesum* chords, as he began to contemplate cyclic connections between all the works of his residency. He wanted the movements *all to refract through one another*. He spoke of *building up a reservoir of material* as the cycle progressed.

Finnissy copies Tavener's scheme for the polyphony with repeats of ever decreasing length: ABC - BC - C. Tavener's three large polyphonic sections are interspersed with

two sections of unembellished plainchant. Finnissy dresses the first of these up with his own rhythms for the altos. For his second interpolation we hear two-part writing of a raw elemental quality, which hints at rather earlier music than Tavener. Finnissy only sets the first two verses of Chapter 16 of Mark's Gospel, but the final bars give a deep sense of verse 8:

And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.

DUM TRANSISSET SABBATUM – DOUBLE

Whereas in the first choral motet Finnissy drew on material from Tavener, in this organ 'Double' he reuses his own material. Throughout there is a Cubist notion of chopping up the material and then reassembling it to shed new light and to create new juxtapositions. There is a parallel in great modern architecture, such as Frank Gehry's Guggenheim in Bilbao; one gains new understanding of the organic whole by looking at the building from different angles - from inside, from outside. Sixteenth-

century parody masses come to mind, such as Victoria's *Missa O quam gloriosum*, when the material from a two-minute model generates a twenty-minute composition. In the late nineteenth century many works were written by reinterpreting and elaborating melodies which the listener would already know. Examples include Liszt's *Rigoletto Paraphrase* and Sarasate's fantasies on *Carmen* and *Don Giovanni*. Likewise, one's appreciation of the beauties of the organ *Doubles* is heightened by first knowing well the three unaccompanied choral works of the cycle; you see old friends and familiar landscapes through the train window as you go past. There is a passage in Ferruccio Busoni's 1910 essay, *Value of the Transcription*, which feels very relevant to Finnissy's cycle as a whole:

Notation is itself the transcription of an abstract idea. The moment that the pen takes possession of it, the thought loses its original form. The intention of writing down an idea necessitates already a choice of time and key. The composer is obliged to decide on the form and... the course to be taken and the limitations... The idea becomes a sonata or a concerto; this is already an arrangement of the original... The performance of a work is also a transcription.

From his first mature works, Finnissey has acknowledged the influence of cinema on his composition - assembling images, actions and gestures as a sort of 'montage'. The *Double* is like a dream, where thoughts and events from the previous day coalesce into new forms. It doesn't just utilise music from the first motet, but from elsewhere in the cycle - most notably from the final section of *Plebs angelica*, which appears at the start as well as for the whole section from circa 4'30" to 5'45". Rather than being a temporal progression from beginning to end, all the events of the cycle exist simultaneously. The cycle explores the distinction between God's human incarnation in Jesus, who experiences time chronologically, and God the Father for whom all of time is simultaneous. Heaven and earth are sometimes represented by high and low musical tessituras. The *Double* begins high and ends low on a bottom G, the tonal centre of the whole cycle. In some respects there are symmetries between the *Double* and the preceding motet - one starting on a bottom G, the other ending on the low G. The *Jesum* chords are heard twice in the *Double* (from 3'35"), but now starting loudly and getting quieter - again the opposite of the motet. This time Finnissey starts with the climactic *Jesum* chord, as described above,

and then winds down. He experiments with very subtle changes to the same chord, in the manner of Morton Feldman, another composer with a similarly refined ear for pitch, texture and spacing.

The *Double* has an ABCB structure, with the bold *Jesum* chords forming the B sections. Whilst listening try to imagine you are sitting in Chapel, with the organ sound quite high up and distant, and with your eyes roaming around the beautiful stained glass - forever alighting on different patterns and colours.

VIDETE MIRACULUM

Chapter Two of the cycle takes us to the start of Christ's life. This time the model is Tallis's six-part *Videte miraculum*, the Respond for the Feast of The Presentation of Christ in the Temple. Jesus was presented to the old man Simeon who responded with the text known as *Nunc Dimittis* - *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation.* In the low, dark closing textures of the piece one hears the old man at the end of his life. This contrasts with the bright, shining new hope of the Christ Child elsewhere in the work. To the Latin text

which Tallis had set, Finnissey adds an English text by John Donne. This troped text continues our exploration of the difference between God's perception of Time and our own.

*Ere by the spheares time was created thou
wast in his minde*

Finnissey shares with Tallis a particular gift for melodic beauty, of great benefit to a contrapuntalist.

When studying Tallis, it is instructive to look at the number of voice parts. For example, at the start of the *Gloria* of his *Missa Salve Intemerata* he begins with 2 parts, then 3, 4 and finally 5. At the start of *Videte miraculum* Finnissey likewise builds up from 2 to 6 voices. By the time the 6th part enters (the bass part at circa 0'50") there is an almost overwhelming sensuousness to the sonority. In Tallis, the number of voices primarily affects the texture, whereas in Finnissey, the addition of voice parts has more harmonic impact because the latter composer is happy to have more pitch classes sounding at once. One more chocolate, and another, and another...! Again, the sheer beauty of sound reminds me of Feldman. It also brings to my mind Harrison Birtwistle's *Dinah and*

Nick's Love Song, written at a time when the composer was much influenced by Feldman in Buffalo, NY.

At the start of *Videte miraculum* I think of light shining through a moving glass prism; lots of different faces glint kaleidoscopically with ever-changing colours in shifting directions. Sometimes you catch a glimpse of a particular pattern - but this is a fleeting vision which is soon gone; you wonder whether you had imagined it. By chance we recorded the motet on exactly the 50th anniversary of the moon landing, and this opening music seems to float around as though in space without gravity. Different versions of 'floating' follow in such works as *Cantata* and *Plebs angelica*. Following this initial *shimmery miraculouness*, as one friend described it to me, at the first English-texted section there is suddenly a prophetically heavier, more earthly texture - Jesus is to be weighed down by bearing the sins of the world. The high texture of the opening contrasts with the low tessitura of the ending - God comes down to earth from heaven. The final bass solo unfolds melismatically with wonderfully evocative word-painting.

VIDETE MIRACULUM – DOUBLE

The second *Double* opens with a softer version of the *Jesum* theme. All three chords have the same five pitches (plus one extra in the last chord), but hear how the colour changes so much when certain notes are simply moved into a different octave. Like Igor Stravinsky or Arvo Pärt, Finnissy has a wonderful ear for the spacing of chords. A hypnotic state of contemplation is induced, as though one cannot not take one's eyes off the wondrous scene:

Videte miraculum - Behold the miracle.

As the *Double* progresses, polyphony alternates with *Jesum* chords. The first section of polyphony is a clear paraphrase of the opening of its paired motet - as though a very good musician was trying to play the motet from memory. Sometimes it's accurate - sometimes it's improvised differently - the building viewed from a different angle. This first section of counterpoint is relatively easy to follow horizontally - one might think of the simplicity of the newborn child. However the later polyphonic sections start to feel more chordal to my ears. The music becomes fiercer and darker; even more than in the motet there is a prophetic

sense of the eventual crucifixion of the Child in Mary's womb.

Regarding Finnissy's piano writing, Ian Pace has commented on the use of all seven octaves seemingly simultaneously! In an interview Finnissy explained it thus: *It's the way I sit at the piano [indicates hands as if in extreme registers]. I don't sit like that [indicates hands close together in central position] because it hurts my tummy(!)* The final widely spaced G and D of the present work, identical to the end of the second *Commentary*, remind us of the centrality of those two pitches, as established in bar 1 of the first motet. There is a huge area contained with these two notes:

Immensity cloysterd in thy deare wombe.

COMMENTARY ON 'WIE SCHÖN LEUCHTET DER MORGENSTERN'

Chapter Three of the cycle, comprising the two Commentaries and the Cantata, focuses on Christ's earthly life. We start this section in a very different world, initially emphasising the mortal side of the earth/heaven axis. In contrast to the impersonal aspects of the main organ,

violin and flute now impart a more human quality to the music. The first *Commentary* is the only skittish movement of the nine works, a *scherzando*, which opens with medieval peasants singing and dancing. Knotty counterpoint, perhaps grappling with strict religious dogma, keeps being interrupted by carefree playfulness. The rustic, earthy octaves of the opening are a foil to the delicate, heavenly octaves of the ending - a moment of revelation in which chorale phrases float on flute and high violin.

Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern - How beautifully shines the morning star!

This Bachian trio, based on an Epiphany chorale melody, provides a link between the preceding meditation on Christ in the womb and the *morning star* of the succeeding Bach-derived *Cantata*. In this context the morning star refers to Jesus. For this magical ending I like to think of the shepherds out early on the morning of the Nativity, gazing awestruck at the Star shining



Michael Finnissy listens to the Choir rehearsing 'Videte miraculum' on the day of its premiere, 3rd February 2018

in a calm veiled sky. To draw on the famous Phillips Brooks carol:

O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth!

CANTATA - HERR CHRIST, DER EINGE GOTTESSOHN

I. Con brio. Vivace

Riotous, exuberant, glittering instrumental lines open the movement. Shards fly in all directions. Could this be the Big Bang, the Birth of Time? Bachian counterpoint follows, punctuated by variants of the chorale phrases sung in unison by the choir. The frequent alternation between simple and compound metre, two methods of quantifying time, are a precursor of the fifth movement in which these two metric patterns will coexist.

One can hear the influence of the sparkling sopranino recorder which Bach used to represent the light of the Christ Child. At the word *Morgenstern* our gaze is lifted to the heavens; we hear God respond in the mystical quotation from *Videte miraculum* and a subsequent numinous calm. Time seems suddenly to stand still as we marvel at the wonder of Christ's birth on earth; the profound tranquility is

like a deep sleep, as though the listener too is now cocooned in the womb. The movement takes us on a journey from cosmic chaos to extraordinary intimacy and deep contemplation. The movement again ends on a solitary G, with us looking up at the morning star which guides us to Jesus.

II. Recitato; molto espressivo e sensibile

Finnissy didn't stipulate whether each movement should use the main organ or the chamber organ. I chose to alternate the instruments, creating different characters and an added sense of perspective. Thus the even-numbered movements have a distant, liquid, ethereal accompaniment from high above the listener. In the other movements the chamber organ speaks in a closer, more personal manner from ground level. For me, this music becomes more and more beautiful the better I know it - what seemed like discords on first hearing become ravishing concords. Bach's recitatives have alluring melodic shapeliness, as well as engaging rhetoric and pacing. I find the same qualities in the two new recitatives. Finnissy inverts Bach's first melodic contour, but then becomes more free. Unlike Bach, Finnissy chooses to set the word *jedoch* - 'yet' - not once, but three times,

emphasising this crucial turning point in the text.

Finnissy swaps the order of Bach's two recitatives, enabling this movement to lead us thematically into the following alto aria. We are guided through this transition by a B.A.C.H.-like motif, with paired rising and falling seconds.

*willst du mich nur mit deinen Augen leiten -
if only you would guide me with your eyes.*

III. Con moto

At the outset of the project I imagined that we might eventually record the four new choral pieces alongside their original models, but in fact the Finnissy cycle has turned out to be so integrated in its own right that I didn't want to upset the architecture. However, I would recommend at the very least getting to know the third movement of Bach's cantata, his catchy aria *Ach, ziehe die Seele*. Of all the models which Finnissy uses as starting points, this is the most recognisable in its new incarnation. One can hear Finnissy re-moulding the clay of Bach's original, forever creating new shapes. The close quasi-canonic writing between flute and voice reflects the way the text draws us close to Jesus. A similar technique is used by Bach, again with

flute, in the first soprano aria of the St John Passion, *Ich folge dir gleichfalls*. The movement has a lightness and airy playfulness. Having started by imitating the voice, halfway through the aria the flute embarks on a succession of long notes. At this point the voice, organ and flute all have the same melody, but they play at different speeds - three concurrent calibrations of Time. The movement ends in a characteristic Finnissy way - with no *rit* and no sense of cadential resolution, dispensing with the reprise of Bach's *da capo* aria - the music is simply cut off like a twig being snapped.

IV. Recitato: molto espressivo e sensibile

Continuing our exploration of Time, we now have a text which considers both Christ's Nativity and his Second Coming, at the Last Judgement:

*wenn sich die Herrlichkeit im letzten Teil der Zeit
when His Majesty at the end of time descends
to earth*

I love the plasticity of rhythm in this movement, which creates a state of transcendence, of eternity - a very different approach to Time from the previous aria.

At the outset of the *Cantata* composition I suggested to the composer that he might like to use a cello, as that provides the foundation in Bach's music, but - no - Michael wanted the music to float without a bass line. This movement is a particularly beautiful example - the lowest organ notes are generally above the vocal line. A sense of the music being suspended weightlessly is a textural theme of the cycle, reaching its apogee in the final section of *Plebs angelica*. The use of chamber organ adds to the sense of floating; the lowest notes of the chamber organ are rarely used, and the instrument has no 16-foot stop to give grounding like a double-bass. When the main organ is used it is always manuals-only, with one exception; indeed most of the time the organ part is also high on the keyboard. In the present movement the organ part is played on a 4-foot stop, so that it sounds an octave higher like a piccolo. The only time in the *Cantata* when we hear the organ pedal is for the last note of the whole work.

V. Adagio

The bass aria is made up of four voices: bass, violin, organ right-hand in a long cantabile line, and organ left-hand including some

quasi-pizzicato writing. The bass and organ are in simple time while the violin part, which contains a quote from a Bach gamba sonata, is in compound time. None of the melodic lines are in any way unconventional on their own.

The four parts are assembled vertically like a mosaic, resulting in a lightness and transparency of texture, whilst sometimes becoming more complex rhythmically and harmonically. This aptly reflects the text:

*now to the right, now to the left, my straying steps
turn... Let me not sink into danger.*

There are also moments of stillness where the plea *Walk with me, my Saviour* seems to be answered. The end of the aria, *[Guide me] to the gates of heaven*, leads directly into the final chorale.

VI. Calmo e solenne

Bach chose to conclude his Cantata with the final verse of Elizabeth Cruciger's Lutheran hymn, *Herr Christ, der einge Gottessohn*, but Finnissy chooses to end with the second verse. This brings lots of themes of the cycle together - the end of Time, the birth of Jesus,

the resurrection, heaven and earth. Finnissy starts with the traditional Lutheran chorale melody, with organ echoes between phrases, and he moves the melody gradually further from the original until the music dissolves entirely. I remember once reading that if you want to have a surrealist dinner party (!), you need to start by putting the table candles into the oven at a gentle heat so as to create new shapes. Finnissy melts the Lutheran chorale until it becomes something quite different. The movement ends with the tonic G in the organ pedal, supported by a widely spaced three-part chord. The fourth movement had also ended on a G, coloured by a higher F sharp. In both instances it is as though the G is being played with well-chosen mutation stops, in the manner of Jehan Alain or Jean Guillou.

COMMENTARY ON BWV 562

This *Commentary* is based on an unfinished C minor fugue, here transposed to D minor. Bach intended to add it to the Fantasia in C minor (BWV 562), which he had written some twenty years earlier. Bach's fugue subject is a horizontal representation of Finnissy's *Jesum* chords, with the same internal intervals. At around 2'20", the brief other-worldly fragment in C sharp minor,

against the tonal centre of D minor, may be seen as a large scale prolongation of the semitone in the theme and in the *Jesum* chords.

Finnissy's *Commentary* starts with Bach, and there are brief intrusions of 'other' music - capricious, dizzy, momentarily unstable. The composer has referred to the opening as a "Birth of Fugue." The Bach sections get shorter and shorter, the 'other' sections get longer and longer - until at the end it is the Bach that seems like an intrusion. Finnissy has spoken of *trying to enact Bach's techniques, but using different materials*. Three minutes into the music we are invited to contemplate Time again when a new texture begins; in the composer's words - *there is a sense of time being completely suspended or frozen. It's like watching clouds - there's a stillness which is animated from within. Jesum* chords are now again used vertically, as Finnissy says: *it's like a musical anatomy lesson; we trade fugue for specific pitches. The fugue is turned through 90 degrees, so that the D minor tonality of the start is gradually replaced by a vertical set - it refocusses what the ear is hearing as a magnetic north - eventually one is left [again] just with the pitches G and D.*

I marvel at the variety of textures created by chamber organ, flute and violin. In more legato passages there is a deliberate mismatch between the two expressive melody instruments and the organ. In the frozen time sections, the instruments play chords or illusions of chords. One of the most beautiful and delicate textures occurs in the ‘other’ music (e.g. at 2’30”) when the chamber organ becomes a single line instrument, exactly equal in articulation and style with the other instruments. This is also the music material which most closely recalls Pierre Boulez, Finnissy having commented on

the overall cycle’s structural similarities to *Le Marteau sans maître*. Indeed, another parallel with the Boulez is the lack of a bass instrument, as discussed elsewhere. One could draw other parallels between the works - e.g. textures in this second *Commentary*, vocal shapes in the final section of *Videte miraculum* and rhetorical use of silence. Boulez uses a wider, more colourful palette of instruments, though without choirs or organs! However, Finnissy deploys an extra instrument - the building itself, with its resonance and its possible spatial effects.



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PLEBS ANGELICA

For the start of the fourth and final Chapter we are back to unaccompanied choir, now divided antiphonally. Finnissy chose to take Tippett’s 1943 motet, *Plebs angelica*, as his starting point. Whilst giving a different slant, this fits my original conception well, because Tippett was much influenced by sixteenth-century music in his motet. For the text, Finnissy reuses the medieval Latin sequence in honour of St Michael, which had been set by Tippett. Like the John Donne trope in *Videte miraculum*, this text is mystical and contemplative. Finnissy has described Tippett as one of his biggest influences - indeed the older composer wrote charming letters to him. Tippett once told Finnissy that *being a composer in England* (unlike other countries) *was like crossing a desert without a map*. Tippett is also a significant composer for St John’s, having written the College’s greatest musical commission of the twentieth century, his *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis*.

In *Plebs angelica*, a vision of heaven, Finnissy creates a big contrast with the other two unaccompanied motets. He describes it as being *like a chant with canons*. Unlike the other motets this work is predominantly homophonic and

it is scored for double choir; one choir sings in Latin while the other sings the same text in English in the composer’s own translation. The motet’s opening clearly underlines the cycle’s tonal centre of a modal G, whilst it ends suspended on a lone top G, just as the first movement of the cantata has done.

In his remarkable book, *Soundscapes*, Paul Robertson describes his experience of an aorta operation in which his heart was stopped for a lengthy period:

As I lay there waiting, I felt myself die — beautifully, ecstatically, transcendently. I saw eternity and shed the whole of myself joyfully in order to become unified with it.

Finnissy seems able to offer us a glimpse of what Robertson experienced. The final section of *Plebs angelica* opens a door into new worlds not accessible to the rest of us, a door into eternity:

*transferte nos in Paradisicolas
Transfer us unto those who dwell in Paradise*

Beethoven is another composer who possesses this visionary ability. Indeed, the organic nature of the whole cycle makes me think of Beethoven

- I'm sure that I will keep finding more depths, beauties and interconnections in this music for the rest of my life, just as I will with late Beethoven quartets.

Harmonically *Plebs angelica* is perhaps the most challenging anthem the choir has performed in my time. The most elaborate chords are generally derived from the original *Jesum* chords, but often in more intense forms with up to ten of the twelve available pitch classes heard simultaneously. However, the careful spacing of the chords in each choir leads to a transparency of texture; we try to let the listener hear exactly what the notes are, rather than obfuscating the pitches with excessive vibrato.

The first non-diatonic note in the treble parts is the strikingly expressive E flat at *Virtus*, signifying valour and courage; this pitch class is to assume further importance in the final work of the cycle. The central section of the piece, *And fire-headed Seraphim*, starts with a very striking texture: in each of the two choirs, the four voice-parts each sing a minor ninth higher than the part below. This creates an extraordinary soundworld, like two whole galaxies passing one another. It is the ultimate

amplification of the semitones contained within the third *Jesum* of the opening anthem.

After this passage the texture thins for a stark entreaty to Michael, the Archangel, the heavenly warrior. The name *Michael* is derived from a Hebrew expression meaning “*Who is like unto God?*” There is a mesmerising, shimmering quality to the next section, *Gabrielque vera*, whilst the airborne, contrapuntal ending, *transferte nos*, takes flight with angelic wings, as the music transports us to Paradise. Heavenly bodies float around without gravity. This is a parallel to the effect at the start of *Videte miraculum* when the Angel Gabriel floats down to Mary, but now there are innumerable angels. Although the rhythms look complicated on the page, our aim has been to make this passage sound unfettered and effortless. Writing on Dante’s *Paradiso*, Dorothy L. Sayers describes how the narrator *ascends to a region beyond physical existence ... and becomes enveloped in light, rendering him fit to see God*.

*We rise into a heaven of pure light —
Of intellectual light, light full of sheer
Pure love, love full of goodness true and right,
Love full of joy, joy so sweet as to shame
All other sweet things else.*

(Canto 30; 48-52, in the translation of the late Clive James)

Our choral journey ends in heaven, reminding us of Jesus’s words in the Gospel for the last Sunday of the Church’s year:

*Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in
Paradise.*

(Luke 23, v. 43)

PLEBS ANGELICA - ALTERNATIVO

The antiphonal choirs of the motet are now replaced by antiphonal organs - the two languages of the motet’s text become the soundworlds of the two organs. In the motet the choirs were not aiming to have markedly different sonorities from one another, but now the two organs provide alternatives to one another. We hear contrasts between the instruments in attack and timbre: baroque/romantic, objective/subjective, close/distant, low/high sound sources in the building, cold/warm. This is the only work in the cycle which uses the two organs simultaneously in direct opposition to one another. In many respects the final organ duet acts as a summation of the cycle, looking back over the whole work, just as the first organ piece looked forward.

The opening feels like a rather literal passage of transcription, but the temporal relationship between the two organs becomes free and elastic - heavenly time not earthly time, or perhaps a fourth dimension is experienced? Finnissey sees analogies between composition and film *because film happens in time, unlike painting, and the controlled revelation of a vision is possible in that way*. He cites the film maker Gregory Markopolous as a particular early influence - he would *speed things up, slow things down, shoot from odd angles, light things in unusual ways*.

Some of the densest chords from the motet are distilled into fewer notes, sounding less fierce - e.g. *princely troop* (at around 1’00”). A dialogue of chords ensues, contrasting one organ’s ability to *crescendo* with the other organ’s unchanging dynamic. From c. 2’40” arabesques are exchanged between organs, revisiting the music of the second *Commentary*. Much of the *Alternativo* feels like an improvised duet, with both players reminiscing on the rest of the cycle whilst also responding to each other. Indeed the work is notated on two separate copies, with neither player shown what the other is doing; most of the time the organ parts are not supposed to be synchronised. Certain moments are supposed to be together, which is not easy

when neither player can see the other; a certain amount of sniffing was involved! I remember the exhilaration of hearing and watching the first performance; I had felt a similar frisson when I first witnessed a performance of Jonathan Harvey's *Toccata for Organ and Tape*, in which the organist has to stay in time with the pre-recorded music. Around 4'20" one hears an allusion to the opening of *Videte miraculum*. Each organ is often used to play homophonic textures, but at other times each becomes a single-line melody instrument.

Five minutes into the work we hear, singing warmly out of the texture, the melody which opened *Videte miraculum*. This opening has recurred frequently in the cycle - with the open fifths hammered out fortissimo in the middle of *Videte miraculum* – *double*, and also heard mystically in the first movement of the Cantata as the music folded in on itself. This striking cantabile melody is followed by a series of melodies from *Plebs angelica*, cut up and then stuck together in a Cubist manner. (Circa 5'40") A period of sudden stillness follows, meditating on earlier themes, with the two organs being made to sound just like one another - the calm before the storm, one might say, bearing in mind the final battle ahead.

A more strident entry follows on mutation stops (circa 7'20"). In this new section the ornaments are reminiscent of the Moroccan Berber recordings which Finnissey had transcribed in the first work he composed for us back in 2014, *John the Baptist*. Extended passages from *Dum transisset* (circa 8'50") contribute to a sense of symmetry in the cycle; the first and ninth pieces quote from one another, as do the second and eighth pieces.

The two organists rhapsodise with warmth on earlier music - just as a Christian might reminisce about the earthly lives of people who have died and now ascended to heaven. The music builds in intensity, and the first rumbling pedal entry of the *Alternativo* heralds an inexorable and chilling crescendo. A full wide texture is created, revisiting the chord from *And fire-headed Seraphim*. The main organ has the highest and lowest notes, whilst the chamber organ occupies the middle range - one remembers Finnissey's piano pieces seeming to span seven octaves simultaneously. The two instruments have seemed to be equals for a while, but it is clear which is to be the victor in the final battle. The final terrifying chord yet again spans from high G to bottom D, with the structurally significant E flat - St Michael?



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- standing out leading the victory. We end with the twelfth chapter of the Book of Revelation:

*And there was war in heaven:
Michael and his angels fought against the dragon;
and the dragon and his angels fought,
And prevailed not; neither was their place
found any more in heaven.
And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent,
called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the
whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and
his angels were cast out with him.*

Andrew Nethsingha

DUM TRANSISSET SABBATUM

Dum transisset Sabbatum,
Maria Magdalene et Maria Jacobi et Salome

emerunt aromata ut venientes ungerent Jesum.

Alleluia.
Et valde mane una sabbatorum veniunt
ad monumentum orto iam sole.
Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.
Alleluia.

Mark 16 vv. 1–2

VIDETE MIRACULUM

Videte miraculum matris Domini:
Concepit virgo virilis ignara consortii;

That all, which all sinnes must beare,
Which cannot die yet cannot chuse but die.

Haec speciosum forma prae filiis hominum
castis concepit visceribus
et benedicta in aeternum Deum nobis protulit
et hominem.
Et matrem se laetam, cognoscit, quae se nescit
uxorem.

*When the Sabbath was past,
Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James
and Salome
bought sweet spices that they might come and anoint
Jesus.
Alleluia.
And very early in the morning on the first day of the week,
they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.
Glory be to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Alleluia.*

*Behold the miracle of the Lord's mother:
The virgin conceived unacquainted with man;*

*She conceived in her chaste womb one who is
beautiful beyond the sons of men.
And, blessed forever, brought forth God and man
for us.
And joyfully she knows herself to be a mother, who
does not know she is a wife.*

Loe, that all, faithfull Virgin
yeelds himselfe to lye in thy wombe.
Ere by the spheares time was created
thou wast in his minde,
Who is thy Sonne, whom thou conceivest
conceived;
Thou art thy Maker's maker.
Thou hast light in darke;
And shutst in little roome,
Immensity cloysterd in thy deare wombe.

Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.

*Responsory at first Vespers, Feast of the Purification of the
Blessed Virgin Mary.
John Donne*

CANTATA: 'HERR CHRIST, DER EINGE GOTTESSOHN' i. CHOIR

Herr Christ, der einge Gottessohn,
Vaters in Ewigkeit,
Aus seinem Herzen entsprossen,
Gleichwie geschrieben steht.
Er ist der Morgensterne,
Sein' Glanz streckt er so ferne
Vor andern Sternen klar.

*Lord Christ, the only Son of God,
Of the Father in eternity,
Sprung from his Heart,
As it is written.
He is the Morning Star,
His radiance he extends so far
That it is clear beyond all other stars.*

ii. TREBLE RECITATIVE

Ach, führe mich, o Gott, zum rechten Wege,
Mich, der ich unerleuchtet bin,
Der ich nach meines Fleisches Sinn
So oft zu irren pflege;
Jedoch gehst du nur mir zur Seiten,
Willst du mich nur mit deinen Augen leiten,
So gehet meine Bahn
Gewiß zum Himmel an.

iii. ALTO ARIA

Ach, ziehe die Seele mit Seilen der Liebe,
O Jesu, ach zeige dich kräftig in ihr!

Erleuchte sie, daß sie dich gläubig erkenne,
Gib, daß sie mit heiligen Flammen entbrenne,
Ach wirke ein gläubiges Dürsten nach dir!

iv. TENOR RECITATIVE

O Wunderkraft der Liebe,
Wenn Gott an sein Geschöpfe denket,
Wenn sich die Herrlichkeit
Im letzten Teil der Zeit
Zur Erde senket.
O unbegreifliche, geheime Macht!
Es trägt ein auserwählter Leib

*Ah lead me, O God, onto the path of righteousness,
I who am unenlightened,
Who in my carnal mindedness
Am so often wont to stray;
Yet if only you will walk at my side,
If only you will guide me with your eyes,
Then my path will
Certainly lead to heaven.*

*Ah, draw my soul with bands of love,
O Jesus, ah, show Yourself powerfully therein!*

*Give it light, that it may know you in faith,
Grant that it may burn with holy flames,
Ah, create a faithful thirst for you!*

*O wondrous power of Love,
When God considers his creatures,
When his Glory
In the final portion of time
Descends to earth.
O incomprehensible, hidden might!
A chosen womb bears*

Den großen Gottessohn,
Den David schon
Im Geist als seinen Herrn verehrte,
Da dies gebenedeite Weib
In unverletzter Keuschheit bliebe.
O reiche Segenskraft! so sich auf uns ergossen,
Da er den Himmel auf, die Hölle zugeschlossen.

v. BASS ARIA

Bald zur Rechten, bald zur Linken
Lenkt sich mein verirrter Schritt.
Gehe doch, mein Heiland, mit,
Laß mich in Gefahr nicht sinken,
Laß mich ja dein weises Führen
Bis zur Himmelspforte spüren!

vi. BASS ARIA

Für uns ein Mensch geboren
Im letzten Teil der Zeit,
Dass wir nicht wärn verloren
Vor Gott in Ewigkeit,
Den Tod für uns zerbrochen,
Den Himmel aufgeschlossen,
Das Leben wiederbracht.

Elisabeth Kreuziger (mvts 1, 6) (c.1500– c.1535)
Anonymous (mvts 2–5)

*The great Son of God,
Whom David already
In spirit honoured as his Lord,
For this blessed woman,
Remained in unspotted chastity.
O rich power of blessing, poured out on us,
For he has opened heaven and shut the gate of hell.*

*Now to the right, now to the left
Veers my erring tread.
But, my Saviour, walk alongside!
Let me not fall into peril,
Let me perceive your wise guidance
Even to the gate of Heaven!*

*For us he was born as a man
In time's last portion,
So that we should not be lost
Before God in Eternity.
For us he shattered death,
Unbarred Heaven
And restored our life.*

PLEBS ANGELICA

Plebs angelica phalanx et archangelica
principans turma.
Virtus Uranica, ac potestas almiphona.
Dominantia numina divinaque subsellia,
Cherubim aetherea ac Seraphim ignicoma.
Vos, O Michael coeli satrapa,
Gabrielque vera dans verba nuntia,
Atque Raphael, vitae vernula,
transferte nos inter Paradisicolas.

De Sancto Michael
10th century troper of St Martial of Limoges (B.N. Lat.1118)
Tr. Michael Finnissy

*Angelic host. Phalanx and archangels,
princely troop.
Uranian strength from word-nourished authority.
Dominions numinous, divine and courtly,
Ethereal Cherubim. And fire-headed Seraphim.
And thou, O Michael, heaven's governor.
And Gabriel, messenger who brings God's word,
Raphael, life-grown and native.
Transport us unto those who dwell in Paradise.*

THE CHOIR OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

Trebles

Adam Ahmad
Felix Bamford
William Buttery

Jaylen Cheng

Lewis Cobb

Joshua Davidson

George Ducker

Lorenzo Granado

Alfred Harrison ^{CD1: 3/CD2: 3}

Harry L'Estrange ^{CD1: 3}

Toby L'Estrange

Jonathan Mews

Lucas Nair-Grepinet

Ewan Tatnell

Philip Tomkinson ^{CD1: 3}

Thomas Watkin

Counter Tenors

Hugh Cutting ^{CD1: 3/CD2: 4}

Richard Decker

Alec D'Oyly

Laurence Trowsdale-Stannard

Thomas Watts

Tenors

Jack Bazalgette

Benedict Flinn

Gopal Kambo ^{CD2: 5}

Henry Laird

Louis Watkins

Basses

James Adams ^{CD2: 6}

Thomas Butler

Jamie Conway

Matthew Gibson

Simon Grant

Oliver Morris ^{CD1: 3}

William O'Brien

Herbert Howells

Organ Scholar

Glen Dempsey

CD1: 2, 4/CD2: 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10

Junior Organ Scholar

James Anderson-Besant

CD2: 3, 5, 7, 10

Director of Music

Andrew Nethsingha

*Numbers indicate soloist
credits for each track*

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The Choir of St John's College, Cambridge is one of the finest collegiate choirs in the world, known and loved by millions from its broadcasts, concert tours and recordings. Founded in the 1670s, the Choir is known for its distinctive rich, warm sound, its expressive interpretations and its breadth of repertoire. Alongside these musical characteristics, the Choir is particularly proud of its happy, relaxed and mutually supportive atmosphere. The Choir is directed by Andrew Nethsingha who follows a long line of eminent Directors of Music, recently Dr George Guest, Dr Christopher Robinson and Dr David Hill.

The Choir is made up of around 20 Choristers and Probationers from St John's College School and around 15 Choral Scholars who are members of St John's College, its primary purpose being to enhance the liturgy and worship at daily services in the College Chapel. The Choir has a diverse repertoire spanning over 500 years of music. It is also renowned for championing contemporary music by commissioning new works, including recent compositions by Judith Bingham, Julian Anderson, Anna Semple, Katrina Toner, Ignacio Mañá Mesas and Cecilia McDowall.

Each term the Choir sings Bach Cantatas liturgically with St John's Sinfonia, its period instrument ensemble. This Bach series has now entered its second decade.

The Choir brings the 'St John's Sound' to listeners around the world through its weekly webcasts (available at www.sjcchoir.co.uk). The Choir has also live-streamed video broadcasts of Chapel services on Facebook, in association with Classic FM. In addition to regular radio broadcasts in this country and abroad, the Choir releases multiple recordings each year. In May 2016 the College launched its new 'St John's Cambridge' recording label (in conjunction with Signum Classics) on which the Choir has released the BBC Music Magazine award-winning recording of Jonathan Harvey's music: *DEO; Christmas with St John's; KYRIE* (works by Poulenc, Kodály and Janáček); *Mass in G minor* (works by Vaughan Williams); *Advent Live* (a collection of live recordings from the College Chapel's Advent Carol Services, broadcast each year by the BBC); *Locus Iste*, the Choir's 100th commercial recording which celebrated the 150th anniversary of the Consecration of St John's College Chapel; *Magnificat*, a recording of six settings of the Evening Canticles, and *Ash*

Wednesday, a live recording of the Choir's 2019 Ash Wednesday Evensong (Allegrì, Bach, Byrd and Weelkes).

The Choir also performs concerts outside of Cambridge and tours internationally each year. Recent destinations have included the USA, the Netherlands, France, Sweden, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Hong Kong and Singapore. It also performs regularly in the UK, with venues including Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Royal Albert Hall and Royal Festival Hall, London.

MICHAEL FINNISSY

Michael Finnissy was born in Tulse Hill (South London) in 1946. He studied at the Royal College of Music with Bernard Stevens and Humphrey Seale, and in Italy with Roman Vlad. Much of his early work was first performed in France and the Netherlands, while he was working as a freelance répétiteur and pianist for dance-classes. He then taught at the Royal Academy of Music (London), at the universities of Sussex and Southampton, and at the Katholieke Universiteit in Leuven. He has also given summer courses at Dartington, and been resident artist at the Victorian College of



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the Arts in Melbourne (Australia). He has been featured composer at the Huddersfield Festival several times, at the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, and many other places across the world, most recently at SICPP in Boston USA. He was president of the ISCM from 1990-96, and is now an honorary member. His work is most consistently recorded by Metier/Divine Art and NMC, and published by Verlag Neue Musik GmbH (Berlin), Oxford University Press, United Music Publishing and Universal Edition.

GLEN DEMPSEY HERBERT HOWELLS ORGAN SCHOLAR

Born in Suffolk in 1994, Glen's formative musical experiences were centred around the English choral tradition – as a chorister in St Mary's, Bury St Edmunds and later in the choirs of St Edmundsbury Cathedral. Organ lessons with Michael Nicholas led to his being awarded a scholarship as a répétiteur to study at the Purcell School of Music. During this time Glen performed in all the major concert halls of London as a soloist and chamber musician on the organ and piano, and also conducted at the Wigmore Hall.

In 2013, Glen was appointed Organ Scholar at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. In this role he was responsible for accompanying and directing the choir's daily services and for assisting in the training of the choristers, as well as for playing at many events attended by the British Royal Family.

Alongside his organ studies with Ann Elise Smoot he maintained a varied performance profile as organist, conductor and tenor. During the academic year 2014/15 he resided



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in the Netherlands and was the Assistant Organist of St Nicholas's Basilica, Amsterdam. Under the mentorship of Michael Hedley, Glen accompanied the majority of the choral services in the Basilica, as well as having responsibility for conducting the Basilica's various choirs and ensembles. During this time he studied with Jacques van Oortmerssen.

Glen then spent four years as Organ Scholar at St John's College, Cambridge, where he accompanied the Choir in the daily services, as well as for its busy schedule of tours, broadcasts and recordings; he also assisted in the training of the choir. Gordon Stewart and Ann Elise Smoot were his organ teachers. Glen's interest in contemporary music has been developed through premiering several choir and organ, and solo organ works at St John's College, including a three-year collaboration with Michael Finnis. Upon graduation Glen took up the posts of Assistant Director of Music at Ely Cathedral and Organist of King's Ely. He is also active as a freelance organist and conductor.

JAMES ANDERSON-BESANT JUNIOR ORGAN SCHOLAR

James Anderson-Besant is currently the Herbert Howells Organ Scholar at St John's College, Cambridge, in his final year studying Music. In the role as Organ Scholar he accompanies the world-famous Choir in its daily round of services under the direction of Andrew Nethsingha, and also assists in the training of the choristers. James has broadcast live on BBC Radio 3 and Radio 4, and his playing for the Choir will feature in a number



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of future CD releases, including discs of psalms and canticles.

James also enjoys conducting, having organised and directed performances of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* in 2019 and *St John Passion* in 2020. He recently gave organ recitals at King's, Queens' and St John's Colleges as well as Truro and St Albans Cathedrals, and looks forward to upcoming engagements at Stockholm Cathedral

and Trinity College, Cambridge. James won second prize at the 2019 Northern Ireland International Organ Competition, and was also Organ Scholar for the Charles Wood Summer School and Festival in Armagh, giving him the opportunity to work under David Hill and Philip Scriven.

James was a music and academic scholar at Abingdon School, and in his final year was Organ Scholar of the Cathedral Singers of Christ Church, Oxford. He spent his gap year as Organ Scholar of Gloucester Cathedral, where he accompanied services sung by all four cathedral choirs, helped train the choristers and assisted in a primary school singing outreach programme. James' year at Gloucester was especially exciting due to the addition of the first ever girl choristers in the cathedral's history.

For seven years James learned the organ with James Brown, and he now studies with Stephen Farr. He would love to pursue a career in cathedral music if possible.

SARAH O'FLYNN FLUTE

Sarah pursues a demanding and varied career as a performer and educationalist. She is a founding member of the chamber ensemble Chroma, and has been sub-principal flute with Britten Sinfonia since 2006.

Sarah has appeared with numerous symphony and chamber orchestras throughout the UK, performing in concert halls across the world, most notably as guest principal flute with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. Sarah's work with Britten Sinfonia is rich and diverse, ranging from an unconduted *St John Passion* to Proms performances with Anoushka Shankar, and the Strictly Come Dancing Prom.

As an orchestral and chamber musician Sarah has premiered hundreds of new works and commissions, frequently working in close collaboration with the composer. She has particularly enjoyed ongoing Britten Sinfonia projects with Thomas Adès, Oliver Knussen, James Macmillan and Steve Reich.



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She is also a member of The Marais Ensemble who curated an extensive annual chamber music festival in Sarah's hometown of Potton, Bedfordshire for fourteen years.

Sarah is a keen educationalist. She currently runs interactive music-technology workshops in Special Educational Needs schools, and is heavily involved in a diverse range of projects

delivered by Britten Sinfonia's Creative Learning department, most notably: community music-making for families living with dementia; and Britten Sinfonia Academy, a training orchestra for exceptionally talented teenagers.

Sarah studied at the Royal College of Music, having been awarded a postgraduate scholarship, as well as studying with Clare Southworth and David Nicholson. She is the flute tutor at Goldsmiths College, University of London, and plays on an Arista flute which she acquired in 2016.

CECILY WARD VIOLIN

American violinist Cecily Ward was born in Salt Lake City, Utah and began studying violin and piano at the age of four. She was the founding first violinist of the San Francisco based Cypress String Quartet, a position she held for twenty years until the quartet disbanded in 2016. With the Cypress Cecily performed throughout the United States and Europe, and recorded 16 critically acclaimed albums including the complete Beethoven Quartets. Praised for her 'lithe finesse,' 'charm,' and 'rhapsodic violin,' she has collaborated with esteemed musicians including cellist Gary Hoffman, pianist and conductor Leon Fleisher, pianist Walter Ponce, and cellist Zuill Bailey.

A graduate of the Interlochen Arts Academy, Cleveland Institute of Music and San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Cecily's mentors have included Donald Weilerstein, Norbert Brainin, Zoltan Szekely, Bonnie Hampton, Sylvia Rosenberg, Robert McDonald and Isaac Stern. Ward currently lives in London, UK, with her husband Mark Willsher and their two Portuguese



© Christine Davenport

Water Dogs. She is on the violin faculty at the Royal Northern College of Music, and can be found freelancing in chamber orchestras throughout the UK.

ANDREW NETHSINGHA DIRECTOR OF MUSIC, ST JOHN'S COLLEGE

Performing in North America, South Africa, the Far East, and throughout Europe, Andrew Nethsingha has been Director of Music at St John's College, Cambridge since 2007. He helped to set up the recording label, 'St John's Cambridge', in conjunction with Signum Classics. The first disc on this label, DEO (music by Jonathan Harvey), was a 2017 BBC Music Magazine Award winner. Four recent discs have been 'Editor's Choice' in Gramophone Magazine.

Andrew Nethsingha was a chorister at Exeter Cathedral, under his father's direction. He later studied at the Royal College of Music, where he won seven prizes, and at St John's College, Cambridge. He held Organ Scholarships under Christopher Robinson at St George's Windsor, and George Guest at St John's, before becoming Assistant Organist at Wells Cathedral. He was subsequently Director of Music at Truro and Gloucester Cathedrals, and Artistic Director of the Gloucester Three Choirs Festival.



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Andrew's concerts conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra have included: Mahler's *8th Symphony*, Beethoven's *9th Symphony*, Britten's *War Requiem*, Brahms' *Requiem*, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* and *The Kingdom*, Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, Poulenc's *Gloria* and Duruflé's *Requiem*. He has also worked with: the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, London Mozart Players, Britten Sinfonia, Orchestra of St Luke's (New York), Aarhus Symfoniorkester, BBC Concert Orchestra. Venues have included the BBC Proms, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Verbier Festival, Tokyo Suntory Hall, Konzerthaus Berlin, and Singapore Esplanade.

IN MEMORIAM

PROFESSOR SIR CHRISTOPHER DOBSON

(1949 - 2019)

Professor Sir Christopher Dobson was Master of St John's College from 2007 until his untimely death. He was one of the leading scientists of his generation. Chris's innovative research largely focused on protein folding and protein misfolding, leading to greater understanding of neurodegenerative diseases.

In the words of Dr Frank Salmon, recent President of St John's: "Chris's pioneering research investigating the origins of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's will undoubtedly lead to the discovery and introduction of new and effective treatments in the future that will benefit millions of people. His commitment to helping others will be an equally inspiring part of his enduring legacy – countless lives and careers were improved by his mentorship, support, advice and influence. In all of this he was supported and encouraged by his wife Lady Dobson."

Chris was greatly loved by everyone in College, including all those who came to Chapel, all who sang in the choir and the families of all choir members. He was extraordinarily supportive of music-making at St John's. He seemed to

have limitless time for everyone in the College community. I personally have never known a kinder man. He was encouraging, patient, extremely amusing, generous, caring, and full of wisdom. He was a visionary leader for the College. He was utterly devoted to all members of the College Choir, past and present. He was also a very enthusiastic supporter of the College's two newer choirs, St John's Voices and Aquila.

I owe a huge amount to Chris. He took a great personal and pastoral interest in members of College. He nurtured so many of us into acquiring the self-belief necessary to fulfil our potential.

Chris frequently popped in to Chapel to listen to recording sessions. His last such visit, in July 2019, was whilst we were making this Finnissey disc. Chris, Mary, Richard, William – not forgetting their beloved greyhound, Jimbo – are all in the choir's thoughts as we release our new recording. The love and support which Chris showed for St John's College Choir will never be forgotten.

Andrew Nethsingha



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IN MEMORIAM

SIR STEPHEN CLEOBURY (1948-2019)

Sir Stephen Cleobury was one of the giants of the choral music world during the past half-century. He was an inspirational mentor, teacher and friend. Few musicians are at the pinnacle of their professions both as Choral Director and as Organist; Stephen was such a person. As well as running King's College Choir for 37 years, he made great contributions to many other choral institutions. These include Westminster Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, BBC Singers, Cambridge University Musical Society (CUMS) and St Matthew's Northampton.

Stephen's career began with four years as Organ Student at St John's, acting as Assistant to George Guest. Stephen played for many of the choir's most famous Argo recordings, including the Fauré and Duruflé Requiems and the Langlais Mass. The last of these works was introduced to the choir by Stephen; George had sent him down to London with a few banknotes to find new repertoire! George was so proud that Stephen later went on to run the famous choir 'down the road.'

When I was Organ Student at St John's, I was privileged to have two years as Stephen's

accompanist for the CUMS Chorus. We used to compare stories of working for George. For instance, we both experienced days when the Chapel Organ broke down. Twenty years apart we both tried to persuade George to alter that day's advertised Evensong music, each to be met with the same rejoinder: 'No; I haven't changed the music since the day the King died!' I learnt so much from Stephen at that time, inspired by his work ethic, attention to detail, efficiency in rehearsals and – above all – his amazing ear. What an inspiration it was to see him prepare and direct a fine performance of Schoenberg's *Friede auf Erden* with a 150-strong amateur chorus.

Stephen retained a keen interest in St John's throughout his life. The last Evensong which he attended here, in May 2019, included Finnis's *Dum transisset Sabbatum*. Stephen was the best possible role model in his commitment to commissioning contemporary music. He chose many of the finest composers, not just those whose music would be most easily approachable. I hope Stephen would have approved of our new disc, which seeks to continue the path he trod for so long. He is very much in my thoughts as we release this recording.

Andrew Nethsingha



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