

The Nantwich Singers presents

Welcome, Yule!

*A concert of seasonal
music by composers
from the 16th to
21st centuries
including -*

*Tomas Luis de Victoria
Jonathan Willcocks
Stephen Cleobury
Sarah Quartel
Hubert Parry*

December 2021



www.thenantwichsingers.org

Programme

O Magnum Mysterium	Tomas Luis de Victoria
Welcome, Yule!	Hubert Parry
Gabriel's Message	Olivia Sparkhall
Parvulus Filius	Blasius Ammon
Expectation	Maddalena Casulana
Wassail	Jonathan Willcocks
I sing of a maiden	Matthew Martin
Make we joy now in this fest	Ian Assersohn
Away in a manger	Ola Gjeilo
This endris night	Sarah Quartel
A little child there is yborn	Malcolm Archer
Coventry carol	Emily Hazrati
Silent night	Libby Croad
Joys seven	arr. Stephen Cleobury
Chestnuts roasting on an open fire	arr. Elizabeth Duerden
A Gallery Carol	John Gardner

O Magnum Mysterium

Tomas Luis de Victoria c1548-1611

We begin our programme with this glorious motet by Victoria (first published 1572) which captures one of the most charming conceits of the Christmas story: the notion that the farm animals in the stable where Jesus was born were counted among the first to witness this holy event. Full of wonder and warmth, with a lovely dancing 'Alleluia' in triple time leading to a glorious cascade of scalic figures rippling through the parts to the final cadence.

*O magnum mysterium, et admirabile sacramentum,
ut animalia viderent Dominum natum, iacentem in praeseptio!
Beata Virgo, cujus viscera meruerunt portare Dominum Iesum Christum.
Alleluia.*

*O great mystery, and wonderful sacrament,
that animals should see the newborn Lord, lying in a manger!
Blessed is the virgin whose womb was worthy to bear the Lord, Jesus Christ.
Alleluia!*

Welcome, Yule!

Hubert Parry 1848-1918

These words date from the 15th century and are clearly little more than an excuse for energetic - if not raucous - merry-making under the guise of a holy festival. Singing and dancing are key to celebrations now, as ever, and even if we don't actually dance today, we hope our voices will stand in for us.

C H H Parry is probably better known for more serious and stirring Anglican church music, such as "Blest Pair of Sirens", but here he is clearly having wonderful fun with the dancing interplay of voices.

*Welcome be Thou, heavenly King
Welcome for whom we shall sing
Welcome, welcome Yule!
Welcome innocents every one
Welcome Thomas, martyr one,
Welcome, welcome Yule!
Welcome be ye, good New Year
Welcome, saints loved and dear,
Welcome, welcome Yule!
Welcome be ye, Candlemas
Welcome be ye, Queen of Bliss
Welcome, both to more and less
Welcome, welcome Yule!*

*Welcome be ye that are here
Welcome all, and make good cheer,
Welcome all, another year,
Welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome Yule!
Welcome, Yule!*

Gabriel's Message 2020

Olivia Sparkhall (arr) b1976

The text derives from St Luke's account of the Annunciation, and the melody is an old Basque folk carol itself based on *Angelus ad Virginem* from the 13th or 14th century. It was collected by Charles Bordes, and Sabine Baring Gould paraphrased it in English.

Olivia Sparkhall's arrangement evokes the dance-like aspect associated with carols in earlier times. Back in the day, carols were not just songs, but dances, and the strong rhythmic lilt and unequal phrase-lengths here summon up images of joyous folk dances, stamping, clapping and singing together at the festive time. Sparkhall also foregrounds the dramatic aspect, giving the voice of the angel to a solo tenor, with the chorus framing the narrative with commentary. A fresh perspective on an old favourite, but one that lets the familiar melody shine through while being supported by the drama and the dance.

In this version the angel Gabriel and Mary have been cast as solo voices, with the rest of the choir taking on the role of narrator.

*The angel Gabriel from heaven came,
His wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;
'All hail', said he, 'thou lowly maiden Mary,
Most highly favoured lady.' Gloria!*

*'For known a blessed mother thou shalt be,
All generations laud and honour thee,
Thy Son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold,
Most highly favoured lady.' Gloria!*

*Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head,
'To me be as it pleaseth God', she said,
My soul shall laud and magnify his holy name.'
Most highly favoured lady. Gloria!*

*Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ was born
In Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,
And Christian folk throughout the world will ever say:
'Most highly favoured lady.' Gloria!*

NB see website for contact details to let her know about the performance.

Parvulus Filius

Blasius Ammon 1558-1590

One of the many joys of singing with a group such as NS is the opportunity for time travel. Clutching a flimsy sheet of paper and diving into a parallel universe is a privilege and an adventure, not without its challenges and anxieties but so much worth the risk. This glorious motet from the 16th century has no doubt offered musicologists plenty of material for discussion and debate, and the modern published versions such as ours reveal some of this debate in the editorial markings and comments in the manuscript. But in the end, it's the dots on the page that we are working with, and the magic they weave is superb.

Much music of more recent centuries will include many performance details indicating the required *tempi* and dynamic changes, and it can feel a little scary to be faced with a score that has nothing of this. Even the bar-lines here are editorial additions - an attempt to make the reading easier for the singers, but sometimes they can be more of a distraction than an aid, and it's necessary to adopt a flexible approach and to keep counting no matter what! Probably any anxieties about dynamic shaping and "light and shade" are needless. Notice how Ammon creates a build in dynamic simply through the introduction of ever more voices. No need to *crescendo* - just add more singers. Once you learn, as a singer, to trust to the "dots", the magic reveals itself.

Blasius Ammon was an Austrian priest and composer.

Parvulus filius hodie natus est nobis; et vocabitur Deus, fortis: Alleluia.

*A little boy is born to us this day: and he shall be called God, the Almighty:
Alleluia.*

Attesa

Maddalena Casulana c1544-c1590

Maddalena Casulana was very probably the first woman in western musical history to print and publish a book of her own compositions, which she did in 1568. Composer, lutenist and singer, she was born in or near Siena, and educated possibly in Florence.

The following line in the dedication to her first book of madrigals, to Isabella de' Medici, shows her feeling about being a female composer at a time when such a thing was rare: "[I] want to show the world, as much as I can in this profession of music, the vain error of men that they alone possess the gifts of intellect and artistry, and that such gifts are never given to women." And that was in the 16th century. Sigh.

*Sei tu, a ch'il Signore dice 'aspeta' et tu preparerai le sue vie.
Bramato figlio di Elisabetta, senti al fin in ciel le armonie!
Or che alla Vergine eletta vieni il Messia delle profezie:
Cantarem il suo Avento in coro
Fin che col Oriens tutto s'inoro.*

*Thou, who are called the prophet of the highest, and who prepares his ways
for earthly dwellings, Thou first-born of Elizabeth the pious, John, hear at last
the angel voices swelling! Now that to the Virgin best and brightest comes the
Messiah of the prophets' telling.
We will sing his Advent now in chorus.*

Wassail

Jonathan Willcocks b1953

A suitably rollicking jaunt through a traditional wassail song, arranged by Jonathan Willcocks. "Waes hael", or "good health", is sung around the village with not only seasonal good wishes for all but also thinly veiled threats thrown in as well, in case the butler was considering palming off low quality ale on the revellers. An excuse for making merry at the darkest time of year.

*Wassail, wassail all over the town, our bread is white and our ale is brown;
Our bowl it is made of the green maple tree,
With the wassailing bowl we'll drink to thee!*

*Here's a health to the ox and to his right eye, pray God send our master a
good Christmas pie,
A good Christmas pie as e'er I did see;
With the wassailing bowl we'll drink to thee!*

*So here's to the cow and to her broad horn, may God send our master a good
crop of corn,
And a good crop of corn that we all may see;
With the wassailing bowl we'll drink to thee!*

*Then here's to the maid in the lily-white smock, who tripped to the door and
slipped back the lock;
Who tripped to the door and pulled back the pin, for to let these jolly
wassailers in.
Wassail!*

*Come butler, come fill us a bowl of the best; then we hope that your soul in
heaven may rest;
But if you do draw us a bowl of the small, then down shall go butler, bowl and
all.
Wassail!*

I sing of a maiden

Matthew Martin b1976

This beautiful and enigmatic poem by an anonymous writer of the 15th century offers yet another shimmering colour to the tapestry of English literature relating to the Christmas story. Of course it was written to be sung - the first line proclaims that - but (also of course) that first melody is lost now. The language is usually modernised to some degree for ease of reading and comprehension (the Old and Middle English characters of 'ash' and 'thorn' which give a 'th' sound are not even on the computer keyboard) but its poetic conceit shines through nonetheless, and gives us another taste of time-travelling. This recent setting by Matthew Martin has the direction 'calm and reflective' in the score, and he distills the essence of the mystical mood in a beautiful contemporary interpretation.

*I sing of a maiden that is makeless; king of all kings to her son she ches.
He came all so still where his mother was, as dew in April that falleth on the
grass.*

*He came all so still to his mother's bower, as dew in April that falleth on the
flower.*

*He came all so still where his mother lay, as dew in April that falleth on the
spray.*

*Mother and maiden was never none but she: well may such a lady Godes
mother be.*

Make we joy now in this fest

Ian Assersohn b1958

Here we have another wonderful 15th century lyric, this one alternating English and Latin, as was quite frequently done. Somehow one gets the impression that the actual meaning of the words is not of first importance. They are a vehicle for another joyous dance-like romp, which Assersohn presents *con brio*.

*Make we joy now in this fest, eia, eia,
In quo Christus natus est.*

*A patre unigenitus is through a maiden come to us;
Sing we of him and say "Welcome", veni redemptor genicium.*

*Make we joy now in this fest, eia, eia,
In quo Christus natus est.*

*Agnoscat omne seculum, a bright star made three kinges come,
Him for to seek with their presents, verbum supernum prudens.*

*Make we joy now in this fest, eia, eia,
In quo Christus natus est.*

*A solis ortus cardine so mighty Lord is none as He;
And to our kind he hath him knit, Adam parens quod polluit.*

*Make we joy now in this fest, eia, eia,
In quo Christus natus est.*

*Maria ventre concepit, the Holy Ghost was ay her wit',
Of her in Bethlem born he is, Consorts paterni luminis.*

*Make we joy now in this fest, eia, eia,
In quo Christus natus est.*

*O lux beata Trinitas, he lay between an ox and ass,
Beside his mother maiden free, Gloria tibi Domine,*

*Make we joy now in this fest, eia, eia,
In quo Christus natus est.*

Away in a Manger

Ola Gjeilo b1978

This very popular and familiar Christmas hymn first appeared in the late 19th century, but its provenance has been difficult to pin down. The attribution to Martin Luther has been shown fairly comprehensively to be a false one, and it is now thought to be American in origin. Be that as it may, it has thoroughly embedded itself in the cultural landscape of Christmas, and it is a brave composer who dares to tinker with it. But composers often are brave, and we have several wonderfully fresh interpretations of familiar words in our programme today. Ola Gjeilo has really - apparently - done as little as possible with this lovely carol; the melody is sung supported by the most diaphanous of wordless harmonic progressions, and even sometimes with no support at all. It is a wise composer who knows when 'less is more'. The effect is a shimmering Christmas meditation.

Do you really need to see the words?

This Endris Night

Sarah Quartel b1982

This is another magical 15th century poem by that prolific writer, Anonymous. A gentle maternal feeling pervades the whole, and Mary's continuous lullaby beautifully evokes the constant rocking of the child throughout the private and mystical conversation between mother and son.

Sarah Quartel's setting is for upper voices only, and she gives the sopranos and altos a fabulous opportunity to explore close harmony rich with chromaticism and delicately playful rhythms.

*This endris night I saw a sight, a start as bright as day,
And ever among, a maiden sung "Lully, by by, lullay".*

*This lovely lady sat and sang, and to her child did say;
"My son, my brother, father dear, why list thou in hay?*

*"My sweetest bird, 'tis thus required, though thou be king veray,
But nevertheless I will not cease to sing "By by lullay".*

*The child then spake while she did sing, and to his mother did say,
"Yea, I am known as Heaven-King in crib though I be laid.*

*"For angels bright down on me light, thou knowest 'tis no nay.
And for that sight, thou may delight to sing, 'By by lullay".*

*“Now sweet son, since it is so, that all is at thy will,
I pray thee grant to me a boon, if it be right and skill,*

*“That child or man , who will or can, be merry on my day,
To bliss them bring and I shall sing, ‘Lully, by by, lullay”.*

A little child there is yborn

Malcolm Archer b1952

These are probably 16th century words. It is another simple narrative account, stripped down to the essentials - the child, his mother, the star, the kings.

Malcolm Archer’s charming setting zips along happily with a 4/4 - 7/8 juxtaposition of meters which give it an extra skip in its step, while keeping the singers focused.

*A little child there is yborn, Eia, eia, susanni,
And he sprang out of Jesse’s thorn,
Alleluia,
To save all us that ere forlorn.*

*Now Jesus is the childe name, Eia, eia, susanni,
And Mary mild she is the dame,
Alleluia,
And so our sorrow turned to game.*

*It fell upon the high midnight, Eia, eia, susanni,
The stars they shone both fair and bright,
Alleluia,
The angels sang with all their night.*

*Three kings there came with their presents, Eia, eia, susanni,
Of myrrh and gold and frankincense,
Alleluia,
As clerkes sing in their sequence.*

*Now sit we down upon our knee, Eia, eia, susanni,
And pray we to the Trinity,
Alleluia,
Our help, our succour, for to be.
Alleluia.*

Coventry Carol

Emily Hazrati b1998

This wonderful carol originated in the Coventry Mystery Play “The Pageant of the Shearmen and the Tailors” - originally performed by the city’s guilds. The earliest surviving text is dated 1534 although the plays were in performance for probably a century and a half before that. The text relates the legend of the Holy Innocents and King Herod’s decree that all young male children be slaughtered. The music we are so familiar with includes not only the well-known “tierce de Picardie” but also a fabulously crunchy “false relation” as close parts have F natural and F sharp within a beat of each other - a delight for singers!

Emily Hazrati’s beautiful re-imagining brings a new poignancy to the drama in the sighing appoggiatura-like repeated slurs, while subtly referencing the false relation of the early version.

*Lullay, thou little tiny child,
By, by, Lully lullay.
O sisters, too, how may we do, for to preserve this day;
This poor youngling for whom we do sing
By, by, lully, lullay.
Herod the king, in his raging,
Charged he hath this day
His men of might in his own sight,
All children young to slay.
Then woe is me, poor child, for thee,
And ever mourn and say,
For thy parting, nor say, nor sing,
By, by, Lully lullay.*

Silent night

Libby Croad b1981

Silent night is a favourite carol for many, the gently rocking rhythm and simple, sweet melody disguising a really tricky bit towards the end, requiring breath control and precision of intonation sometimes a little beyond the reach of an ordinary congregation! Libby Croad has taken the delicate, almost mystical character of the original and breathed new life into an old favourite. No tricky ending here, but a gorgeous simplicity.

Libby Croad is a British composer and this lovely setting was first performed in 2016. With her sister Anna, Libby Croad is founding director of Blue Topaz Strings.

*Silent night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright,
Round yon virgin mother and child
Holy infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace.*

*Silent night, holy night
Shepherds quake at the sight,
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly host sing alleluia!
Christ the Saviour is born.*

*Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.*

Joys seven

Stephen Cleobury (arr) 1948-2019

The theme of the seven joys of Mary arose from medieval devotional literature. Originally there were five 'joys', but these expanded to seven, or nine or even fifteen sometimes. Basically the 'joys' are an excuse to develop an idea and expand it to fit the required circumstances, focusing on the Virgin Mary and her life.

Stephen Cleobury's cheerful setting allows the dancing melody to skip along, passed through the different voices and keeping the mood constantly jolly and upbeat regardless of the text, thus preserving the central point viz. that this is a time of celebration and joy. Stephen Cleobury was Director of Music for the Choir of King's College, Cambridge, for many years; he also directed the BBC Singers and became their Conductor Laureate in 2007.

*The first good joy that Mary had it was the joy of one;
To see the blessed Jesus Christs when he was first her son.
When he was first her son, good man, and blessed may he be, both Father,
Son and Holy Ghost to all eternity.*

*The next good joy that Mary had it was the joy of two;
To see her own son Jesus Christs to make the lame to go.
To make the lame to go, good man, and blessed may he be, both Father, Son
and Holy Ghost to all eternity.*

*The next good joy that Mary had it was the joy of three;
To see her own son Jesus Christs to make the blind to see.
To make the blind to see, good man, and blessed may he be, both Father,
Son and Holy Ghost to all eternity.*

*The next good joy that Mary had it was the joy of four;
To see her own son Jesus Christs to read the bible o'er.
To read the bible o'er, good man, and blessed may he be, both Father, Son
and Holy Ghost to all eternity.*

*The next good joy that Mary had it was the joy of five;
To see her own son Jesus Christs to bring the dead alive.
To bring the dead alive, good man, and blessed may he be, both Father, Son
and Holy Ghost to all eternity.*

*The next good joy that Mary had it was the joy of six;
To see her own son, Jesus Christs, upon the crucifix.
Upon the crucifix, good man, and blessed may he be, both Father, Son and
Holy Ghost to all eternity.*

*The next good joy that Mary had it was the joy of seven;
To see her own son, Jesus Christs, to wear the crown of heaven.
To wear the crown of heaven, good man, and blessed may he be, both
Father, Son and Holy Ghost to all eternity.*

The Christmas Song

Elizabeth Duerden (arr) 1950-1996

Originally a solo with lovely bluesy accompaniment, this arrangement stays very close to the original harmonic structure of the song by Robert Wells and Mel Tormé (1945), disposing the instrumental parts among the voices to give an almost barber-shop style. The mood is relaxed, but the singers can't relax - the harmonic meanderings can be treacherous, especially for the inner parts. The song has been performed by many singers since it first appeared, from Nat King Cole to Bing Crosby to Ariana Grande, and now the Nantwich Singers.

*Chestnuts roasting on an open fire
Jack Frost sipping at your nose,
Yuletide carols being sung by a choir and folks dressed up like eskimos.
Everybody knows some turkey and some mistletoe help to make the season
bright,*

*Tiny tots with their eyes all aglow will find it hard to sleep at night.
They know that Santa's on his way,
He's loaded lots of toys and goodies on his sleigh,
And every mother's child is gonna spy to see if reindeer really know how to
fly,
And so I'm offering this simple phrase to kids from one to ninety-two,
Although it's been said many times, many ways, Merry Christmas to you.*

A Gallery Carol

John Gardner 1917-2011

A moment for the organ to shine in this exuberant setting of an old English text. John Gardner's probably better known 'Tomorrow shall be my dancing day' is a perennial favourite with its infectious rhythmic acrobatics, and 'A Gallery Carol' is equally nimble and joyous. There are hints of jazz in the harmonic slides as well as in the shifting, improvisatory rhythms, and altogether this is a wonderful fiery sign-off for the concert.

*Rejoice and be merry in songs and in mirth!
O praise our Redeemer, all mortals on earth!
For this is the birthday of Jesus our King
Who brought us salvation, his praises we'll sing!*

*A heavenly vision appeared in the sky;
Vast numbers of angels the shepherds did spy;
Proclaiming the birthday of Jesus our King,
Who brought us salvation, his praises we'll sing!*

*Likewise a bright star in the sky did appear
Which led the wise men from the East to draw near.
They found the Messiah, sweet Jesus our King
Who brought us salvation, his praises we'll sing!*

*And when they were come, they their treasures unfold,
And unto him offered myrrh, incense, and gold.
So blessed forever be Jesus our King,
Who brought us salvation, his praises we'll sing!*

Programme notes © Rachel Duerden 2021

The Nantwich Singers

Directors: Quentin Duerden and Susan Marrs

Singers:

Soprano

Annabel Nielson
Lyn Bright
Becky Daniels
Susan Marrs
Jane Riddle

Alto

Vanessa Layfield
Marjorie Seddon
Alison Hendricken
Anne Marie Naylor
Glynis Brewer
Caroline Briggs Harris

Tenor

Liam Tyler Murphy
William Hall
John Duthie

Bass

David Guest
Jonathan Layfield
David Burrowes
Steve Brewer
Quentin Duerden

Accompanists: Alison Hendricken and Annabel Nielson (piano),
Jonathan Layfield (organ, piano)

Our next event

Compline – a reflective *a capella* service to celebrate the feast of Candlemas
6pm on Sunday 30th January 2022
St Mary's church, Nantwich

Friends of the Nantwich Singers

Nantwich Singers are very keen to foster strong links with our audience. We have a "Friends" organisation which provides advance notice of concerts and events, usually by e-mail, together with detailed information about the programme and guest soloists prior to each concert.

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