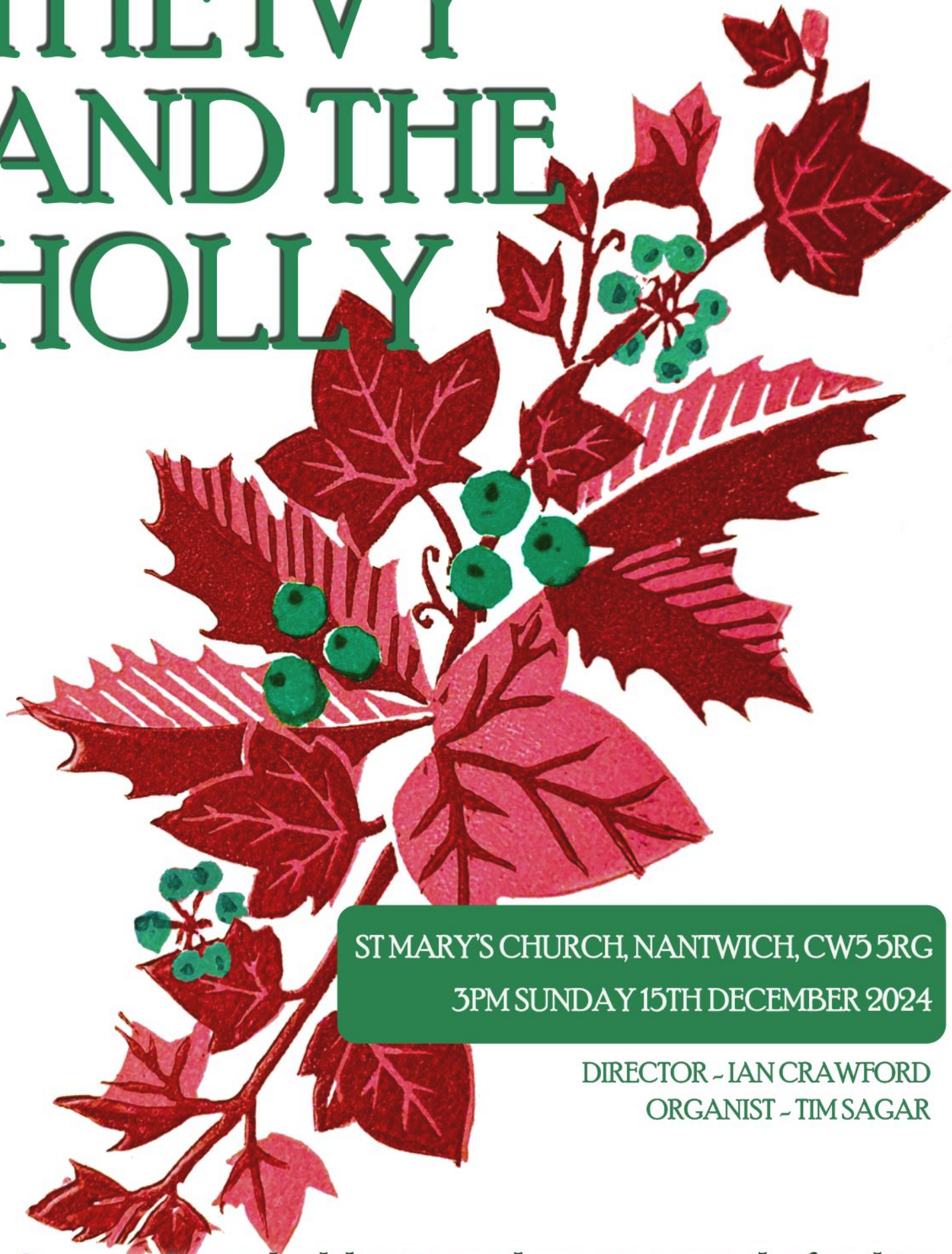


NANTWICH SINGERS

THE IVY AND THE HOLLY



ST MARY'S CHURCH, NANTWICH, CW5 5RG

3PM SUNDAY 15TH DECEMBER 2024

DIRECTOR - IAN CRAWFORD

ORGANIST - TIM SAGAR

Programme

<i>O be joyful</i>	Toby Young
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<i>Nowell, Nowell, Nowell</i>	Elizabeth Maconchy
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The Ivy and the Holly, the title of our Christmas programme this year, is meant to suggest a gentle subversion of the familiar seasonal favourites. So, for example, we will *not* be singing the perennial and much-loved *The Holly and the Ivy*, but we *will* be singing *Ivy, Queen of Trees She is*. As ever, the Christmas season offers an abundance of joyful music and here we have ancient and contemporary texts in both ancient and contemporary settings. There will be familiar texts in both old and new musical settings, and some that are perhaps altogether less familiar. You will notice some themes emerging too: in addition to the *Ivy* mentioned, the *Star* gains some prominence, as does the *Rose*. There is much dancing, too, as indeed there should be. The centre point is *Star Songs*, a beautiful trio by Ian Crawford, our MD, two of which are receiving their world premieres today, and are dedicated to the Nantwich Singers.

Note: you will be required to participate! See the asterisk marked items. Not compulsory, of course, but sing in your heart.

O be joyful

Toby Young (b. 1990)

O be joyful, earth and sky, Hallelujah, hallelujah!
Unto us God's Son came nigh, Hallelujah, hallelujah!
He for our salvation, Hallelujah, hallelujah!
Left God's habitation, Hallelujah, hallelujah!
Here the fairest Rose we see, Hallelujah, hallelujah!
Blooming forth from Jesse's tree, Hallelujah, hallelujah!
O be joyful, O be joyful, Hallelujah, hallelujah!
He the great incarnate Word, Hallelujah, hallelujah!
Jesus Christ doth help afford, Hallelujah, hallelujah!
Hallelujah, hallelujah!
 (Anonymous 15C)

This simple call to “earth and sky” to rejoice in God’s incarnation comes, like so many wonderful carols, from an anonymous 15C text. The composer’s designation is “sparkling”, and that is exactly what this carol

does; it skips away like a farandole, as if hands are linked in a joyous line of dancers weaving through rustic villages. The melody returns in variation throughout the carol, with the piano “sparkling” in rippling rhythmic repetitions and undulating dynamic. A more hymn-like section brings weight and grandeur, but the dancing sparkle is never far away, and indeed returns with a vengeance for the final “Hallelujah”s.

Toby Young showed early promise as a composer, winning the Guardian/BBC Proms Young Composer of the Year as a teenager in 2006 and 2008. He is a researcher as well, and frequently gives talks about his work. It would surely be a treat to hear his TEDx talk, enticingly titled “Why do we warble?”

Ivy chief of trees

Sarah Cattley (b. 1995)

Ivy, chief of trees it is: Veni, veni coronaberis.

*The most worthy is she in town; He that saith other doth amiss;
Worthy is she to bear the crown: Veni, veni coronaberis.*

*Ivy is soft and meek of speech; Against all woe she bringeth bliss:
Happy is he that may her reach: Veni, veni coronaberis.*

*Ivy is green of colour bright; Of all trees the child she is;
And that I prove will now be right: Veni, veni coronaberis.*

*Ivy, she beareth berries black; God grant to all of us his bliss!
For there shall we nothing lack: Veni, veni coronaberis.*
(15C words, adapted by Sarah Cattley)

The ivy enjoys frequent mention in the Christmas season, but almost always as an adjunct to the more usually celebrated holly (as in “The Holly and the Ivy”, which enumerates and meditates on the various characteristics of the former, with no further mention of the latter). In British mythology, ivy is often associated with love and friendship, but was also believed to protect against drunkenness, which perhaps is an even more compelling reason for its inclusion in the Christmas

cornucopia of characters. Here, Ivy is crowned queen of the woodland, and Cattley introduces her with a sweet opening melody which is both stately (as per the composer's designation) and graceful. The adapted 15th century text follows the familiar carol structure of verse and chorus (or 'burden'), and Cattley gives the verses to a pair of soloists in close harmony, until half way through the penultimate verse. Here the whole choir joins in, but just when you think it's going to be a full-throated homophonic conclusion, she sets the rhythms free to weave and twist like ivy twining its way up the oak tree, finally coming to rest in a luminous, stained-glass window A major chord: "Come and be crowned".

Sarah Cattley is based near Cambridge, where she was a student at Newnham College. She was Caritas's Composer of the Year 2017-2018, and has continued to work with the choir since then. She says that she is especially interested in people and events of the past, and has made pieces about Charlotte Brontë and about the suffragist links between Hubert Parry and her own alma mater, Newnham College. College.

Nowell, Nowell, Nowell

Elizabeth Maconchy (1907-1994)

*Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, sing we now all and some,
For rex pacificus is come.*

*In Bethlehem in that fair city, A child was born of a maiden free,
That shall a lord and prince be; A solis ortus cardine.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, sing we now all and some,
For rex pacificus is come.*

*Children were slain in full great plenty Jesu, for the love of thee;
Wherefore their soules saved be; Hostis Herodis impie.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, sing we now all and some,
For rex pacificus is come.*

As the sunne shineth through the glass, so Jesu in his mother was;

*Thee to serve now grant us grace; O lux beata Trinitas.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, sing we now all and some,
For rex pacificus is come.*

*Now God is comen to worshipen us; Now of Mary is born Jesus;
Make we merry amonges us: Exultet caelum laudibus.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, sing we now all and some,
For rex pacificus is come.
(James Ryman, Franciscan friar 15C collection)*

This is a lovely dance-like carol, giving equal sprightliness to all the verses, whether celebrating Jesus and his mother, or telling of Herod's slaughter. The text represents a typical combination, in that sense, of the horrific and the celebratory, woven together into a joyful dance. Maconchy fully honours the dance roots of the carol form in the gentle but irresistible driving rhythms and repetitions of "nowell, nowell, nowell". The sense of circling round and round again through these repetitions is gleefully medieval. It ends, but you feel it could quite easily have continued almost indefinitely if the singers and dancers so chose. The carol was commissioned by CUP for *The Cambridge Hymnal* (ed David Holbrook and Elizabeth Poston) published in 1967. Maconchy was an Irish composer, considered by many to be one of the finest 20C composers of Britain and Ireland.

***The First Nowell**

arr. David Willcocks (1919-2015)

*1. The first Nowell the angel did say
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
In fields where they lay, keeping their sheep,
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.*

*Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel!*

*2. They looked up and saw a star, shining in the east, beyond them far;
And to the earth it gave great light, and so it continued both day and
night:*

*Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel!*

*3. And by the light of that same star, three wise men came from country
far;*

To seek for a king was their intent, and to follow the star wherever it went:

*Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel!*

*4. Then let us all with one accord sing praises to our heavenly Lord,
That hath made heaven and earth of nought, and with his blood
mankind hath bought:*

*Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,
Born is the King of Israel!*

(English traditional)

Silent Night

Franz Gruber (1787-1863)

One verse of Franz Gruber's beautiful "Silent Night" here provides an introduction to a new imagining of the carol by Sarah Quartel, in which she focuses on the mystery of night and silence and, especially, the contrast between the cold outside and warmth inside.

*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, sleep in Heavenly peace.*

On this silent night

Sarah Quartel (b. 1982)

*Frosty fields are laid to rest.
In the air, an arctic breath brings snow, snow, snow,
Blowing snow is drifting deep.
Frozen trees, protectors, see me safe in sleep,
Wrapped in dreams while cold winds blow.*

*Cloaked in slumber with firelight dancing, and all is calm on this silent night.
Frosty fields, frozen trees, sleep in heavenly peace.
Cloaked in slumber with firelight dancing, yet all is calm while the storm blows on.*

Cloaked in slumber with firelight dancing, wrapped in sleep with dreams entrancing,

Yet all is calm while the storm blows on, on this silent night.

(Sarah Quartel)

We have sung several of Canadian composer Sarah Quartel's works in recent years. Here, as in many of her choral works, she has written both text and music. There is constant interplay in the contrast evoked between "glittering frost" and "wrapped in dreams", the bleak, chilling snow and darkness outside, the warm firelight and peacefulness inside. With frequent nods to the beloved "Silent Night" Quartel conjures up a world of mystery and enchantment. Gentle, lyrical and dancing melodies intertwine among the parts, with the subtlest of chromatic and rhythmic detail to enhance the effect of at once inevitability and unpredictability in its forward movement.

Drop down

Judith Weir (b. 1954)

Drop down ye heavens from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness.

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people; my salvation shall not tarry.

I have blotted out as a thick cloud, thy transgressions:

Fear not, for I will save thee; For I am the Lord thy God, the holy one of Israel, thy redeemer.

Drop down ye heavens from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness.

(From the Advent Prose)

In this tiny gem, Judith Weir, former Master of the King's Music, evokes medieval plainsong through the sparse harmonies and parallel movement of parts. At the beginning, soprano and bass sing in unison, with the altos providing the parallel middle line. This thin texture is enriched initially simply by the addition of the tenors, but then it is further enriched as parts split and the dynamic increases reaching its climax at "Fear not, for I will save thee, For I am the Lord thy God". The piece closes with a recapitulation of the opening phrase, with the addition of a tenor line but ending again on unison D - as open and sparse as at the beginning.

Peace on Earth**Errollyn Wallen (b. 1958)***And snow falls down on me. Peace on earth.**The night is dark and soft. Peace on earth.**The lights sparkle in the square, the smoke that lingers in the air.**Peace on earth.**And grace falls down on me. Peace on earth.**The dark will turn aside. Peace on earth.**The fires that burn in every hearth do sing our praise of Christmas past.**Peace on earth.**Ah Hear them singing. Peace on earth.*

(Errollyn Wallen)

Wallen says that this work is about "...the bleakness of winter in a troubled, turning world conveyed through a slowly spinning *ostinato* over which the voices sing (as they themselves hear other unseen voices sing) of the hope for light and peace."

In this exquisitely pure and deceptively simple miniature (with words by the composer) Wallen demonstrates her mastery of expressive economy and precision. The magnificently subtle and understated dissonance in the accompaniment may strike momentary terror into the hearts of unwary singers, but the listener will hear only crystalline beauty.

Errollyn Wallen has recently been appointed Master of the King's Music, succeeding Judith Weir. Wallen is a pianist and song-writer and was the first woman to receive an Ivor Novello award for classical music, and the first black woman to have a work featured in the Proms (the *Concerto for Percussion and Orchestra*, 1994) in 1998.

Il est né**arr. Ben Parry (b. 1965)***Il est né le divin enfant, jouez hautbois, résonnez musettes;*

Il est né le divin enfant, chantons tous son avènement.

*Depuis quatre milles ans, nous le promettaient prophètes,
Depuis quatre milles ans, nous attendions cet heureux temps.
Il est né le divin enfant, jouez hautbois, résonnez musettes;
Il est né le divin enfant, chantons tous son avènement.*

*Ah! Qu'il est beau, qu'il est charmant, Ah! Que ces grâces sont parfaites!
Ah! Qu'il est beau, qu'il est charmant, qu'il est doux ce divin enfant!
Il est né le divin enfant, jouez hautbois, résonnez musettes;
Il est né le divin enfant, chantons tous son avènement.*

*Une étable est son logement, un peu de paille est sa couchette
Une étable est son logement, pour un Dieu quel abaissement!
Il est né le divin enfant, jouez hautbois, résonnez musettes;
Il est né le divin enfant, chantons tous son avènement.*

*O Jésus, roi tout puissant, si petit enfant que vous êtes;
O Jésus, roi tout puissant, Regnez sur nous entièrement.
Il est né le divin enfant, jouez hautbois, résonnez musettes;
Il est né le divin enfant, chantons tous son avènement.
(Traditional 19C French)*

*He is born, the Heav'nly Child, oboes play; set bagpipes sounding.
He is born, the Heav'nly Child, Let all sing His nativity.
'Tis four thousand years, prophets have foretold His coming,
'Tis four thousand years, Have we waited this happy hour.*

*Ah how lovely, ah how fair, what perfection is His graces.
Ah, how lovely, ah, how fair, Child divine, so gentle there.*

*In a stable lodged is He, Straw is all he has for cradle,
In a stable lodged is He, Oh how great humility!*

*Jesus Lord, O King with power, Though a little babe You came here.
Jesus Lord, of King with power, Rule o'er us from this glad hour.*

*He is born, the Heav'nly Child, oboes play; set bagpipes sounding.
He is born, the Heav'nly Child, Let all sing His nativity.*

Ben Parry's experience in the Swingle Singers is surely evident here as the voices take on the roles of instruments, especially the throbbing drumbeats of "Il est né" in the lower voices during the choruses. This rhythmic motif later becomes "la, la-la-la" for upper voices, and it has a decidedly playful feel. The verses, by contrast, are much more flowing

and lyrical, telling of eager anticipation of the birth of Jesus and joy when it finally occurs.

Ben Parry directed the National Youth Choir for many years, and was both singer and arranger for the Swingle Singers from 1987-1992. More recently, he has been director of London Voices.

Star songs

Ian Crawford

Out of the Orient, Crystal skies

*Out of the Orient Crystal skies A blazing star did shine,
Showing the place where poorly lies a blessed babe divine.
Born a Maid of Royal blood who Mary hight by name
A sacred rose which once did bud by grace of heav'nly flame.*

*This shining star three kings did guide e'en from the farthest East.
To Bethlehem where it betide this blessed babe did rest.
Laid in a silly manger poor, betwixt an ox and ass,
Whom these three kings did all adore as God's high pleasure was.*

Falantying, falantying-dye-doe

*And for the joy of his great birth a thousand angels sing
Glory and peace unto the earth where born is this new king?
The shepherds dwelling thee about where they this news did know
Came singing Falantying, falantying-dye-doe.*

*Out of the Orient Crystal skies A blazing star did shine,
Showing the place where poorly lies a blessed babe divine.
Born a Maid of Royal blood who Mary hight by name
A sacred rose which once did bud by grace of heav'nly flame.
(Anonymous, 17C)*

O Oriens

*O Oriens, splendor lucis aeternae et sol justitiae.
Veni, et illumina sedentes in tenebris et umbra mortis.*

*O Dayspring, splendour of light eternal and sun of righteousness:
Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.
(Advent antiphon)*

The Star Song

*Tell us, thou clear and heav'nly tongue, where is the Babe but lately sprung?
Lies He the lily banks among?
Or say, if this new birth of ours Sleeps laid within some ark of flowers
spangled with delight;*

*Thou canst clear all doubts and manifest the where
 Declare to us, bright star, if we shall seek, or search the beds of spices
 through
 To find Him out?
 No, this ye need not do
 O Star!
 But only come and see him rest A princely Babe in's mother's breast.*

*He's seen! He's seen! Why then a round, Let's kiss the sweet and holy
 ground,
 And all rejoice that we have found A King 'fore conception crowned.*

*Come then, come then and let us bring unto our pretty twelfth-tide king
 Each one his several offering.
 And when night comes we'll give him wassailing
 And that his treble honours may be seen,
 We'll choose him King and make his mother Queen.
 (A Carol to the King Sung at White-Hall. Robert Herrick, 1591-1674)*

This lovely setting of some less familiar seasonal texts by our own MD, Ian, focuses on the central image of the Star in the Christmas story. The gloriously lively “Out of the Orient” opens the set and sweeps us along on a dramatic narrative trajectory, ornamented with the effervescent and entirely (apparently) meaningless “Falantying-dye-do” which surely captures the exuberance of Christmas excitement perfectly. From the rambunctiously earthy to the serenely otherworldly, the ethereal “O Oriens” (sung *a cappella*) invites us to contemplate the spiritual mystery through its gorgeous shifting harmonies in almost hypnotic reiterations of “O Oriens”. Listen out for the gentle homage to James Macmillan’s “O Radiant Dawn” in the poignantly repeated “Veni” motif. And finally, a setting of Robert Herrick’s lovely poem in which the piano returns with urgent, rippling triplet figures to introduce the singers as they ask the question of the Star itself: “Where is the Babe but lately sprung?”. The Star speaks through a solo soprano voice, silvery and ethereal, calming the urgent human quest for one timeless moment before the rejoicing begins with “He’s seen! He’s seen!” and the opening theme is recapitulated in a joyous C major.

***Es ist ein Ros entsprungen Michael Prætorius (1571-1621)**

The Rose as a symbol of the Virgin Mary is a frequent image in Christmas music, and this 15th century text has been set most famously by Michael Prætorius in one of the most familiar and beloved carols of the season. We sing one verse of Prætorius, followed by a contemporary re-imagining of the same text.

*A Spotless Rose is blowing, sprung from a tender root,
Of ancient seers' foreshowing, of Jesse promised fruit;
Its fairest bud unfolds to light
Amid the cold, cold winter, And in the dark midnight.*
(Translation by Catherine Winkworth, 1869)

*Es ist ein Ros entsprungen aus einer Wurzel zart,
Wie uns die Alten sungen, von Jesse kam die Art.
Und hat ein Blumen bracht mitten im kalten Winter, wohl zu der halben nacht.*

The Rose Joel Thompson (b 1988)

*A Rose unfolds on tender vine, as seers foretold, from Jesse's line.
Its petals radiant in the light of stars aglow this holy night.*

*Isaiah divined the Flower would bloom a spotless Rose from Mary's womb,
As angels praise this glorious sight: the blessed Babe on this holy night.*

*E'en though we now our anthem raise in gratitude and joyous praise,
I wonder why, for me, God chose to show such love with a spotless Rose.*
(Translation and additional verse by Joel Thompson)

Joel Thompson, an Atlanta-based composer, has here rendered his own translation of the medieval text and added a new verse. The Prætorius melody is gently referenced in the piano's introduction but the choral writing soon moves into new melodic and harmonic territory. The first verse hints at the chromaticism to come, and the second explores ever more shifting harmonies in the choral writing, with the baritone solo holding the melody line above. The final verse grows in dynamic through

“I wonder why, for me, God chose” and gradually sinks to a *pianissimo*, meditative ending on “to show such love with a spotless Rose”.

Gaudete

arr. Suzzie Vango (b. 1982)

Gaudete

Gaudete, gaudete, Christus est natus ex Maria Virgine. Gaudete.

Tempus adest gratiae, Hoc quod optabamus,

Carmine laetitiae Devote redamus.

Gaudete, gaudete, Christus est natus ex Maria Virgine. Gaudete.

Ezechielis porta, Causa pertransitur, Unde lux est orta,

Salus invenitur.

Gaudete, gaudete, Christus est natus ex Maria Virgine. Gaudete.

Deus homo factus est, natura mirante, mundus renovatus est

A Christo Regnante

Gaudete, gaudete, Christus est natus ex Maria Virgine. Gaudete.

Ergo nostra contio Psallat iam in lustro, Benedicat Domino,

Salus regi nostro.

Gaudete, gaudete, Christus est natus ex Maria Virgine. Gaudete.

Rejoice, rejoice! Christ is born Of the Virgin Mary. Rejoice!

The time of grace has come, what we have wished for;

Songs of joy let us give back faithfully.

God has become man, with nature marvelling,

The world has been renewed by the reigning Christ.

The closed gate of Ezekiel is passed through,

Whence the light is risen; salvation has been found.

Therefore, let our assembly now sing in brightness

Let it bless the Lord: Greetings to our King.

The *Gaudete* is from *Piae Cantiones*, published in 1582, coincidentally exactly 400 years before the composer of this setting was born. Suzzie Vango is a British conductor, amateur, composer, and co-founder of “Papagena”, an all-female *a cappella* quintet for whom this was composed. This setting of “Gaudete” is characterised by lovely, almost intoxicating pulsing rhythms like drums or heartbeats, driving the narrative with the melody dancing above. The shifting rhythmic patterns

feel somehow mischievous, and give the whole an edgy, unpredictable quality, not to mention a degree stress for the singers.

It came upon the midnight clear arr. Valerie Capers (b. 1935)

*It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold:
'Peace on the earth goodwill to men, from heav'n's all-gracious King!'
The world in solemn stillness lay to hear the angels sing.*

*Still through the cloven skies they come, with peaceful wings unfurled;
And still their heav'nly music floats o'er all the weary world:
Above its sad and lonely plains they bend on hovering wings;
And ever o'er its babel sounds the blessed angels sing.*

*And ye, beneath life's crushing load whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow,
Look now! For glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing:
O rest beside the weary road and hear the angels sing.*

*For lo, the days are hastening on, by prophet bards foretold,
When, with the ever circling years, comes round the age of gold;
When peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendours fling,
And the whole world give back the song which now the angels sing.
(Edmund Sears, 1849)*

The melody here is allowed to blossom in a fresh treatment of the familiar carol. Capers leads us through the narrative of the verses from an opening sopranos-only verse through three different but related harmonic treatments. There is nothing superfluous here; the composer has embraced the melody and allows it to shine: no fuss, no clever different effects - she lets it speak, but dressed in new clothes.

It is an interesting example of her work, since she is best known as a jazz composer and pianist. Born in New York, Capers was the first blind graduate of the Juilliard School. The thought of her learning musical notation in braille fills me with admiration and awe.

***Hark! The herald angels sing arr. David Willcocks (1919-2015)**

*Hark! The herald angels sing Glory to the new-born King;
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled:*

*Joyful all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies,
With th'angelic host proclaim Christ is born in Bethlehem.
Hark! The herald angels sing Glory to the new-born King.*

*Christ, by highest heav'n adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold him come offspring of a virgin's womb:
Veiled in flesh the godhead see, Hail th'incarnate deity!
Pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! The herald angels sing Glory to the new-born King.*

*Hail the heav'n born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings, ris'n with healing in his wings:
Mild he lays his glory by, born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing Glory to the new-born King.
(Charles Wesley, 1707-1788)*

There is no rose

Lucy Walker (b. 1998)

Alleluia

*There is no rose of such virtue As is the rose that bare Jesu; Alleluia.
For in this rose contained was heav'n and earth in little space;
Res miranda.*

*And by that rose we may well see that he is God in persons three,
Pari forma.*

*Now leave we all this worldly mirth, And follow we this joyful birth.
Transeamus. Alleluia.*

(Anonymous, 15C)

Lucy Walker creates a lush, dreamy atmosphere; a wonderful complement to the Prætorius and Thompson, and a very different treatment of this other ancient text centring on the Rose. The sinuous melodic lines and fluid rhythms underpin the soprano solo line which emerges from the musical texture from time to time above rich, shifting harmonies in the other parts. The "Alleluias" are for the most part very gentle and understated, until the last few bars, as "transeamus" first creeps and then soars upwards through the voice parts, to a triumphant *forte* "Alleluia!" before sinking back once again into a gentle, peaceful close, with a solo tenor final "Alleluia!". Lucy Walker, like Sarah Cattley mentioned above, is based in Cambridge and is a

Cambridge graduate, although Lucy is originally from the North-East of England. Her first BBC commission was for the BBC Singers, in celebration of International Women's Day. She is currently Composer-in-Residence with St Martin's Voices at St Martin-in-the-Fields, London.

Good King Wenceslas

arr. Ian Crawford

*Good King Wenceslas looked out on the Feast of Stephen
When the snow lay round about, deep, and crisp and even.
Brightly shone the moon that night, though the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight, gathering winter fuel.*

*'Hither, page, and stand by me, if thou know'st it, telling,
Yonder peasant who is he? Where and what his dwelling?'
'Sire, he lives a good league hence, underneath the mountain,
Right against the forest fence, by St Agnes' fountain.'*

*'Bring me flesh, and bring me wine, bring me pine logs hither,
Thou and I will see him dine, when we bear them thither.'
Page and monarch forth they went, forth they went together;
Through the rude wind's wild lament and the bitter weather.*

*'Sire the night is darker now, and the wind blows stronger;
Fails my heart I know not how; I can go no longer.'
'Mark my footsteps, good my page; tread thou in them boldly:
Thou shalt find the winter's rage freeze thy blood less coldly.'*

*In his master's steps he trod, where the snow lay dinted:
Heat was in the very sod which the saint had printed.
Therefore, Christian men, be sure, wealth or rank possessing,
Ye who now will bless the poor; shall yourselves find blessing.
(John Mason Neale, 1843)*

The original 13C carol using this famous melody was in fact a Spring carol, but when John Mason Neale came across it in the *Piae Cantiones*, he decided to use the music for a setting of the legend of Wenceslas, Duke of Bohemia and make it into something suitable for the Christmas season. This drew much criticism both at the time and in later years (Ralph Vaughan Williams was a stern critic), not only for the choice of subject matter but also for the quality of the verse (or

“doggerel”, as it was described). However, the fact that it has survived and is a favourite even today suggests that Neale was not so misguided after all. (Jeremy Summerly and Nicolas Bell said, “It could have been awful - but it isn’t - it’s magical...you remember it because the verse just works”.) This new setting is entirely recognisable as the familiar melody, but is enlivened and sprinkled with stardust by its dynamic rhythmic treatment in the 7/8 meter, lifting it out of its four-square predictability and breathing new life into the ancient melody and its later narrative. If you find yourself shivering a bit during the fourth verse, that’s because we have temporarily moved into the minor key, and the composer has included the designation is “colder”...

Programme notes © Rachel Duerden 2024

The Nantwich Singers

Musical Director: Ian Crawford

Soprano

Barbara Arch

Lyn Bright

Becky Daniels

Annabel Nielsen

Jane Riddle

Katy Robinson

Alto

Jan Campbell

Rachel Duerden

Gilly Liebeck

Anne-Marie Naylor

Rachael Parkinson

Marjorie Seddon

Tenor

Michael Booth

John Duthie

William Hall

Liam Tyler-Murphy

Bass

David Burrowes

Quentin Duerden

David Guest

Oliver Rowland

Ian Crawford is Musical Director of Nantwich Singers. Ian grew up in London and was educated at Christ Church, Oxford. He regularly works with choirs and ensembles across the North West; recent highlights include Bach's *St John Passion* with 18th Century Sinfonia, Finzi's *In Terra Pax* with Northern Chamber Orchestra and Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall. Ian's compositions are published by Oxford University Press, Novello and through his own website: www.redscarfmusic.co.uk. His *Sussex Carol* (pub. OUP) was selected as an Editors' Choice by J.W. Pepper in 2018 and was featured last Christmas on BBC television. Ian is currently Director of Music at The King's School in Macclesfield.

Tim Sagar held a choral and organ award at Magdalene College, Cambridge, reading Classics to pass the time between Evensongs. He also studied the piano with Martin Roscoe. Tim has played in many cathedrals, at the Royal Albert Hall, for Classic FM and for BBC Songs of Praise. He was Director of Music at Newcastle under Lyme School from 2005-2023, recently conducting *Into the Woods* and *Les Misérables* with their full orchestrations, and where he led singers through works such as Duruflé *Requiem* and Vierne *Messe Solennelle*, and on to Cambridge choral awards success. Tim is also Assistant Organist at St Mary's Collegiate Church, Stafford, Accompanist to Shifnal Chorale, and in demand as an arranger, accompanist and theatrical musician.

New Singers - Join us!

We are always pleased to hear from singers of any voice parts who are interested in joining us. It is important to have some experience of singing choral music and to be a reasonably good sight reader. Commitment to a challenging and wide-ranging repertoire is essential. We rehearse every Tuesday during term time between 7.30 and 9pm at St Mary's Church, Nantwich. For a short, informal audition with our musical director, please contact us via our website www.thenantwichsingers.org.

Forthcoming event

Saturday 29 March 2025 at 1600, St Mary's church, Nantwich

Concert to include:

Maurice Duruflé *Requiem*

Gregorio Allegri *Miserere*

Sound and video recording by the audience is prohibited. Thank you.