



HARK WHAT JOYFUL SOUNDS! THE DAMON SINGERS CHRISTMAS CONCERT 2022

At the White Hill Centre, Chesham on Dec 11th at 7.30pm

Carol for All: Deck the Hall

O Radiant Dawn

James MacMillan (b. 1959)

Sir James MacMillan is one of our most distinguished composers whose specially composed anthem *Who shall separate us?* was recently performed at the Queen's funeral. *O Radiant Dawn* is a setting of the Magnificat antiphon for 21 December (*O Oriens*), written in 2007 and dedicated to the Choir of St Columba's Church, Maryhill, Glasgow. It is one of MacMillan's *Strathclyde Motets*, composed to be accessible by a wide range of choirs.

The Truth from Above

Trad arr Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 – 1958)

The words of this carol are taken from *A Good Christmas Box* published in 1847 though they had circulated for many years previously in broadside ballads while the tune was collected from a Mr W. Jenkins at Kings Pyon, Herefordshire in 1909. This version was published by Vaughan Williams in *Eight Traditional English Carols* of 1919, adapted from his *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* of 1912, though the final selection of verses is from the *Oxford Book of Carols* of 1928. Phew!

Reading: 'Christmas' by John Betjeman

Read by Ann Crisp

Gabriel's Message

Trad Basque arr David Willcocks (1919 – 2015)

Recounting the events of the Annunciation, this folk carol from the Basque country was collected in the nineteenth century by the French music teacher and composer Charles Bordes, and translated into English for a 1922 publication by the Anglican priest, novelist and antiquarian Sabine Baring-Gould. This arrangement was made by the choral conductor David Willcocks in 1970.

Advent Calendar

Simon Beattie (b. 1975)

Dedicated to his new-born son, and premiered by the Damons in 2006, Simon's beautiful piece sets a poem by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. It was broadcast by the Choir of St John's College, Cambridge, on BBC Radio 3 in 2008 and has subsequently been performed by a number of cathedral choirs in the UK and US and has recently been recorded.

Tomorrow shall be my Dancing Day

Trad arr David Willcocks

This carol first appeared in print in *Christmas Carols, Ancient and Modern* assembled by William Sandys in 1833 but the text is thought to be much older, possibly part of a medieval mystery play, perhaps originally in Cornish. The full carol describes the life, death and resurrection of Christ as a dance with sinful mankind, but Willcocks' rhythmically playful version from 1966 confines itself to the Nativity story.

Duet: Res est admirabilis

Anon from the *Gradual de Fontevraud* (c1250)
(Soloists: Simon Beattie and Martin Cunningham)

The *Gradual de Fontevraud* is a richly illuminated manuscript originally belonging to Eleanor of Brittany (d. 1342), abbess of Fontevraud Abbey near Chinon, in the former French duchy of Anjou. *Res est admirabilis*, a sequence hymn for the Feast of the Nativity or Annunciation, is one of three pieces of early polyphony in the manuscript. As was common at the time, it celebrates the virgin birth of Christ: "This great thing, the venerable Virgin gives birth and remains pure... Like the dew on the grass, the Word of the Most High Father descended on Our Lady".

Nesciens Mater

Jean Mouton (c1459 – 1522)

Mouton, the 500th anniversary of whose death is commemorated this year, was court composer to the French royal family in the early years of the sixteenth century. This motet, perhaps his most famous, is a triumph of head and heart. It consists of four simultaneous canons – the second choir sings the same music as the first choir two bars later and five notes higher – but the emotional intensity of the music is undiminished by such intellectual considerations. "Knowing no man, the Virgin mother bore, without pain, the Saviour of the world".

Carol for All: In the bleak midwinter

Gustav Holst (1874 – 1934)

The Huron Carol Trad arr Eleanor Daley (b. 1955)

Here, in 'Canada's first Christmas carol', the Christmas story is transposed to the country's First Nations people: 'Gitchi Manitou' is the Great Spirit in many Native American cultures. The text was originally written in the Huron language by Saint Jean de Brébeuf, a French Jesuit missionary in the 17th century, while the melody is based on a traditional French folk song, *Une Jeune Pucelle (A Young Maid)*. The English text is by Jesse Edgar Middleton (1926) and this arrangement is by contemporary Canadian composer, Eleanor Daley.

Good-will to men, and peace on Earth

Dobrinka Tabakova (b. 1980)

Dobrinka Tabakova was born in Plovdiv, Bulgaria and has lived in London since she was 11. Her music has been performed and recorded by many orchestras and choirs across the world. This carol was originally published in the *BBC Music Magazine* for Christmas 2018, since when it has been very widely performed. The composer's aim was to retain a sense of liturgical mystery but add another, more playful element - the general mood is that of a contemporary round. 'The image I had for the performance of my carol was a Christmas sing-along at home or, perhaps, a slightly eccentric group of enthusiastic amateurs singing from smart-phones in a pub (I know a few of those)'...

Carol for All: Good King Wenceslas

Reading: from 'Christmas Poems' by Wendy Cope

Read by Marianne Michael

Behold that Star

Thomas W. Talley (1870–1952) arr Bob Chilcott (b.1955)

(Soloists: Rachel Meldrum and Martin Cunningham)

Talley, the son of an ex-slave, was a chemistry professor who also collected African American folksongs. This one, however, he wrote himself; he 'knew a great many jubilee songs, but none pertained to Christmas'. Our version tonight was arranged for the City Chamber Choir in 2003.

The Three Kings

Jonathan Dove (b.1959)

(Soloists: Rachel Meldrum & Sophie Hamilton)

This setting of a Dorothy L. Sayers poem (from her first published book, a collection of poems from 1916) was commissioned by King's College, Cambridge for its *Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols* in 2000. Dove writes: 'Sayers achieves a surprising emotional power and mystery by portraying the youngest king, the nearest to childhood, as the saddest, bringing a gift of myrrh which anticipates Christ's passion and death; it is the oldest king, nearest to the grave, who brings golden toys. I have tried to catch this surprise in the music: the first two verses are simple and ballad like, while the third verse suddenly opens up like a treasure chest of twinkling gold.'

Benedicamus Domino

Peter Warlock (1894–1930)

We end (well almost...) tonight's concert with one of Warlock's earliest choral works, written in 1918. 'A boy comes forth, Eya, this is our time, From the womb of a virgin. Glory! Praise! God is made man and immortal. Without the seed of a man ... He is born of a virgin ... Without the means of a man ... He is born of Mary ... On this appointed feast ... Let us bless the Lord ...'

Carol for All: Ding dong! merrily on high

This seemingly age-old carol is actually anything but. It was created almost exactly a century ago by a Cambridge musician, Charles Wood (1866–1926), and marries a secular 16th-century French dance tune with words written by Wood's friend and collaborator G. R. Woodward (1848–1934), a Liverpudlian cleric with somewhat antiquarian tastes. We celebrate its hundredth anniversary with a few additional dings (and dongs...!)



Followed by mince pies & mulled wine



The Damon Singers

Soprano

Helen Cooke
Ann Crisp
Jane Featherstone-Witty
Dorothy Freedman
Sophie Hamilton
Claire Hunter
Rachel Meldrum

Alto

Caroline Greenwood
Malavika Legge
Marianne Michael
Louise Pearce
Liz Sheppard
Karen van Oostrum
Uli Wright

Tenor

Simon Beattie
David Freedman
Duncan Passey
Chris Turner

Musical Director: David Cooke

Bass

Keith Armstrong
Martin Cunningham
Sebastian Gibbs
Andrew Scott

With Alison Davidson – percussion and voice