

EXULTATE! THE DAMON SINGERS CHRISTMAS CONCERT 2023
At the White Hill Centre, Chesham on Sat Dec 9th at 7.30pm

Hodie Christus natus est

Giovanni Gabrieli (1557 - 1612)

Gabrieli's resplendent double choir setting of the Christmas Day antiphon (*Today Christ is born. Today the Saviour appeared. Today on Earth the Angels sing, Archangels rejoice. Today the righteous rejoice, saying: Glory to God in the highest. Alleluia.*) is a contrafactum - one song to the tune of another - of the joyful pastoral madrigal *O che felice giorno* which he wrote in 1585, the year he became organist of St Mark's, Venice.

Carol for All: Ding Dong Merrily on High

This seemingly age-old carol is actually anything but. It was created around 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 Liverpoolian cleric with somewhat antiquarian tastes.



*Ding dong merrily on high in heav'n the bells are ringing,
Ding dong verily the sky is riv'n with angels singing:
Gloria, hosanna in excelsis; gloria, hosanna in excelsis.*



*E'en so here below below, let steeple bells be swungen,
And io io io by priest and people sungen:
Gloria, hosanna in excelsis; gloria, hosanna in excelsis.*

*Pray you, dutifully prime your matin chime ye ringers,
May you beautifully rime your evetime song ye singers:
Gloria, hosanna in excelsis; gloria, hosanna in excelsis*

Winter Wonderland

Felix Bernard (1897 - 1944) arr Peter Gritton

This much-recorded song was written in 1934. Though it never actually mentions Christmas, it quickly became a seasonal favourite.

Reading: extract from 'Pickwick Papers'

Charles Dickens
(Read by Ann Crisp)

Sans Day Carol

arr David Cooke
(Solos: RM, MM, SHa, SB, MC)

This well-known carol, which was collected in St Day (hence 'Sans Day'), near Redruth in Cornwall, unusually associates holly, usually a masculine symbol, with the Virgin Mary. This arrangement by our conductor was written especially for the Damons' 60th anniversary in 2017.

Carol for All: The Holly and the Ivy

arr David Cooke

The text and tune of this popular carol were collected in 1909 by Cecil Sharp from a Mrs Mary Clayton in Chipping Campden and published in his *English Folk-Carols* of 1911. The refrain dates back at least to broadsides of the eighteenth century while the verses are likely to be medieval, evoking the ancient pagan male and female symbolism of the holly and ivy.

1. (All) *The holly and the ivy,
When they are both full grown,
Of all the trees that are in the wood,
The holly bears the crown.
O the rising of the sun
And the running of the deer,
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweet singing in the choir.*

2. (Ladies) *The holly bears a blossom,
As white as the lily flow'r,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ,
To be our sweet Saviour.
(All) O the rising, etc., etc*

3. (Choir) *The holly bears a berry,
As red as any blood,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
To do poor sinners good.
(All) O the rising, etc., etc.*

5. (Men) *The holly bears a bark,
As bitter as any gall.
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
For to redeem us all.
(All) O the rising, etc., etc.*

4. (All) *The holly bears a prickle,
As sharp as any thorn,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
On Christmas day in the morn
O the rising, etc., etc.*

6. (All) *The holly and the ivy
When they are both full grown.
Of all the trees that are in the wood.
The holly bears the crown.
O the rising, etc., etc.*



Today the Virgin

John Tavener (1944 - 2013)

Tavener's vigorous setting of words by the Orthodox nun Mother Thekla (1918-2011), a strong spiritual influence on the composer, was written for the choir of Westminster Abbey in 1989.

The Shepherds Cradle Song

Traditional German arr Charles Macpherson

The ancient German and Slavic custom of rocking the Christ-child, widely enacted during Christmas vespers and matins, was often accompanied by dancing and a 'Wiegenlied' or 'cradle-song'. The melody of *Des Hirten Wiegenlied* (*The shepherd's cradle song*) was derived from several traditional sources during the nineteenth century and set to words by the poet and polemicist Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart. It was subsequently arranged for English-speaking choirs in 1912 by Charles Macpherson ((1870-1927), the Edinburgh-born assistant organist of St Paul's Cathedral, London with an English translation by Arthur Foxton Ferguson.

Small Group: Salve Sancta Parens

Anon (c.1290) Worcester Cathedral Library

(SB, DP, DF, MC, AS, KA)

This rare survival of medieval English liturgical music is derived from a plainchant Introit sung at masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary from Purification (Candlemas) to Advent. We hear it first as unadorned chant before it is repeated in long even notes in the lowest voice above which three other voices create a web of overlapping polyphony. Each voice has its own Latin text - a common practice at the time. All are in praise of the Virgin Mary and begin with the word *Salve* (*Hail*) and conclude with words ending in *-lorum*. *Hail, holy mother who brought forth the King who reigns on earth for ever and ever... Hail, rose without thorn, flower of purple, medicine for the sick... Hail, light of the ailing, comforter of all men... Hail, mother of the Redeemer, fountain of mercy...*

Ave Maria a 8

Tomás Luis de Victoria (c1548 - 1611)

We split again into two choirs for this sumptuous yet contemplative setting by one of the greatest composers of the Renaissance, first published in 1572. It alternates passages of chordal writing, some in triple time, with more overlapping polyphonic sections. Like the previous piece it is dedicated to the Virgin Mary. *Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee... Hail Mary, Queen of Heaven, sweet and merciful, O Mother of God...*

Love came down at Christmas

Richard Lloyd (1933 - 2021)

Lloyd was organist at Hereford, then Durham Cathedral, and composed a substantial body of church music. Here he sets the well-loved poem by Christina Rossetti (1830-1894), sister of the painter Dante Gabriel, who, as children, used to visit their grandfather, the writer Gaetano Polidori, at Holmer Green. Perhaps she came to Chesham, too?

Noel: Verbum caro factum est

Tamsin Jones (b. 1972)

(Solo: RM)

Tamsin Jones' music is strongly influenced by earlier styles to which she brings a 21st-century aesthetic with "exciting harmonic surprises and rambunctious rhythms". This is certainly true of this thoroughly joyful piece, *Noel: The Word was made Flesh*, whose rhythmic refrain is perhaps the very definition of an ear-worm. We apologise if you can still hear this as you try to get to sleep tonight...

Piano Duet: 'Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy'

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840 - 1893)

(Liz Sheppard, Keith Armstrong)

Before the advent of recording technologies, piano duet arrangements allowed a much wider public to hear and enjoy otherwise inaccessible orchestral repertoire. This could well be the way in which nineteenth-century Chesham first heard this much-loved Christmas favourite from Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* ballet.

Follow that Star

Peter Gritton (b.1963)

As well as a composer, Peter Gritton is an educator and a professional counter-tenor, singing both as soloist and as a member of several well-known professional choral groups. We are including a couple of his arrangements this evening, but this is an original piece by him, both words and music, envisioning the Three Kings' journey. Peter's instructions for the performers are "slightly stomp" which we will endeavour to follow!

Reading: 'Milk and Cookies for Santa'

Kelly Roper

(Read by Marianne Michael)

Magi viderunt stellam

Simon Beattie (b.1975)

Simon writes that this piece, dating from 2007, was an experiment in using a *cantus firmus* (a pre-existing melody, often plainchant, frequently used in Renaissance compositions) within a modern musical idiom. The chant itself, which can be heard clearly in equal notes in the tenor, comes from a setting by the Renaissance composer Pedro de Cristo, which Simon decided to pair with words from Lancelot Andrewes' Christmas sermon for 1622. T. S. Eliot used them, too, of course, for the opening of *Journey of the Magi*.

My Guardian Angel

Judith Weir (b.1954)

Judith Weir became Master of the Queen's Music in 2014, a position broadly comparable to Poet Laureate. Her setting of a short text by William Blake for choir and audience, which "celebrates the increased incidence of public appearances by angels at Christmas time", was first performed in 1997 by The Joyful Company of Singers and the Spitalfields Festival audience. There will therefore be another opportunity for your participation tonight!

1 **Con moto** ♩ = 72

S. Al - le - lu - ia, Al - le - lu -
A. Al - le - lu - ia, Al - le - lu -
T. Al - le - lu - ia, Al - le - lu -
B. Al - le - lu - ia, Al - le - lu -

8
- ia, Al - le - lu - - - - ia. Sing this five times
- ia, Al - le - lu - - - - ia.

Carol for All: While Shepherds Watched

The text of this much-loved carol, also known as Song of the Angels at the Nativity of our Blessed Saviour, is a paraphrase of verses in Luke's gospel and has been a central Christmas hymn for English-speaking Protestants since its first appearance in 1700. The psalm tune actually predates the text by more than a century though they may have been linked together as early as 1708.

1. (All) *While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around.*

3. (All) *"To you, in David's town, this day
Is born of David's line
A Saviour, who is Christ the Lord,
And this shall be the sign:*

5. (All) *Thus spake the Seraph, and forthwith
Appeared a shining throng
Of angels praising God, who thus
Addressed their song:*

2. (Men) *"Fear not!" said he, for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled mind;
"Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To you and all mankind.*

4. (Ladies) *"The heav'nly Babe you there shall find
To human view displayed,
All meanly wrapped in swathing bands,
And in a manger laid."*

6. (All) *"All glory be to God on high,
And to the Earth be peace;
Goodwill henceforth from heav'n to men
Begin and never cease!"*

Exsultate Justi

Viadana was successively *maestro di cappella* at Mantua, Cremona, Concordia (near Venice), and Fano, before retiring to a monastery. Though not a prolific composer, he was popular; this exuberant setting of Psalm 33, *Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous*, published in Venice in 1602, has been a favourite with choirs ever since.

Lodovico Viadana (c.1560 - 1627)

Have yourself a merry little Christmas

Along with *The Trolley Song* this was written for Judy Garland in the 1944 MGM musical *Meet Me in St Louis*. Hugh Martin was apparently asked by Garland, and later by Frank Sinatra, to make the lyrics more positive but tonight we just hope we will be able to "muddle through somehow...".

Hugh Martin (1914 - 2011) arr Peter Gritton

Followed by mince pies & mulled wine
Retiring collection in aid of the Love Lowndes Appeal

The Damon Singers

Soprano

Ann Crisp
Susanna Davies
Jane Featherstone-Witty
Dorothy Freedman
Sophie Hamilton
Sarah How
Claire Hunter
Rachel Meldrum

Alto

Caroline Greenwood
Erika Lukacs
Marianne Michael
Louise Pearce
Liz Sheppard
Madeleine Symes
Karen van Oostrum
Uli Wright

Musical Director: David Cooke

Tenor

Simon Beattie
David Freedman
Duncan Passey
Chris Turner

Baritone/Bass

Keith Armstrong
John-Paul Bowman
Martin Cunningham
Sebastian Gibbs
David Harmer
Andrew Scott

With Alison Davidson - percussion, trumpet and voice
Keith Armstrong - piano accompaniment

