



WHAT CHEER! THE DAMON SINGERS CHRISTMAS CONCERT 2024
At the White Hill Centre, Chesham on Sun Dec 8th at 7.30pm

Noe, Noe

Antoine Brumel (c.1460 - 1512/13)

Brumel was a French composer who held a series of prestigious posts as singer and choirmaster in both France and Italy, including at Notre Dame de Paris and the court of Alfonso d'Este at Ferrara. This motet is rather unusual as it contains just one word of text, repeated many times. There is some controversy over the precise derivation of *Noe*. It may mean *news* or it could be a Latinised version or simply a different pronunciation of *Noel*, a common exclamation at the time (and subsequently) relating to Christ's birth.

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)".

The Blessed Son of God

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 - 1958)

This "choral" is the fifth movement of a large-scale Christmas cantata, *Hodie*, for choir, soloists, organ and orchestra completed by Vaughan Williams in 1954. Composed in a self-consciously archaic style for unaccompanied choir, this movement represents a moment of peace as the Christ child lies in the manger. The words are a translation of a hymn by Martin Luther by the cleric and reformer Miles Coverdale (c.1488 - 1569) who was involved in the preparation and publication of several of the earliest English translations of the Bible.

Carol for All: As with Gladness

Conrad Kocher (1786 - 1872) arr. David Willcocks

1. *As with gladness men of old
did the guiding star behold,
as with joy they hailed its light,
leading onward, beaming bright;
so, most gracious God, may we
evermore be led to thee.*

3. *As they offered gifts most rare
at that manger rude and bare,
so may we with holy joy,
pure and free from sin's alloy,
all our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to thee, our heavenly King.*

2. *As with joyful steps they sped,
to that lowly manger-bed,
there to bend the knee before
Him whom heav'n and earth adore;
so may we with willing feet
ever seek thy mercy-seat.*

4. *In the heav'nly country bright
need they no created light;
Thou its light, its joy, its crown,
Thou its sun which goes not down;
There for ever may we sing
Alleluias to our King.*

Blessed be that Maid Mary

English trad. arr. David Willcocks

Like many 'ancient' carols, this piece has a long and fascinating history. The tune is originally from William Ballet's *Lute Book*, c.1600 and is also familiar to folkies as *Staines Morris* which was set to secular words by William Chappell in the 1850s (*Come ye young men, come along, With your music and your song. Bring your lasses in your hands For 'tis that which love commands*). In his 1902 publication, *The Cowley Carol Book*, the composer Charles Wood reharmonised and married the tune to a mock medieval text by the cleric G. R. Woodward. David Willcocks prepared this more elaborate arrangement for *Carols for Choirs* first published in 1961. The incomparable team of Wood and Woodward also help us *Ding Dong Merrily* later in tonight's programme...

Shepherds Arise

English trad. arr. Andy Watts

One of the best-known English folk carols, *Shepherds Arise* first appeared in a 19th-century manuscript from the parish of Winterborne Zelston, Dorset. It was popularised from the 1950s as part of the repertoire of the Copper family of Rottingdean, East Sussex and has now been sung and recorded by numerous folk

groups. It most likely derives from the earlier West Gallery tradition of raucous congregational singing, still preserved in various local traditions. The present arrangement was made by the multi-instrumentalist Andy Watts, founder of the Carnival Band known for their *Carols and Capers* Christmas concerts with Maddy Prior. Their farewell tour takes place this month.

Reading: 'Preparations'

Anon (17th century) read by Ann Crisp

Quaeramus cum Pastoribus

Jean Mouton (1459 - 1522)

Mouton's motet for four voices was astonishingly influential, surviving in 27 sources from as far afield as Aberdeen and Guatemala and remaining in the repertoire of the Sistine Chapel for more than a hundred years. It became the basis of a series of mass settings and motets in up to 8 voices by several composers, including of the next piece, Pedro de Cristo. It sets a series of questions and answers in beautifully crafted responses between pairs of voices. The music reflects both innocent joy at the nativity and, when the suffering of the crucifixion is subtly prefigured, a resigned sadness. *Let us search with the shepherds for the Word made flesh; let us sing with men to the King of all ages, noe! Whom do you see in the stable? Jesus born of a virgin. What do you hear in the crib? Angels with their song and shepherds saying 'noe'. Where do you eat, where is your bed? Say, if you are crying or if you are smiling: we ask you, King Christ, noe. My food is a virgin's milk, my bed a hard crib, my songs are tears, noe.*

O Magnum Mysterium

Pedro de Cristo (1545 - 1618)

Most of Pedro's life was spent at the great Augustinian monastery of Santa Cruz in Coimbra, in northern Portugal but his music travelled much further. Over two hundred of his compositions have languished in its library since his death, their riches only now being revealed through publication and performance. Tonight, we perform one of his two settings of *O magnum mysterium* as it might have been heard at the time in the New World. *"O great mystery and wonderful sacrament, that animals should see the new-born Lord lying in a manger! O blessed is the Virgin, whose womb was worthy to bear Christ the Lord. Hail Mary, full of grace: the Lord is with you".* (Solo Trio: Rachel Meldrum, Karen van Oostrum, Keith Armstrong)

Carol for All: Ding Dong Merrily on High

16th cent. French arr. Charles Wood



*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*



Stille Nacht

Franz Xaver Gruber (1787 - 1863) arr. Roderick Williams

The outstanding British baritone, Roderick Williams, is also an accomplished composer. While a choral scholar at Magdalen College, Oxford he prepared this elaborate version of the well-loved carol for the Academical Clerks and the Balfour Gardiner Festival Chorus. The setting is for a solo quartet and choir (up to 10 parts in total at any one time) "with a little bit of love from Gustav Holst" whose *Nunc Dimittis* is quoted in the opening bars. (Solo Quartet: Erika Lukacs, Simon Beattie, Andrew Scott, John-Paul Bowman)

Reading: 'A reflection on the Christmas Rose'

Written and read by Karen van Oostrum

The Rose in the Middle of Winter

Bob Chilcott (b.1955)

David Willcocks and Bob Chilcott feature prominently in many choral celebrations at Christmas time and we feature music by both this evening. This carol was commissioned by the Bach Choir, conducted for many years by Willcocks, for his 90th birthday in 2009. The words were specially written by the poet - and Chilcott's longtime collaborator - Charles Bennet who notes: "If we want to find a moral in the carol, perhaps we might frame it as follows: until such time as a rose, bird, or child comes to dance in our soul, we may as well sing".

Carol for All: Gloucestershire Wassail

English trad. arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams

1. Wassail, wassail, all over the town
Our toast, it is white and our ale it is brown
Our bowl, it is made of the white maple tree
With the wassailing bowl we'll drink to thee.

2. So here is to Cherry and to his right cheek
Pray God send out master a good piece of beef
And a good piece of beef that may we all see;
With the wassailing bowl we'll drink to thee.

3. And here is to Dobbin and to his right eye
Pray God send our master a good Christmas pie
And a good Christmas pie that may we all see
With our wassailing bowl we'll drink to thee.

4. And here is to Fillpail and to her left ear
Pray God send our master a happy New Year
And a happy New Year as e'er he did see
With our wassailing bowl we'll drink to thee.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. Wassail, wassail, all over the town, our toast it is white and our ale it is brown
Our bowl it is made of the white maple tree, with the wassailing bowl we'll drink to thee.

In the Stillness

Sally Beamish (b. 1956)

With original words by the contemporary Scottish poet Katrina Shepherd, this short carol depicts the "hushed rapture of a small parish church in a snowbound landscape, just before Christmas". As the organist Anna Lapwood has observed, Beamish writes simply throughout, leaving room for expression through the text alone.

All Hayle to the Days

Anon 17th century arr. David Cooke

The text of this "Song in Praise of Christmas"—about the round of neighbourly visits and customs of wintertime—was printed by Henry Gosson of London Bridge in the early 1600s. The melody is first found in John Playford's *English Dancing Master* of 1651, with the title *Drive the Cold Winter Away*. A broadside ballad version in the late 17th century Pepys collection, entitled "A pleasant country new Ditty, merrily shewing how to Drive the cold Winter away" has twelve verses, but in this arrangement, David has drawn the line at three... **Please feel free to join in the refrain as below!**

Tune: When Phoebus did rest



All hayle to the dayes that mer-ite more praise then all___ the rest of the yeare:___ And



wel-come the nights that doub-le de-lights as well___ the poore as the Peere:___ Good



for-tune at-tend, each mer-ry man's friend, that doth but the best that he may: For -



get-ting old wrongs, with Car-rols and Songs, to drive the cold win-ter a-way.____

Piano Duo

Liz Sheppard and Keith Armstrong

After their success last year, Liz and Keith provide another seasonal surprise for your pleasure and delight!

Carol for All: Good King Wenceslas

Anon. arr. Reginald Jacques

1. All: Good King Wenceslas look'd 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
gath'ring winter fuel.

2. Men: "Hither page and stand by me,
If thou know'st it, telling,
yonder peasant, who is he,
where and what his dwelling?"

Ladies: "Sire, he lives a good league hence
underneath the mountain,
Right against the forest fence
by St Agnes' fountain."

5. All: 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.

3. Men: "Bring me flesh and bring me wine,
Bring me pine-logs hither;
Thou and I will see him dine
when we bear them thither."

All: Page and monarch, forth they went,
Forth they went together,
Through the rude wind's wild lament
and the bitter weather.

4. Ladies: "Sire, the night is darker now
and the wind grows stronger,
Fails my heart I know not how,
I can go no longer."

Men: "Mark my footsteps good my page,
Tread thou in them boldly,
Thou shalt find the winter's rage
freeze thy blood less coldly."

Reading: 'Elves on Strike (or Christmas is cancelled)'

Written and read by Marianne Michael

Santa Baby

Joan Javits (b. 1928) and Philip Springer (b. 1926) arr. Simon Beattie

This song has been covered by various artists since it was first sung by Eartha Kitt back in 1953. It was specially arranged by Simon for our splendid altos as they so rarely get the tune! If only someone could do the same for the basses...

What Cheer?

William Walton (1902 - 1983)

The anonymous text of this carol, celebrating Christ's birth and the arrival of the New Year, is taken from the Commonplace Book of the London merchant Richard Hill, a manuscript collection of late-medieval English poems and other miscellaneous items compiled between 1503 and 1536. Walton's exuberant and rhythmic musical setting was composed in 1960 in response to a commission by Oxford University Press for the first of their Carols for Choirs volumes - now an indispensable mainstay of so many carol concerts including tonight's!

Followed by mince pies & mulled wine



The Damon Singers

Musical Director: David Cooke
Accompanist: Keith Armstrong

Soprano

Helen Cooke
Ann Crisp
Dorothy Freedman
Sarah How
Claire Hunter
Rachel Meldrum
Emma Summers

Alto

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

Tenor

Simon Beattie
David Freedman
Duncan Passey
Chris Turner

Baritone/Bass

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

With Alison Davidson - percussion and voice

Notes by Martin Cunningham