



## MAGI, REJOICING! THE DAMON SINGERS CHRISTMAS CONCERT 2025

At the White Hill Centre, Chesham on Sun Dec 14<sup>th</sup> at 7.30pm

### **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. It was the only Christmas hymn to be approved by the Church of England in the 18th century and, as a consequence, was sung to a wide variety of melodies before generally being hitched to an earlier psalm tune by Christopher Tye, *Winchester Old*. However, the Damons here sing one of these 'other' tunes composed by Michael Beesly, an itinerant country singing teacher of Blewbury in Oxfordshire. It is one of the earliest examples of a 'fuguing tune', a type of psalm setting in which a chordal passage is followed by a series of staggered entries, in this case led off by the basses with an interesting change of time.

### **Carol for All: The Holly and the Ivy**

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.

### **Michael Beesly (1700-1760)**

**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.

**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.

**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

### **Gaude Maria Virgo**

This short, exuberant motet for five voices in praise of the Virgin Mary, by one of the greatest composers of the Renaissance, was first published in 1572. *Rejoice, Virgin Mary, all heresies alone thou hast crushed in the whole world. Alleluia.*

### **Green growth th'Holly**

**sung by Caroline Greenwood, Karen van Oostrum and Louise Pearce**

Though sometimes attributed to Henry VIII, it is unlikely he actually wrote this three-part winter love song. The original poem has no references to God or Christmas; the evergreen character of the holly during the winter's weather is instead offered as an image for the faithfulness of the lover to the beloved through all adversities. No matter who wrote it, it is a beautiful setting.

### **Sing My Child**

**Sarah Quartel (b.1982)**  
Sarah Quartel is one of Canada's most internationally celebrated and widely programmed living choral composers. Commissioned for the massed festival forces of the 2016 International Choral Kathaumixw in

**Anon (c.1522)**

### **Tomás Luis de Victoria (c1548-1611)**

Canada, *Sing, my Child* sets a joyful text celebrating the beauty found all around us in everyday life. The buoyant 7/8 metre of the opening drives the piece forward while lush harmonies colour the hymn-like B section as the text evolves into a call for strength despite the troubles that may come.

**Duet: Žežulka z lesa vylítlá**

**Czech Trad (arr. Hugh Keyte and Andrew Parrott)  
sung by Simon Beattie and Martin Cunningham**

This is the standard Czech version of a carol also widely known in America. It was originally sent to the editors of *The Oxford Book of Carols* (1928) by a Czech schoolteacher from Polička, in the hills between Bohemia and Moravia. *Out of the forest a cuckoo flew, Seeking the heavenly Babe to woo, Near Jesus' bed he gave in songs, The praise that to our God belongs. High in the rafters there sat a dove, Cooing to Jesus of his great love, His heart and voice so full of joy That heaven sent this lovely Boy!*

**Videntes Stellam**

**Ibant Magi**

Famed for both his sacred and secular works, in Europe and Latin America, Guerrero was also one of the few composers who could truthfully claim to have been held ransom by pirates... This motet for four voices was composed for Vespers on the feast of the Epiphany. *To greet His birth the Wise Men went, led by the star before them sent; called on by light, towards Light they pressed, and by their gifts their God confessed. The altos precede the motet with the ancient chant, Videntes stellam. Seeing the star, the Magi rejoiced with great joy: and entering the house, they offered to the Lord gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

**Magi viderunt stellam**

**Plainchant**

**Francisco Guerrero (1528-1599)**

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*.

**Reading: 'A Cynic's View of Christmas'**

**Simon Beattie (b. 1975)**

**(with deference and reference to A L Kennedy)**

**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 Liverpudlian 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*

**I Saw a Maiden**

**Traditional (arr. Edgar Pettman)**

The melody of this tender lullaby is adapted from an old Basque Noël with harmonies and refrain added by the English organist, choral conductor, composer and editor Edgar Pettman (1866-1943). The words, evoking both the Virgin and child, are adapted from 15<sup>th</sup> century originals.

**Drop Down, Ye Heavens, from Above**

**Judith Weir (b. 1954)**

Judith Weir was Master of the King's Music from 2014-2024, the first woman to hold this office which will celebrate its 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year. She describes this piece as follows. "This very short setting of a text associated with the Matins service at Advent was written in 1983 and first performed by the Choir of

Trinity College Cambridge, as part of the very beautiful Advent Carol Service. The music has a plainsong-like shape (although not based on any real plainsong) and swells from unison to 8-part harmony and back again within a couple of minutes' music".

**Reading:** 'Nursery School - The Nativity Play'

**by Joyce Grenfell, read by Susie Mock**

### **The Infant King**

Another lullaby adapted from an old Basque Noël, this time by David Willcocks (1919-2015) the renowned conductor of the Choir of King's College, Cambridge and the Bach Choir. The words, translated by the Anglican priest and folk song collector Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924), refer not only to the Saviour's birth but also anticipate the 'bitter grief' of the crucifixion and the 'gladsome morning' of Easter.

### **Salva nos, Domine**

Mouton was court composer to the French royal family in the early years of the sixteenth century, most likely responsible for the French musical forces at the famous meeting with England's Henry VIII at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520. **Salva nos, Domine** (*Save us, Lord, whilst awake, guard us whilst sleeping*) is a responsory for the monastic office of Compline for six voices. Two of the middle voices sing a plainchant melody in canon starting at different times and five notes apart in pitch. Mouton then added four more parts, embedding the canon in sumptuously rich polyphony.

### **As I Out Rode This Enderes Night**

**Anon. 16th century**

**(sung by Susie Mock, Simon Beattie and Martin Cunningham)**

This is one of two carols, the other being the better-known Coventry Carol, to be added to the text of the Pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors in 1591 - one of only two surviving sections of the medieval mystery plays of the Coventry cycle. The birth of Christ occurs during this scene following which are revealed three jolly shepherds sheltering from the cold weather. While they eat and drink a star appears and angels are heard singing 'Glorea' (sic). The shepherds immediately realise the significance of these signs - "A ha! Now ys cum the tyme that old fathurs hath told" - and are inspired to play their pipes ("terly terlow") and joyfully sing of the star and the angels!

### **Carol for All: Good King Wenceslas**

J.M. Neale (1818-1866), a distinguished liturgist and the greatest of English hymn translators, wrote the words to fit this sturdy tune which dates from the fourteenth century. He found it in *Piae Cantiones* (1582), where it is a spring song, 'Tempus adest floridum'. Neale's version was published in *Carols for Christmastide* (1853) and it is arranged here by the distinguished English conductor Reginald Jacques (1894-1969) with an elaborate piano accompaniment especially to encourage hearty audience participation

**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."

**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."

**5. All:** In his master's steps he trod,  
where the snow lay dinted,  
Heat was in the very sod, (continued over...)

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.

### **Noel: Verbum caro factum est**

**Tamsin Jones (b. 1972)**

Tamsin Jones' music is strongly influenced by earlier styles to which she brings a 21<sup>st</sup>-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...

### **Have yourself a merry little Christmas**

**Hugh Martin (1914 - 2011) arr Peter Gritton**

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...".

### **Carol for All: While Shepherds Watched**

**Thomas Clark (1775-1859)**

Another fuguing tune for this carol. Known as 'Cranbrook' it was first published in 1805. Clark, a cordwainer and freeman of the city of Canterbury and the author of at least twenty-eight books of psalmody, originally set Cranbrook to 'Grace, 'tis a charming sound', but it was later used for 'While shepherds watched'. You will almost certainly know it from a later incarnation...

**1.** While shepherds watched their flocks by night,  
 All seated on the ground,  
 The angel of the Lord came down, (x2)  
 And glory shone around. (x3)

**5.** Thus spake the Seraph, and forthwith  
 Appeared a shining throng  
 Of angels praising God, who thus (x2)  
 Addressed their joyful song: (x3)

**4.** "The heav'nly Babe you there shall find  
 To human view displayed,  
 All meanly wrapped in swathing bands, (x2)  
 And in a manger laid." (x3)

**6.** "All glory be to God on high,  
 And to the Earth be peace;  
 Goodwill henceforth from heav'n to men (x2)  
 Begin and never cease!" (x3)

### **We Wish You a Merry Christmas**

**arr. David Cooke**

Another song that you might imagine has been around forever. It is indeed an English folk carol but it was entirely unknown outside the West Country until the Bristol-based composer, conductor and organist Arthur Warrell (1883-1939) arranged the tune for his own University of Bristol Madrigal Singers in 1935. His arrangement was published by Oxford University Press the same year under the title "A Merry Christmas: West Country traditional song", since when boisterous demands for figgy pudding at Christmas have never ceased...

*Followed by some words about tonight's charity and then mince pies & mulled wine  
 (sorry, no figgy pudding...)*



### **The Damon Singers**

**Musical Director:** David Cooke

#### **Soprano**

Ann Crisp  
 Sarah How  
 Claire Hunter\*  
 Susie Mock\*  
 Emma Summers  
 Monica Yao

#### **Alto**

Caroline Greenwood\*  
 Erika Lukács  
 Louise Pearce  
 Madeleine Symes  
 Karen van Oostrum  
 Uli Wright

#### **Tenor**

Simon Beattie\*  
 David Freedman  
 Simon Hunter  
 Duncan Passey  
 Chris Turner

#### **Baritone/Bass**

Keith Armstrong  
 Martin Cunningham  
 Sebastian Gibbs  
 Anthony Ogden  
 Andrew Scott\*\*

Alison Davidson - percussion and voice

\*Soloists in choral items

\*\*Presenter