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FINANCIAL TIMES

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Having already released a disc of 20th century Christmas music as well as one of traditional carols, my initial reaction when asked to do yet another Christmas disc was, “Oh no, not again!” However, I dug out volume four of Musica Britannica, entitled Mediaeval Carols and expertly edited by John Stevens, and started to browse through it. For those of you with access to a music library, it is well worth looking at. As you will read in Nicolas Robertson’s notes, one of the original meanings of the word ‘carol’ was ‘round-dance’ and later ‘joyous song’. The carol, both in church and out of it, was associated with physical movement; when it was not danced to, it was for procession. This volume contains popular carols of the time, popular by origin and popular by destination; there are carols for the festive season (Nowells and Lullays) alongside Alleluias and carols in honour of St Thomas à Becket and indeed the ever-popular Agincourt Song.

Of course, it is earlier music than we had ever performed but it serves as a marvellous starting point to see how Christmas music evolved in England from the late 14th century to the early 17th century. It also allowed me to use the triptych of instruments which are always depicted on nativity Christmas cards, played by smiling angels – namely, the lute, harp and rebec (an early bowed string instrument similar to the violin). Subsequently, it seemed appropriate to use their secular counterparts in the more rustic songs contained in the Playford manuscript.

Mix this all up with a smattering of Sheppard, Pygott and Byrd and the result is a mouth-watering mull of very festive music.
Saxony, who, when called by their priest to stop the legend of the carol dancers of Kölbigk in an early translation of a story recorded by the impatient to continue, crying ‘Quid stamus? cur non imus?...’

On the whole the Christian church found it less effective to attempt to prohibit such survivals of pagan rituals and better to write new songs usurping their function, thus ‘Taking some of the Devil’s best tunes and giving them back to God’. The authorities of Sens Cathedral in the 13th century specifically licensed their clergy to dance as long as they didn’t actually ‘non sallen (...).’

The medieval carols in this selection all show the dance structure, though coming from a variety of manuscript sources. The Salutation Carol is the only monophonic carol representing the most popular line in carol-making, perhaps using existing folk-song melodies. Noël sing we, Hail Mary, Nowell, out of your sleep and Make we joy are from a manuscript attributed to John Alcock, Bishop of Worcester in the mid 15th century: his rebuc of a cock is sketched next to a stanza of Hail Mary. Carols were much encouraged an enjoyed at Worcester; one Richard Skryvenar was paid 6s 8d ‘rewarded for carralls’ which he wrote out in 1518, on Christmas Day itself. (‘Nowell’, incidentally, is an exclamation of joy not necessarily confined to Christmas: it is reported that ‘companies of virgins singing Nowell’ greeted Henry V’s return from Agincourt.) Ave Rex angelorum, the only carol in three voices throughout, comes from a manuscript perhaps originating in Meaux Abbey in Yorkshire, a Cistercian house with ‘a reputation for good living and rather too free hospitality to women guests’. The boar head and Dieu vous garde, from another manuscript, are ascribed to Richard Smart, who was Rector of Plymtree, near Exeter, 1435-1477. There is no rose mingles chivalrous imagery with lines from Bernard of Clairvaux’s Laetabundus, while Angelus ad Virginem comes from a yet earlier tradition (it is mentioned by Chaucer). Gaudete, on the other hand, is a bit of an interloper, coming from a northern European collection which only found its way to England in 1835; but it demonstrates perfectly the spirit of the carol in its dancing refrain/verse form.

The carol fell into disuse after Tudor times, but certain popular forms survived, adapting existing tunes such as Greensleeves, the words printed in 1542 as the Wait’s Carol for the New Year, the melody transfigured to the version most familiar among the traveling choirs of the 18th century (and 40 years later in The Beggar’s Opera). Also in Playford’s compilation is All hail to the days, a fantastically lithe tune to go with a poem which appears in part in Thomas D’Urfey’s 1681 collection An Antidote to Melancholy: Made up in Pills (later, the famous Pills to Purge Melancholy). Halfway between folk-song and art-song is ballet’s Lullaby, more intimate precisely because of the more refined milieu for which it was destined. Remember O thou man survived long enough in popular usage to be quoted by Thomas Hardy in Under the Greenwood Tree, and one can understand why, in Ravenscroft’s haunting, sombre setting, its twist from minor to major at the end of each verse like a glimpse of light in winter darkness. Meanwhile however the medieval mingling of sacred and profane, Latin and vernacular, burden and verse, had found an echo in the high art of the Christmas music of the great renaissance English polyphonists, represented here by Pygott, Master of the Children in Wolsey’s household chapel by 1516 and later Gentleman of the Chapel Royal, and Byrd; and, most of all, Sheppard, all of whose music here is based upon plainsong melodies (Gloria in excelsis, so dramatic a setting, the polyphony being for high voices only, that it required special extra payments for the boy singers, from the first Respond at Matins on Christmas Day; Verbum caro from the ninth Respond at Matins) and thus has no secular foundation. An echo nevertheless as Wittgenstein said, ‘Never mind the meaning, look at the use’. A letter from the Earl of Worcester dated 19 September 1602 reads, ‘We are frolic here at Court, much dancing in the Privy Chamber of Country Dances before the Queen’s Majesty, who is exceedingly pleased therewith. Irish tunes are at this time most liked; but in winter Lullaby, an old song of Mr. Byrd’s will be more in request I think’.

The dance goes on.

NICOLAS ROBERTSON
Refrain: Nowell, Nowell, Nowell!
This is the salutation of th’angel Gabriel.

Tidings true there become new, sent from the Trinity
By Gabriel to Nazareth, city of Galilee;
A clean maiden and pure virgin, thoro’ her humility
Hath conceived the person second in deity.

When he first presented was before her fair visage,
In the most demure and goodly wise he did to her homage
And said “Lady from heaven so high, that lorde’s heritage,
The which of thee born would be, I am sent on message.

Hail virgin celestial, the meekest that ever was
Hail temple of the deity! Hail, mirror of all grace!
Hail virgin pure, I thee ensure within full little space
Thou shalt receive and him conceive, that shall bring great solace.”

Then again to the angel she answered womanly,
“What’er my Lord command me do I will obey meekly,
Ecce sum humilima ancilla Domini,
Secundum verbum tuum,” she said, “fiat mihi.”

Then to the angel she answered womanly,
“Whate’er my Lord command me do I will obey meekly,
Ecce sum humilima ancilla Domini,
Secundum verbum tuum,” she said, “fiat mihi.”

Refrain: Nowell sing we, both all and some, Now Rex pacificus is ycome.
Exortum est in love and liss.
Now Christ his grace he gan us giss.
And with his body us bought to bliss, Both all and some.

De fructu ventris of Mary bright,
Both God and man in her alight,
Out of disease he did us dign:
Both all and some.

Lux fulgebit with love and light,
In Mary mild his pennon pight,
In her took kind with manly might:
Both all and some.

Gloria tibi, ay, and bliss,
God unto his grace he us wiss,
The rent of heaven that we not miss:
Both all and some.
Refrain: Hail Mary full of grace

Hail, Mary, full of grace, mother in virginity. The Holy Ghost is to thee sent From the Father omnipotent; Now is God within thee went, when the angel said Ave. When the angel Ave began, Flesh and blood together ran; Mary bore both God and man Through virtue and through dignity. So saith the gospel of Saint John: God and man is made but one, In flesh and blood, body and bone, One God in personæ three. And the prophet Jeremy Told in his prophecy That the Son of Mary Should die for us on roodé-tree. Muchë joy to us was grant And in earthë peace y-plant When that born was this 'fant In the land of Galilee. Mary, grant us the bliss There thy Sonnës woning is; Of that we han done amiss Pray for us pour charité. Amen.

Refrain: Rejoice, rejoice!

Christ is born of the Virgin Mary, Rejoice! At this time of grace and longed-for blessing, We offer love and praise in return. God is made man in this wonderful birth: The world is cleansed through the kingship of Christ. The closed gate of Ezechiel is now open; And sends forth transforming light with salvation. Let us now therefore sing purifying psalms; Let us bless our Lord, King of Salvation.

Today the king of heaven deigned to be born of a virgin, that he might call back lost mankind to the heavenly kingdom; the army of angels rejoices. Because eternal salvation has appeared in human form. Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of goodwill. Because eternal salvation has appeared in human form.

Gaudete

Refrain: Gaudete, gaudete! Christus est natus ex Maria Virgine, Gaudete! Tempus ad est gratiae hoc quod optabamus, Carmina laetitiae devote reddamus.

Deus homo factus est natura mirante, Mundus renovatus est a Christo regnante.

Ezechelis porta clausa per transitur, Unde lux est orta salus inventur

Ergo nostra contio psallat iam in lustro, Benedict Domino salus regi nostro.

Gaudete

Refrain: Gaudete, gaudete!

Christus est natus ex Maria Virgine, Gaudete! Tempus ad est gratiae hoc quod optabamus, Carmina laetitiae devote reddamus.

Deus homo factus est natura mirante, Mundus renovatus est a Christo regnante.

Ezechelis porta clausa per transitur, Unde lux est orta salus inventur

Ergo nostra contio psallat iam in lustro, Benedict Domino salus regi nostro.

Gaudete
1. **C.1420 MS** *There is no rose*

Refrain:
There is no rose of such virtue
As is the rose that bare Jesu.

There is no rose of such virtue
As is the rose that bare Jesu; Alleluia.

For in this rose contained was
Heaven and earth in little space;
Res miranda.

2. **C.1450 SELDON MS** *Nowell, nowell: Out of your sleep*

Burden:
Nowell, nowell, nowell, etc.

Out of your sleep arise and wake,
For God mankind now hath ytake,
All of a maid without any make,
Of all women she bear’th the bell: Nowell.

3. **THOMAS RAVENSCROFT (C.1590-C1633)** *Remember O thou man*

Remember O thou man,
O thou man, O thou man,
Remember O thou man
Thy time is spent,
Remember O thou man,
How thou art dead and gone,
And I did what I can,
Therefore repent.

Remember God’s goodness,
O thou man, O thou man,
Remember God’s goodness,
And his promise made.
Remember God’s goodness
How he sent his Son doubtless
Our sins for to redress,
Be not afraid.

The angels all did sing,
O thou man, O thou man,
The angels all did sing
Upon the shepherds’ hill,
The angels all did sing
Praises to our heav’ly king,
And peace to man living
With a good will.

To Bethlem did they go,
O thou man, O thou man,
To Bethlem did they go,
The shepherds three,
The Bethlem did they go,
To see where it were so or no,
Whether Christ were born or no To set man free.

In Bethlem he was born,
O thou man, O thou man,
In Bethlem he was born,
For mankind sake,
In Bethlem he was born
For us that were forlorn,
And therefore took no scorn,
Our flesh to take.

Give thanks to God alway,
O thou man, O thou man,
Give thanks to God alway,
Most joyfully.
Give thanks to God alway,
For this our happy day,
Let all men sing and say,
Holy, holy,
**RICHARD PYGOTT (FL.1530)** *Quid petis, O fili?*

*Refrain*

Quid petis, O fili?
Mater dulcissima ba, ba.
O Pater, O fili,
Michi plausus oscula da, da.

The mother, full mannerly,
and meekly as a maid,
Looking on her little son,
so laughing in lap laid,
So prettily, so pertly,
so passingly well apay’d;
Full softly and full soberly
unto her sweet son she said:
Quid petis, O fili?...

I mean this by Mary,
our Maker’s mother of might
Full lovingly looking on our Lord,
the lantern of light,
Thus saying to our Saviour;
this saw I in my sight;
This reason that I rede you now,
I rede it full right.
Quid petis, O fili?...

Musing on her manners
so nigh marr’d was my main,
Save it pleased me so passingly
that past was my pain;
Yet softly to her sweet son
me thought I heard her sain:
Now gracious God and good sweet babe,
yet once this game again.
Quid petis, O fili?...

**C.1600 BALLET MS, TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN** *Sweet was the song*

Sweet was the song the Virgin sang,
When she to Bethlem Juda came,
And was delivered of a Son,
That blessed Jesus hath to name.
Lulla, lulla, lulla, lullaby,
Lulla, lulla, lulla, lullaby,
Sweet Babe, sang she.

My Son and eke a Saviour born,
Who hast vouchsafed from on high
To visit us that were forlorn.
Lalula, lalula, lalullaby,
Sweet Babe, sang she,
And rocked him sweetly on her knee.

**WILLIAM BYRD (1543-1623)** *Lullaby my sweet little baby*

Lulla, lullaby, lullaby,
My sweet little baby,
What meanest thou to cry,
Lulla, lullaby, lullaby,
My sweet little baby.

Be still my blessed babe,
Though cause thou hast to mourn,
Whose blood most innocent to shed,
The cruel king has sworn:

Lulla, lullaby, lullaby,
My sweet little baby;
What meanest thou to cry,
Lulla, lullaby, lullaby,
My sweet little baby.

And lo, alas, behold
What slaughter he doth make,
Shedding the blood of infants all,
Sweet savour for thy sake.

A king is born, they say:
Which king this king would kill:
O woe, and woeful heavy day,
When wretches have their will.

Lulla, lullaby, lullaby,
My sweet little baby;
What meanest thou to cry,
Lulla, lullaby, lullaby,
My sweet little baby.
**Ave rex angelorum**

_Burden:_

*Ave rex angelorum, ave rexque celorum,*  
_ae princepsque polorum._

_Hail, most mighty in thy working,_  
_Hail, thou Lord of all thing;_  
_I offer thee gold as to a king;_  
_Ave rex angelorum._

**Drive the cold winter away**

All hail to the days  
That merrit more praise,  
Than all the rest of the year,  
And welcome the night,  
The double delight,  
As well for the poor as the peer.  
_Good fortune attend,_  
_Each merry man’s friend,_  
_That doth but the best that he may._  
_Forgetting all wrongs_  
_With carols and songs_  
_To drive the cold winter away._

This time of the year  
_Is spent in good cheer_  
_And neighbours together do meet_  
_Who sit by the fire_  
_With friendly desire_  
_Each other in love to greet_  
_All grudges forgot_  
_Our pud in the pot_  
_All sorrows aside they lay_  
_The old and the young_  
_Doth carol his song_  
_To drive the cold winter away._

To us and to mum  
Kind neighbours will come  
With wassails of nut-brown ale  
To drink and carouse  
To all in the house  
As merry bucks as in the dale,  
Where cake, bread and cheese  
Is brought for your feasts  
To make you a longer stay  
And the fire to warm  
Will do you no harm  
To drive the cold winter away._

**The old year now away is fled**

_C.1600 PLAYFORD MS_  
_The old year now away is fled_  
_The new year it is entered,_  
_Then let us now our sins down tread,_  
_And joyfully all appear._  
_Let’s merry be this holiday,_  
_And let us run with sport and play,_  
_Hang sorrow, let’s cast care away,_  
_God send you a happy new year._

_C.1500 RITSON MS_  
_Nowell, nowell: The boares head_  
_Burden:_  
_Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell,_  
_Tidingës good I think to tell._  
_The boarës head that we bring here_  
_Betokeneth a Prince without peer_  
_Is born this day to buy us dear;_  
_Nowell._

A boar is a sovereign beast  
And acceptable in every feast;  
So mote this Lord be to most and least;  
Nowell, nowell.  
This boarës head we bring with song  
In worship of him that thus sprang  
Of a virgin to redress all wrong;  
Nowell, nowell._
Angelus ad Virginem

Ad haec Virgo nobilis respondens inquit ei:
‘Ancilla sum humilis omnipotentis Dei
Tibi coelesti nuntio,
Tanti secreti conscio,
Consentiens, et cupiens videre factum quod audio;
Parata sum parere,
Dei consilio.’

Eia mater Domini, quae pacem reddisti
Angelis et homini, cum Christum genuisti;
Tuum exora filium
Ut se nobis propitium
Exhibit et debeat peccata; praeestans auxilium
Vita fruibeata
Post hoc exilium.

At this the noble Virgin replying, saying to him:
‘I am the lowly handmaid of almighty God.
I perceive that you are the heavenly messenger
Of this great secret, and I consent,
And desire to see what I have heard come to pass.
I am ready to give birth,
By the word of God.’

Hail, Mother of the Lord, who gave back peace
To angels and men in giving birth to Christ.
Now pray your son
That he may be our ransom
And take away our sins; and may give us his aid
To attain the life of the blessed
After this exile.

Angelus ad Virginem

Angelus ad Virginem subintrans in conclave,
Virginis formidinem demulcens, inquit, ‘Ave!
Ave, regina virginum;
Coeli terraeque Dominum
Concipies et paries intacta salutem hominum;
Tu porta coeli facta
Medela criminum.’

‘Quomodo conciperem, quae virum non cognovi?
Qualiter infringerem quod firmamente vovi?’

‘Spiritus sancti gratia
Perficiet haec omnia
Ne timeas, sed gaudeas, secura quod castimonia
Manebit intepura
Dei potentia.’

The angel, entering the Virgin’s chamber,
Soothed her maidenly fear and said ‘Hail!
Hail, queen of virgins:
You will conceive the Lord of heaven and earth,
And bear without stain the Saviour of mankind.
You have become the gateway to heaven,
The remedy for sin.’

‘How shall I conceive, who have known no man?
In what way shall I break my steadfast vow?’

‘The grace of the Holy Spirit
Will bring all this to pass.
Do not be afraid, but rejoice,
Certain that your chastity
Will remain pure by the power of God.’

Ad haec Virgo nobilis respondens inquit ei:
‘Ancilla sum humilis omnipotentis Dei
Tibi coelesti nuntio,
Tanti secreti conscio,
Consentiens, et cupiens videre factum quod audio;
Parata sum parere,
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That he may be our ransom
And take away our sins; and may give us his aid
To attain the life of the blessed
After this exile.
JOHN SHEPPARD (c1515-1560) *Verbum caro*

*Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis.*
*Cujus gloriām vidimus quasi Unigeniti a Patre plenum gratiae et veritatis.*
*In principio erat verbum et verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat verbum.*
*Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.*

The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory as of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Glory be to the Father and to the Son And to the Holy Spirit.

**C.1500 RITSON MS *Nowell, nowell, Dieu vous garde***

Burden: Nowell, nowell, nowell, Who is there that singeth so: Nowell nowell? I am here, Sire Christēsmas. Welcome, my lord, Sire Christēsmas! Welcome to us all, both more and less! Come near, Nowell. Dieu vous garde, beau sire, tidingēs I you bring: A maid hath born a child full young, The which causeth you for to sing:

*Nowell, nowell.*
*Christ is now born of a pure maid; In an ox-stall he is laid; Wherefore sing we all at-a-braid: Nowell.*
*Buvez bien par toute la compagnie, Make good cheer and be right merry, And sing with us now joyfully: Nowell.*

**C.1450 SELDON MS *Make we joy***

Burden: Make we joy now in this fest, In quo Christus natus est; Eya. A patre unigenitus thro’ a maiden is come to us; Sing we to her and say: Welcome, Veni, redemptor gentium. Agnoscat omne seculum: A bright star three kings made come For to seek with their presence Verum supernum prodiens.

*A solis ortus cardine,* So mightly a lord was none as he, For to our kind he hath give gryth, Adam parens quod pollut.
*Maria ventre concepit;* The Holy Ghost was ay her with. In Bethlehem y-born he is, Consors paterni luminis.
*O lux beata Trinitas!* He lay between an ox and ass, Thou mother and maiden free; Gloria tibi, Domine.

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