

CORO

The Flowering of Genius



COR16001

Tallis, Byrd,
Guerrero, Victoria

"The Sixteen's sound is distilled, ethereal – hard to imagine a more sublime performance."

BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE

Sounds Sublime

The Essential Collection (2CD set)



COR16073

Some of the most celebrated recordings from Harry Christophers and his award-winning ensemble, these discs provide a definitive collection of familiar classics and lesser-known treasures.

The Fairy Queen Purcell (2CD set)



COR16005

"A performance like this shows dimensions of Purcell's genius that are all too rarely heard on disc."

GRAMOPHONE

Blest Cecilia

Britten Choral Works Volume 1



COR16006

"A disc of exceptional quality, reinforcing The Sixteen's reputation as one of the finest choirs of our day."

GRAMOPHONE

CORO

Great British Choral Works

The Sixteen
HARRY CHRISTOPHERS

THE VOICES OF
CLASSIC *fm*

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www.thesixteen.com

COR16092

GREAT BRITISH CHORAL WORKS

It is often said that the British choral tradition is second to none. Not only have our great cathedral and collegiate choirs set the standards which the rest of the world strives to emulate, but also our composers have constantly been at the forefront of innovation and progress.

On this compilation, we take you from the groundbreaking music of the 1500's, via the great baroque music of Purcell and Handel, right through to the modern day with Tavener and MacMillan. We have taken a little licence with the word "choral" and included some exquisite solo items to give the album variety and to show off the amazing musicianship of soloists such as Messrs Chance, George and Padmore who have played such an important role in The Sixteen's evolution.

Harry
Christopher,



Photograph: Marco Borggreve

1	G. F. HANDEL	Coronation Anthem: <i>My heart is inditing</i>	2.49
2	WILLIAM BYRD	<i>Laudibus in sanctis</i>	5.12
3	JAMES MACMILLAN	<i>A Child's Prayer</i> Kirsty Hopkins, Grace Davidson <i>sopranos</i>	4.01
4	THOMAS TALLIS	<i>Spem in alium</i>	9.38
5	SIR JOHN TAVENER	<i>Today the Virgin</i>	2.46
6	WILLIAM CORNYSH	<i>Ave Maria Mater Dei</i>	3.47
7	ROBERT CARVER	<i>Benedictus</i> (from <i>Missa Dum sacrum mysterium</i>)	5.31
8	HENRY PURCELL	<i>One charming night</i> (from <i>The Fairy Queen</i>) Michael Chance <i>alto</i>	2.25
9	HENRY PURCELL	<i>Hush, no more</i> (from <i>The Fairy Queen</i>) Michael George <i>bass</i>	4.06
10	G. F. HANDEL	<i>Tune your harps to cheerful strains</i> (from <i>Esther</i> HWV 50a, 1718 version) Mark Padmore <i>tenor</i>	3.54
11	BENJAMIN BRITTEN	<i>Hymn to St Cecilia</i>	10.40
12	SIR MICHAEL TIPPETT	<i>Nobody Knows</i> (from <i>Five Spirituals</i> from <i>A Child of Our Time</i>)	1.28
13	JOHN SHEPPARD	<i>Media vita in morte sumus</i> (Excerpt)	8.00
14	JAMES MACMILLAN	<i>A new song</i> Christopher Glynn <i>organ</i>	5.16
15	G. F. HANDEL	<i>Worthy is the Lamb that was slain</i> (from <i>Messiah</i> HWV 56)	3.31
16	G. F. HANDEL	<i>Amen</i> (from <i>Messiah</i> HWV 56)	3.44
		Total running time	77.57

Great British Choral Works

Ask any music-lover who the great British classical choral composers have been through the centuries and the answer will include many of the composers represented on this disc. Famous names such as Tallis, Byrd, Purcell, Handel (firmly British for the purposes of this compilation), Britten, Tavener, and MacMillan all appear here. Harry Christophers and the individual members of The Sixteen have been accustomed to performing from the enormous body of British choral music from their early years. Harry started singing every day as a boy chorister at Canterbury Cathedral, a musical upbringing similar to that enjoyed by many of the members of The Sixteen past and present in the various cathedrals and chapels up and down Britain. They do 'Britishness' very well, from living and breathing the music to the way in which they work together. The choir is full of great characters who are also great friends and the joy they experience in working

with each other is portrayed in the music they champion. There is absolutely no doubt that this disc is 'Made in Britain'!

The same cannot entirely be said for George Frideric Handel, born in Halle, Germany, in 1685 before moving to England and eventually becoming a British subject in 1727. His legacy is extraordinary, and he is represented on this disc by three tracks. *My heart is inditing*, one of the Coronation Anthems, was composed to accompany the crowning of Caroline, King George II's Queen, in 1727. Charming, stately, with trumpets and timpani adding lustre to the dancing violin semi-quavers, Handel's music caught the right mood for the occasion at Westminster Abbey perfectly.

Much has been written of William Byrd's unswerving adherence to the Catholic Church in contravention to the faith of the Crown. Byrd was Master of Music at the Chapel Royal and received a monopoly

to print music from Queen Elizabeth I (along with Tallis). At the same time Byrd's family was being fined again and again for failure to attend church but his talent as a composer left them largely unmolested. The Latin motet *Laudibus in sanctis* is a brilliant piece in three sections full of invention, weaving vocal lines and bouncing rhythms befitting the text (a paraphrase of psalm 150) and every bit as fantastic to sing as to hear.

Above calls of 'welcome', sopranos Kirsty Hopkins and Grace Davidson begin James MacMillan's *A Child's Prayer*, written in response to the heart-wrenching tragedy in Dunblane in 1996 in which sixteen schoolchildren and a teacher were massacred. MacMillan's skill in enhancing the text of a poem with his music is to the fore in this beautiful piece which leaves the listener reflecting on faith and loss.

One of the most famous legacies of the Renaissance is Thomas Tallis's monumental *Spem in Alium*, composed for 40 parts, and a lovely way of bringing

more than the usual 'Sixteen' together for a recording – and, we have to assume, a party. Tallis had an extraordinary career which spanned four 16th century monarchs whose religious views alternated. He changed his compositions accordingly, so that we are left with large Latin motets as well as small English-language anthems.

John Tavener (b.1944) has also composed pieces of huge length as well as tiny miniatures. On discs such as this we must turn to the smaller-scale works. *Today the Virgin* is a joyful carol in which Joseph, looking at Mary's swelling belly, asks her 'what do I see?'. Her reply is simple: 'do not fear'! Many of Tavener's compositional techniques can be heard here, from sustained pedal notes to repetition, and more than a nod to Orthodox church music.

The Sixteen's project to record five CDs of music from the Eton Choirbook, the late 15th century collection of English sacred music, was ground-breaking. Many of the pieces were composed on as large

an architectural scale as the buildings in which they intended to be heard, and so cannot be included on this single disc. They are well worth discovering. William Cornysh's *Ave Maria Mater Dei*, sung by male voices, is the Choirbook's representative here. Cornysh was part of the court of Henry VIII, and we know his music reached as far north as Stirling, the home of the Scottish court. Music in large-scale was also being written in Scotland at roughly the same time, notably by Robert Carver. Editing the *Missa Dum sacrum mysterium* was an enormous job for one of The Sixteen's longest serving sopranos, Sally Dunkley, and her wonderful work can be heard on this disc in the *Benedictus* from the Mass. It has incredible vocal lines requiring some very large breaths!

The middle of this disc is inhabited by star soloists frequently heard on discs with the choir: Michael Chance, Michael George and Mark Padmore – the last of whom spent the first ten years of his career as a regular member of The Sixteen. Messrs Chance and George sing *One charming*

night and *Hush, no more* from Purcell's *Fairy Queen*. Hearing almost anything from Purcell makes one wish he had lived beyond his short life (1659–95).

Tune your harps to cheerful strains from *Esther* (originally to have been called *The Oratorium*) is certainly a hidden gem amongst Handel's output, and in contrast to the splendid premieres of the Coronation Anthems may have received its first performance in the small church of St Lawrence, Whitechurch. The instrumentation, of pizzicato strings, oboe and tenor, is delightful and shows Handel at his inventive best in using new colours from a fairly small-scale orchestral palette. As with Handel's other pieces on this album the aria is a masterclass in how to spin out a short text in music which lasts four minutes; and it is of course a pleasure to listen to Mark Padmore and oboist Anthony Robson enjoying the beautifully melodic lines.

Benjamin Britten's choral music has been recorded in three volumes by The Sixteen.

The *Hymn to St Cecilia*, a setting of a poem by W.H. Auden, was partly written on a ship in the Atlantic in 1942 as Britten returned from the USA in wartime. The range of colours and moods in this piece, named for the patron saint of music, is staggering for an *a cappella* work, making it thrilling and at the same time challenging for the performers. Michael Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* was written at the same time. The set of five American faith songs from that oratorio, the *Five Spirituals*, were published for a *cappella* choir in 1958 and inject energy and vibrancy to any programme. *Nobody Knows* is the second from that set.

This disc would not have been complete without the music of John Sheppard, and *Media Vita* in particular. The opening bars, in which the bass line rises then falls just as the sopranos begin what is to be a very high part, is one of the glories of music from this period. Sheppard became 'informator choristarum' at Magdalen College Oxford in the 1540s and provided the platform for Tallis and Byrd to follow.

Here Sheppard expertly brings human frailty to musical life with his setting of 'In the midst of life we are in death'.

The second piece by James MacMillan on this disc is *A New Song*, a paraphrase of psalm 96 for choir and organ, played here by Christopher Glynn. The organ comes into its own at the end with increasingly loud triads.

The programme finishes as it began, with music by Handel, whose grasp of the English language sometimes produces strange word emphases, such as 'to re-ceive power' instead of 'to re-ceive power'. It makes me smile every time I hear the end of *Messiah*. *Worthy is the Lamb* and the *Amen* are so well-known as to make us dangerously immune to the genius of their composition. The fugal Amen builds to a wonderful climax as first the sopranos, followed by the tenors, hit top A's, and there cannot be a better ending to any oratorio - whether British or otherwise.

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GREAT BRITISH CHORAL WORKS tracks are taken from these recordings by The Sixteen available on CORO:

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|----|--------------|--|
| 1 | COR16066 | Handel – Coronation Anthems |
| 2 | COR16077 | Ceremony and Devotion: Music for the Tudors |
| 3 | COR16069 | Bright Orb of Harmony |
| 4 | CORSACD16016 | Spem in alium |
| 5 | COR16015 | Ikon of Light |
| 6 | COR16022 | Eton Choirbook Vol.III – The Pillars of Eternity |
| 7 | COR16051 | Robert Carver |
| 8 | COR16005 | Purcell – The Fairy Queen |
| 9 | COR16005 | Purcell – The Fairy Queen |
| 10 | COR16019 | Handel – Esther |
| 11 | COR16006 | Britten Choral Works Vol.I – Blest Cecilia |
| 12 | COR16013 | à la Gloire de Dieu |
| 13 | COR16077 | Ceremony and Devotion: Music for the Tudors |
| 14 | COR16071 | Padre Pio Prayer |
| 15 | COR16062 | Handel – Messiah |
| 16 | COR16062 | Handel – Messiah |

For more information visit www.the-sixteen.com

Harry Christophers

Harry Christophers is known internationally as founder and conductor of The Sixteen as well as a regular guest conductor for many of the major symphony orchestras and opera companies worldwide. He has directed The Sixteen choir and orchestra throughout Europe, America and the Far East gaining a distinguished reputation for his work in Renaissance, Baroque and 20th-century music. In 2000 he instituted the Choral Pilgrimage, a national tour of English cathedrals from York to Canterbury in music from the pre-Reformation, as The Sixteen's contribution to the millennium celebrations. The Pilgrimage in the UK is now central to The Sixteen's annual artistic programme.

In 2008 Harry Christophers was appointed Artistic Director of Boston's Handel and Haydn Society; he is also Principal Guest Conductor of both the Granada Symphony Orchestra and the Orquesta de la Comunidad de Madrid. As well as enjoying a very special partnership with the BBC Philharmonic, with whom he won a Diapason d'Or, he is a regular guest conductor with the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields. With The Sixteen he is an Associate Artist at The Bridgewater Hall in Manchester and features in the highly successful BBC television series, *Sacred Music*, presented by Simon Russell Beale.

Increasingly busy in opera, Harry has conducted numerous productions for Lisbon Opera and English National Opera as well as conducting the UK premiere of Messager's opera *Fortunio* for Grange Park Opera. He is a regular conductor at Buxton Opera where he initiated a very successful cycle of Handel's operas and oratorios including *Semele* and *Samson*. Harry Christophers is an Honorary Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, as well as the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and has been awarded the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Music from the University of Leicester.



Photograph: Marco Borggreve

The Sixteen

After three decades of world-wide performance and recording, The Sixteen is recognised as one of the world's greatest ensembles. Its special reputation for performing early English polyphony, masterpieces of the Renaissance, Baroque and early Classical periods, and a diversity of twentieth-century music, all stems from the passions of conductor and founder, Harry Christophers.

The Sixteen tours internationally giving regular performances at the major concert halls and festivals. At home in the UK, The Sixteen are 'The Voices of Classic FM' as well as Associate Artists of Bridgewater Hall, Manchester. The group also promotes the Choral Pilgrimage, an annual tour of the UK's finest cathedrals.

The Sixteen's period-instrument orchestra has taken part in acclaimed semi-staged performances of Purcell's *Fairy Queen* in Tel Aviv and London, a fully-staged production of Purcell's *King Arthur* in Lisbon's Belem Centre, and new productions of Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse* at Lisbon Opera House and *The Coronation of Poppea* at English National Opera.

Over one hundred recordings reflect The Sixteen's quality in a range of work spanning the music of five hundred years. In 2009 they won the coveted Classic FM Gramophone Artist of the Year Award and the Baroque Vocal Award for Handel's *Coronation Anthems*. The Sixteen also feature in the highly successful BBC television series, *Sacred Music*, presented by Simon Russell Beale.

In 2011 the group launched a new training programme for young singers called Genesis Sixteen. Aimed at 18 to 23 year-olds, this is the UK's first fully-funded choral programme for young singers designed specifically to bridge the gap from student to professional practitioner.



§ The
Sixteen
HARRY CHRISTOPHERS

www.thesixteen.com

Photograph: Mark Harrison

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