

Nova! Nova!

Contemporary carols
from St Catharine's



The Choirs of
St Catharine's
College
Cambridge

Edward Wickham

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The Choirs of St Catharine's College, Cambridge
Will Fairbairn *organ*

Edward Wickham *conductor*

Richard Rodney Bennett (1936-2012)		John Tavener (1944-2013)	
1. The holly and the ivy *	[4:17]	9. A Cradle Song *	[4:17]
Nicola Lefanu (b. 1947)		Christopher Fox (b. 1955)	
2. Saint Ita's Lullaby *	[2:51]	A Dream of Winter *	
Matthew Larkin (b. 1963)		10. Digging	[1:37]
3. Adam lay ybounden	[2:57]	11. Swedes	[2:32]
Giles Swayne (b. 1946)		12. Thaw	[1:07]
4. There is no rose *	[5:33]	13. Tall nettles	[1:19]
Tansy Davies (b. 1973)		Kerry Andrew (b. 1978)	
5. Christmas Eve	[6:19]	14. Hevene Quene	[3:39]
James Macmillan (b. 1959)		Stevie Wishart	
6. Nova! Nova! Ave fit ex eva	[6:25]	Three Carols *	
Roxanna Panufnik (b. 1968)		15. Te Deum Laudamus	[3:17]
7. Alma redemptoris mater *	[3:26]	16. Let's be merry as bird on berry	[5:10]
Cecilia McDowall (b. 1951)		17. Lullaby for Freya	[4:21]
8. Before the paling of the stars *	[4:26]	Sally Beamish (b. 1956)	
		18. In the stillness	[2:19]
		Total playing time	[66:05]

* *world premiere recordings*

Nova! Nova!

We present in this programme an anthology of Christmas music written in the last ten years, much of which has not previously been recorded. There is nothing new about a recording of carols; and yet a programme of this kind bears witness to a spirit of reinvention which the Christmas season inspires. At a time when the British choral tradition is so well served by contemporary composers, one is in the luxurious position of being able to gather together a programme of recent carols from a rich field of repertoire.

'Nova! Nova! Ave fit ex Eva.' The title of this programme, taken from an anonymous English text of the fifteenth century, encapsulates with typical medieval ingenuity the relationship between the old and the new at Christmas. The news proclaimed by the Latin refrain, tells us that the Eva we know from Genesis and the Garden of Eden, has been transformed into 'Ave', the salutation which introduced Gabriel's annunciation to the Virgin Mary. Indeed, the one is implicit in the other, by a simple reversal of letters: E-V-A to A-V-E. Similarly, the celebration of Christmas in modern times has been characterised by a constant dialogue between the old and

the new; tradition and the requirement to reinvent it being equally important for artists responding to the seasonal thirst for new work. Certainly no other season encourages such a prolific outpouring of new music; and yet no other repertoire draws so consistently on texts which are as arcane as they are antique.

The Holly and the Ivy is a case in point; a text cobbled together from at least two sources, the one invoking pagan traditions, the other full of churchy Victorian sentimentality. Not that this need bother those of us who have inherited it from hymn-book editors: Richard Rodney Bennett's suave take on the familiar text is full of the panache of his jazz arrangements. Commissioned by the Friends of All Saints' Music, Northampton, this setting received its first performance in 2010.

In **Saint Ita's Lullaby**, Nicola LeFanu sets a contemporary poet, James Harpur; albeit invoking the legendary patron saint of Killeedy, County Limerick in Ireland. But with **Adam lay ybounden**, by Canadian composer, Matthew Larkin, we are back to the familiar fifteenth century: an infectiously sing-able version, this, and ideally suited to upper voices.



Composer Christopher Fox with Edward Wickham

There is no rose was commissioned by the choir of Clare College, Cambridge, and first performed in 2006. Two traditional texts, and musical ideas, are here juxtaposed: the Gregorian chant 'Hodie Christus natus est' and the famous fifteenth century carol from the Trinity Roll, 'There is no rose of such virtue'. Vigorous, non-metric rhythms are put to full expressive and dramatic use in both this and Tansy Davies's setting of **Christmas Eve** by Christina Rossetti, commissioned by King's College, Cambridge for the 2011 Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols. In the latter especially, we are shaken out of our usual cosy engagement with the text and encouraged to contemplate a poetry both mysterious and ecstatic.

James MacMillan's **Nova! Nova!**, which was commissioned by the Hope Scott Trust and first performed in 2012, is an essay in what Renaissance music theorists praised as 'varietas'. Faced with the compositional challenge of setting a text which comprises eight verses with refrain, he takes the opportunity of each refrain to innovate, to make new. The result is a form which manages to be both cyclic and to evolve, as the refrains employ ever more virtuosic strategies.

Roxanna Panufnik writes of her **Alma**

redemptoris mater: 'In this short work for Chappelle du Roi, I have expanded and enhanced a musical idea (based on the gorgeous and ancient plainsong setting of these words by Hermann the Lame) that originally appeared intertwined with poetry of Geoffrey Hill. The plainsong is placed over a bed of drifting harmonies, but instead of Geoffrey's poem I have used my favourite of the many alternative translations of the first line: "Loving Mother of our Saviour". The piece is dedicated to Panufnik's mother and was first performed in 2012.

Cecilia McDowall's **Before the paling of the stars** is another Christina Rossetti setting, and the only work on this disc to feature organ (the St Catharine's organ played here by William Fairbairn). The work, commissioned by Peter Beaven and the Choir of the Royal Memorial Chapel, Sandhurst, was first performed in 2012.

One of most popular carols of modern times is surely John Tavener's *The Lamb*, and in **A Cradle Song** we present another sublime setting of William Blake – this one less familiar perhaps because of the consistently stratospheric range of the soprano part. The carol was commissioned in 2010 by Jonathan Manners and DeChorum.

Of **A Dream of winter**, Christopher Fox writes: 'I composed these four settings of poems by Edward Thomas (1878-1917) in the summer of 2012 for the wonderful Girls' choir of St. Catharine's College, who performed them for the first time in St Margaret's Church, Hemingford Abbots on 17 November 2012. I have known Thomas's *Tall Nettles* since my schooldays but the other three poems were new discoveries amongst the 142 poems he wrote between 1914 and his death at the Battle of Arras in the penultimate year of the First World War. I love the objectivity of Thomas's depiction of the world and the way in which this allows him to reveal the strangeness within the ordinary; I have tried to match this in my music.' I should add that the choir had, at that time, been working on Bartók's Choruses for Children's and Female Voices and I was looking for other works which would complement these beautifully simple but deftly etched miniatures. While these Thomas settings are seasonal rather than festive, the text of 'Swedes' in particular is full of imagery redolent of Nativity and Epiphany; making it one of the most eccentric Christmas poems in the literary canon.

With **Hevene Quene** we are back in the

mystical theology of late medieval England; this a macaronic text which Kerry Andrew treats in musical fragments which gradually coalesce. It was commissioned by *Choir & Organ* magazine and first performed in 2005 by the choir of the Temple Church.

Stevie Wishart composed her three lyrics – **Te Deum laudamus, Let's be merry and Lullaby** – for St Catharine's Girls' Choir, who first performed them in 2014. Reflecting the composer's own expertise as a performer of medieval music, the three settings display a neo-medieval sensibility, in which harmonies of increasing richness are created through rounds and, in the case of **Te Deum laudamus** by the layering of apparently independent melodic lines. We conclude the programme with **In the stillness** which returns us once more to the deep-filled harmonic luxury of the modern Christmas carol.

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Texts & Translations

Richard Rodney Bennett (1936-2012)

1. **The holly and the ivy**

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
The running of the deer
The playing of the merry organ
Sweet singing of the choir

The holly bears a blossom
As white as lily flower
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
To be our sweet Saviour
O the rising of the sun...

The holly bears a berry
As red as any blood
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
To do poor sinners good
O the rising of the sun...

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 of the sun...

The holly bears a bark
As bitter as any gall;
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
For to redeem us all.
O the rising of the sun...

English Traditional

Nicola Lefanu (b. 1947)

2. **Saint Ita's Lullaby**

Text by James Harpur (b. 1956)

Matthew Larkin (b. 1963)

3. **Adam lay ybounden**

Adam lay ybounden,
Bounden in a bond;
Four thousand winter
Thought he not too long.

And all was for an apple,
An apple that he took,
As clerkes finden
Written in their book.

Ne had the apple taken been,
The apple taken been,
Ne had never our lady
A-been heavene queen.

Blessed be the time
That apple taken was.
Therefore we moun singen
Deo gratias!

Anonymous

English, fourteenth century

Giles Swayne (b. 1946)

4. **There is no rose**

Hodie Christus natus est;
hodie Salvator apparuit.

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

4. There is no rose (cont.)

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

By that rose we may well see
That he is God in persons three...

Gloria in excelsis Deo:
Gaudeamus.

Hodie in terra canunt angeli, laetantur
archangeli: hodie exultant iusti, dicentes:

Leave we all this worldly mirth,
And follow we this joyful birth;
Alleluia.

Anonymous
English, early fourteenth century

Tansy Davies (b. 1973)

5. Christmas Eve
Christmas hath a darkness
Brighter than the blazing noon,
Christmas hath a chillness
Warmer than the heat of June,
Christmas hath a beauty
Lovelier than the world can show:
For Christmas bringeth Jesus,
Brought for us so low.

Earth, strike up your music,
Birds that sing and bells that ring;
Heaven hath answering music
For all angels soon to sing:
Earth, put on your whitest
Bridal robe of spotless snow:
For Christmas bringeth Jesus,
Brought for us so low.

Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

James Macmillan (b. 1959)
6. Nova! Nova! Ave fit ex eva
Gabriel of high degree,
He came down from the Trinity
From Nazareth to Galilee,
Ut nova. Ave fit ex Eva.

He met a maiden in a place;
He kneeled down before her face;
He said: "Hail, Mary, full of grace!"
Ut nova. Ave fit ex Eva.

When the maiden saw all this,
She was sore abashed, ywis,
Lest that she had done amiss.
Ut nova. Ave fit ex Eva.

Then said the angel: "Dread not you,
Ye shall conceive in all virtue
A child whose name shall be Jesu."
Ut nova. Ave fit ex Eva.

Then said the maid: "How may this be,
Godes Son to be born of me?
I know not of man's carnality."
Ut nova. Ave fit ex Eva.

Then said the angel anon right:
"The Holy Ghost is on thee alight;
There is no thing impossible to God Almighty."
Ut nova. Ave fit ex Eva.

Then said the angel anon:
"It is not fully six months agone,
Since Saint Elizabeth conceived Saint John."
Ut nova. Ave fit ex Eva.

Then said the maid anon quickly:
"I am Godes own truly,
Ecce ancilla Domini."
Ut nova. Ave fit ex Eva.

Anonymous
English, fifteenth century

Roxanna Panufnik (b. 1968)
7. Alma redemptoris mater
Alma Redemptoris Mater, quæ pervia cæli
Porta manes, et stella maris, succurre cadenti,
Surgere qui curat, populo: tu quæ genuisti,
Natura mirante, tuum sanctum Genitorem
Virgo prius ac posterius, Gabrielis ab ore
Sumens illud Ave, peccatorum miserere.

Loving Mother of our Saviour... drift by your
solitudes, our solitudes.

*Gentle mother of the redeemer, you ever
remain a road and gateway to heaven, and
star of the sea, who provides help to the
fallen and raises up the people, you who
by wondrous means bore your holy
parent. Virgin before and after, taking
that 'hail' from Gabriel's mouth, pity our
sins.*

Hermannus Contractus (d. 1054)

Cecilia Mcdowall (b. 1951)
8. Before the paling of the stars
Before the paling of the stars,
Before the winter morn,
Before the earliest cock crow,
Jesus Christ was born:
Born in a stable,
Cradled in a manger,
n the world his hands had made
Born a stranger.

Priest and king lay fast asleep
In Jerusalem;
Young and old lay fast asleep
In crowded Bethlehem;
Saint and angel, ox and ass,
Kept a watch together
Before the Christmas daybreak
In the winter weather.





8. Beyond the paling of the stars (cont.)

Jesus on his mother's breast
In the stable cold,
Spotless lamb of God was he,
Shepherd of the fold:
Let us kneel with Mary maid,
With Joseph bent and hoary,
With saint and angel, ox and ass,
To hail the King of Glory.

Christina Rossetti

John Tavener (1944-2013)

9. A Cradle Song

Lullaby

Sleep sleep, happy child.
All creation slept and smil'd.
Sleep sleep, happy sleep,
While o'er thee thy mother weep.

Lullaby

Sweet babe in thy face,
Holy image I can trace.
Sweet babe, once like thee,
Thy maker lay and wept for me.

Lullaby

Wept for me, for thee, for all,
When he was an infant small.
Thou his image ever see,
Heavenly face that smiles on thee.

Lullaby

Smiles on thee, on me, on all,
Who became an infant small,
Infant smiles are his own smiles,
Heaven & earth to peace beguiles.

Lullaby

William Blake (1757-1827)

from Songs of Innocence and Experience

Christopher Fox (b. 1955)

A Dream of winter

10. Digging

To-day I think,
Only with scents, - scents dead leaves yield,
And bracken, and wild carrot's seed,
And the square mustard field;

Odours that rise
When the spade wounds the root of tree,
Rose, currant, raspberry, or goutweed,
Rhubarb or celery;

The smoke's smell, too,
Flowing from where a bonfire burns
The dead, the waste, the dangerous,
And all to sweetness turns.

It is enough

To smell, to crumble the dark earth,
While the robin sings over again
Sad songs of Autumn mirth.

11. Swedes

They have taken the gable from the roof of clay
On the long swede pile. They have let in the sun
To the white and gold and purple of curled fronds
Unsunned. It is a sight more tender-gorgeous
At the wood-corner where Winter moans and drips
Than when, in the Valley of the Tombs of Kings,
A boy crawls down into a Pharaoh's tomb
And, first of Christian men, beholds the mummy,
God and monkey, chariot and throne and vase,
Blue pottery, alabaster, and gold
But dreamless long-dead Amen-hotep lies.
This is a dream of Winter, sweet as Spring.

12. Thaw

Over the land freckled with snow half-thawed
The speculating rooks at their nests cawed
And saw from elm-tops, delicate as flowers of grass,
What we below could not see, Winter pass.

13. Tall nettles

Tall nettles cover up, as they have done
These many springs, the rusty harrow, the plough
Long worn out, and the roller made of stone:
Only the elm butt tops the nettles now.

This corner of the farmyard I like most:
As well as any bloom upon a flower
I like the dust on the nettles, never lost
Except to prove the sweetness of a shower.

Edward Thomas (1878-1917)

Kerry Andrew (b. 1978)

14. **Hevene Quene**

O virgo splendens;
Edi beo thu, hevene queen.
Thou asteyre so the daiy rewe
The deleth from the deorke nicht.
Splendens hevene queen,
Of the sprong an lemme newe
That all this world haveth iliyt.
Mi swete levedi her mi bene
And reu of mi if thy wille is;
O virgo splendens.

*O virgin shining brightly;
Blessed be you, queen of heaven,
You rose up like daybreak
From the dark night.
From you sprang a new sunbeam
Which has lit all the world.
My sweet lady, hear my plea
And take pity of me if it be your will.*

Anonymous

English, late-thirteenth century

Stevie Wishart

Three Carols

15. Te Deum Laudamus
Of Mary, a maide without lessing,
this day was borne a worthy king:
therfore with joy now let us syng,
'Te Deum laudamus.'

On Christmas Day that child borne was
Man to redeme for owr trespass;
Therfor syng we both more and lesse:
'Te Deum laudamus.'

16. Let's be merry as bird on berry

This time is born a child full good,
He that is bought upon the Rood;
He bound the devil that is so wode,
Till the dreadful Doomesday.

Let's be merry as birds on berry
And all thy care let away.

When the child of mickle might
Would be born of Mary bright,
A token he sent to king and knight,
A star that shone night and day.

Let's be merry...

In token he was withouten peer,
And peerless he shall lasten ay.
The star shone as bright as fire,
Over all the world both far and near.

Let's be merry...

The twelfth day come kings three,
Out of the East, with heartes free,
To worship him they kneeled on knee
With gold and myrrh and frankincense.

Let's be merry...

17. Lullaby for Freya

Mo ghaol, mo ghràdh is m' eudail Thu!
'ionntas ùr is m' èibhneas Thu!
Mo mhacan àlainn, ceutach Thu!
Chan fhìù mi fhèin a bhith ad dhàil.

Ged as leanabh diblidh thu
Cinnteach Rìgh nan Rìghrean Thu
S Tu'n t-òighre dligheach, firinneach
Air rioghachd Dhe nan gràs

M' ulaidh, m' aighear, is mo luaidh thu,
Rùn, is gaol, is gràdh an t-sluaigh thu;
'S tus' an Tì a bheir dhoibh fuasgladh
Bho chuibhreach an namhaid uaibhrich.

*My love whose eye has tender gaze!
My love whose heart is full of love!
Though you are a babe without fault,
You grow in victory.*

*Though a feeble baby are you
for sure the king of kings are you
You're the rightful, true heir
of the Kingdom of God of the Graces.*

*My treasure, my joy, my love, you are a passion,
A darling and an affection.
You are the One who will
give to them resolution,
away from the chain of the proud enemy.*

Sally Beamish (b. 1956)

18. **In the stillness**

Text by Katrina Shepherd

St Catharine's College Choir

St Catharine's College lies at the historic centre of Cambridge and at the heart of the University's distinguished musical tradition. Founded in 1473, there has been a choir associated with the college for over a hundred years. The mixed student choir currently consists of around 24 undergraduate and graduate members, augmented by former choristers from the Girls' Choir; and sings regular services in the college's eighteenth century chapel.

In recent years the choir has toured as far afield as Japan, the United States and China, and makes frequent visits to the continent. This is the first in a projected three-disc sequence of recordings for the Resonus label, featuring the best in contemporary British choral music. The choir is directed by Dr Edward Wickham with the assistance of two organ scholars.

The St Catharine's Girls' Choir

The St Catharine's Girls' Choir – the only college-based girls' choir in the UK – was founded in 2008. The choir sings weekly in the College Chapel, as well as giving regular concerts and its repertoire extends from the early Middle Ages to the twenty-First century, with several works written specially for it. The choir is made up of 20 girls, aged between eight and fifteen, drawn from local schools; and for this recording is augmented by former choristers.

The choir has performed in some of the UK's leading venues including London's St John's, Smith Square, and St David's Hall, Cardiff. It has performed live on Radio 3's *The Choir* and toured to Poland and Hungary. Their second recording for Resonus will be devoted to contemporary music for upper voices.





Edward Wickham

Edward Wickham is a Fellow and Director of Music at St Catharine's College, Cambridge. He combines his duties in Cambridge with performing engagements throughout the world, principally with The Clerks, the vocal ensemble which he formed in 1992. He came to St Catharine's College in 2003, and in 2008 established the first college-based children's girls' choir. With The Clerks, he has made a series of ground-breaking recordings, principally of Franco-Flemish Renaissance music. In 2001 the ensemble completed an award-winning survey of the music of Jean Ockeghem and more recent projects have included first-time recordings of polyphony by composers such as Josquin, Barbireau and Regis.

In recent years, Dr Wickham has been exploring, through collaborative and experimental projects, modes of performance which break out of the traditional Western classical tradition. With multi-media sound installations, partnerships with singers from the Middle East, and ground-breaking educational and outreach programmes, he is committed to pursuing an idiosyncratic agenda of artistic innovation and social participation.

His most recent projects, funded by Arts Awards from The Wellcome Trust, explore issues of cognition and intelligibility in musical lyrics and libretti.

St Catharine's College Choir

Sopranos

Bramble Badenach-Nicolson
Faith Bale Barker*
Gemma Cooper
Lucy Featherstone**
Sarah Hess
Jasmine Hunt
Frances Leith
Sofia Swenson-Wright

Altos

Eleanor Chan
William Fairbairn
Olivia Franks
Emily Hallinan
Rosa Hirtzel
Eleanor Hunt
Phoebe McFarlane
Esther Osorio-Whewell

Tenors

Joe Beighton
Michael Bell
Alex Coplan
Daniel Leung
Robert Pellow
Lawrence Price**

Basses

James Bartlett
Nathaniel Darling
James Dougal
Dan Hurst
Patrick Johansson*
Sam Niblett
Matthew Temple
Oliver Titheridge-Stone

Will Fairbairn *Neville Burston Organ Scholar*

*soloists in *There is no rose*

** soloists in *Hevene Quene*

St Catharine's Girls' Choir

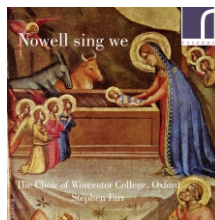
Veronica Cornwell
Abbie Keegan
Olivia Cleobury
Sophie O'Sullivan
Annabel Butler
Grainne Dignam
Beatrice Greenhalgh
Alexandra Lee
Rebecca Peacock
Rachel Barlow
Amy Keegan
Agatha Pethers
Siân Ellis *Chaplain's Chorister*
Anna Mullock *Master's Chorister*
with
Eleanor Hunt, Jasmine Hunt and
Sofia Swenson-Wright

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