



IN NO STRANGE LAND

Choral Music by
Martin Bussey

SONORO
MICHAEL HIGGINS organ
NEIL FERRIS conductor

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Martin Bussey (b. 1958)

Sonoro
Michael Higgins *organ*
Neil Ferris *conductor*

About Sonoro:

'Conductor Neil Ferris encourages his singers to generate a rich, robust texture, abundant in vibrant colour and undoubted excitement'

The Observer

'The singing of Sonoro is expert: they achieve a fine balance and make a sound which is clear and consistently pleasing'

MusicWeb International

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In No Strange Land: Choral Music by Martin Bussey

The music on this disc charts a long period of composition because choral music has always been at the heart of my musical working life, as conductor and singer as well as composer. So, in many ways, these pieces have been written from 'the inside'.

All the pieces on the disc take their starting point from the text. This may sound an obvious way of working, but it is intended as a significant statement about where the pieces have their origin. Manuscripts and copies of my choral works always include the phrase 'Setting of...' identifying the author of the words, before the composer's name. This is a statement of intent. Sometimes the text offers a philosophical or theological impetus to the music. In other cases the very sound of the words propels the music.

Many pieces are *a capella* because of the rich textures and harmonies that can be achieved by splitting the conventional four voice parts, and by using solo voices from the choir. Multi-voice works for choir also offer many possibilities in terms of linear writing, which characterises most of the music here.

Many of the pieces were composed with specific occasions or performing groups in mind. Three pieces on the disc were composed for the BBC Pilgrim Consort. This broadcast from various pilgrimage sites across Europe. Formed initially for daily broadcasts from along the 'Camino' pilgrim route to Santiago di Compostella, the group went on to visit Lindisfarne in 2005, for which **The Breaking of Bread**, a meditation on the road to Emmaus, was composed. The emphasis here is on the moment of revelation as 'their eyes were opened, and they knew him', expressed harmonically. **The Praises of St Francis**, featuring a prominent tenor solo, was written for a broadcast of Choral Vespers from the Franciscan Abbey of Montserrat in 2006. The setting aims to capture some sense of mystic rapture, a frequent theme in these choral works. The last broadcast, from St-Paul-Without-the-Walls in Rome in 2008, was the occasion for writing *Children of Light*, a setting of positive verses from St Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, which is characterised by dynamic rhythm.

Other works are the fruit of reading or travel, often both. A visit to Durham Cathedral in the early 1990s inspired the composition of **Christ is the morning star**,

the text by the Venerable Bede which is displayed over his tomb there. Here the dominant Soprano line focuses the music on the word 'star'. Composed in 2007, **Swet Jesu** represents a strong interest in Celtic, particularly Irish spirituality, being a fourteenth century text by 'Brother Michael'. Its spare vocal texture is not intended to imitate any type of medieval music but rather to aim at a simplicity often lost in more complex poetry or music. **Jesu pro me perforatus** has an unusual association with place. The text is a Latin translation of the hymn, Rock of ages. It is placed as a monument to W.E. Gladstone in Hawarden Church in Wales. Gladstone is supposed to have drafted the translation during a debate in the House of Commons. The lyricism of the Latin seemed much more poetic than the original English and is reflected in a highly melodic setting.

The earliest piece on the disc, **Balulalow**, composed in the 1980s, is one of several Christmas pieces. All of these tend towards a reflective view of the Nativity and its spiritual significance. The setting of Christopher Smart's **Where is this stupendous stranger** certainly reflects the line 'Nature's decorations glisten', particularly in the bright organ figurations.

Yet at the heart of the piece lies meditation on ideas such 'the magnitude of meekness' in contrasting, subdued choral passages. **The Burning Babe** is an extended setting of Robert Southwell's poem, written for the choristers of Manchester Cathedral in 2002. The starkly contrasting images in the poem, particularly of fire and cold, are characterised in rhythmic and textural ways until the revelation 'that it was Christmas Day' is given through a single pitch for voices and organ. In **The Jesse Tree**, a commission for the St George's Singers of Poynton in 2005, a rhythmic refrain 'And a branch shall grow out of his roots' dominates. The work was inspired visually, by medieval 'Jesse Tree' windows where the figure of Christ sits as the culmination of branches leading back to the figure of Jesse, the father of David.

Reading Roy Campbell's translations of poems by the sixteenth century Spanish mystic St John of the Cross led to the composition of **Del Nacimiento** and **Que se llamaba Maria** setting the original Spanish. The first piece represents the traditional picture of the infant Jesus surrounded by animals but with the emphasis on the dual emotions of sadness and joy. The second focuses on the figure of Mary but with a lightness characterised by a swaying

rhythm. **The Song of the Nuns of Chester** was an inevitable arrangement for my choir, Chester Bach Singers, who for over thirty years have sustained my enthusiasm for choral writing. The arrangement of a medieval plainsong, it uses both organ and voices as a backdrop without employing any pitches which are not present in the melody.

Two works originate in celebration of friends who are priests. **Whitsunday** is a simple setting of George Herbert's prayer to the Holy Spirit, 'Listen sweet Dove', composed for the first celebration of the Eucharist by Mark Williams. The silver jubilee of Simon Brandes in 2011 was celebrated in St Nicholas, Chiswick with a meditative piece, **Desideratum**, setting the familiar Psalm text 'Like as the hart desireth the waterbrooks'. The text of the Psalm is largely sung by the tenor soloist, with the chanted question 'When shall I come to appear before the presence of God', repeated continually by the choir, giving the piece its main emotional focus.

At the core of this disc sit the **Three Motets**, commissioned by the Oriel Singers of Liverpool in the late 1980s. Creating a slightly unusual triptych, Oscar Wilde

and Francis Thompson sit either side of, ostensibly, King Charles I. The common aspect is a spiritual intensity which transcends any sense of orthodox theology. Wilde's **Ave Maria** is linked indissolubly as an inspiration for the setting with Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (Behold, the handmaiden of the Lord) in picturing an awe-struck Mary (the emotion identified relies on the viewer's reaction). Wilde's rich, if not theologically on-track, allusions to Greek mythology provide strength to the episode of the Annunciation, which has often been represented rather limply. This is reflected in rich, multi-part chords, just as Mary's doubtful reaction is characterised in the answering solo voice which completes the phrase 'slew her utterly'. The piece is completed by reflection in the upper voices in triads over a setting of the Ave Maria text in tenors and basses.

By contrast, **The Evening Hymn of Charles I**, whose provenance seems unclear, is unclouded by any doubt in its calm instruction to 'Close thine eyes, and sleep secure'. The opening unison phrase gradually grows into multi-part linear writing. The increased number of melodic lines combine to create a richness which

is intended to reflect the vigour and strength of 'He that guards thee'. This is re-emphasised when the opening stanza of the hymn is repeated after a middle section which contrasts soprano and alto with tenor and bass voices. The addition of two solo sopranos increases the richness still further before the piece subsides, but with a tenor solo whose insistence on the pitch A against the concluding choral E-flat major chord may be perceived as either a question mark or an insistence on the ever-watchful nature of God.

Francis Thompson's poem **In no strange land** is memorable not least for its final image of 'Christ walking on the water, not on Gennesareth, but Thames'. The poem, originally titled 'The Kingdom of God', was found amongst the poet's papers after his early death. To the composer of the setting represented here, it is about the nearness of the intangible, should we only choose to listen or to see. It springs undoubtedly from Thompson's period living in London in relative poverty: he is often described as having been a 'down-and-out' but this may be an exaggeration. The phrases:

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry – clinging Heaven by the hems.

reflect a certainty of a spiritual presence even if it seems 'inapprehensible'. The multi-voice writing reflects the richness of Thompson's vision, pushing forward always, especially in representing the movement of the stars which 'beat at our own clay-shuttered doors', until the calm of the final image. The sense of unseen spiritual worlds or spheres, of the numinous, is a compelling one and sums up the mystic aspect which has been the starting point of so many pieces represented here.

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Texts and Translations

1. Children of Light

Sleeper, awake!
Sleeper rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.
For once you were darkness
but now in the Lord you are light.
Live as children of light. Alleluia.

Ephesians

2. Whitsunday

Listen sweet Dove unto my song,
And spread thy golden wings in me;
Hatching my tender heart so long,
Till it get wing, and flie away with thee.

Where is that fire which once descended
On thy Apostles? thou didst then
Keep open house, richly attended,
Feasting all comers by twelve chosen men.

Such glorious gifts thou didst bestow,
That th' earth did like a heav'n appeare;
The starres were coming down to know
If they might mend their wages, and serve here.

Lord, though we change, thou art the same;
The same sweet God of love and light:
Restore this day, for thy great name,
Unto his ancient and miraculous right.

George Herbert (1593–1633)

3. Sweet Jesus

Sweet Jesus hend and fre,
That was i-strawght on rode tre,
Nowthe and ever mid us be
And us schild from sinne.
Let thou noight to helle te
Thai that beth her-inne.
So bright of ble thou hire me,
Hoppe of alle mankyne!
Do us i-se the Trinite
And hevене riche to winne.

This worlde-is love is gon awai
So dew on grasse in someris dai,
Few ther beth, weilaway,
That lovith Goddis lore.
Al we beth iclung so clai,
We schold rew that sore.
Prince and king, what, menith thai
To libbe evir more?
Leveth yur plai and crieth ai:
Jesu Crist, thin ore!

Bro. Michael of Kildare (Irish, fourteenth century)

4. Jesus, pro me perforatus

Jesus, pro me perforatus,
Condar intra tuum latus;
Tu per lympham profluentem,
Tu per sanguinem re pentem
In peccata mi redunda,
Tolle culpem, sordes munda!

Coram Te nec justus forem
Quamvis tota vi laborem,
Nec si fide nunquam cesso,
Fletu stillans inde fesso;
Tibi soli tantum munus,
Salva me, Savator Unus!

Nil in manu mecum fero,
Sed me versus crucem gero;
Vestimento nudus oro,
Opem debilis imploro,
Fontem Christi quaero immundus,
Nisi laves, moribundus.

Dum hos artus vita regit,
Quando nox sepulcro legit;
Mor tuos quum sta re jubes,
Sedens Iudex in ter nubes,
Jesus, pro me perforatus,
Condar intra tuum latus!

*Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Save me from its guilt and power.*

*Not the labour of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All could never sin erase,
Thou must save, and save by grace.*

*Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace:
Foul, I to the fountain fly,
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.*

*While I draw this fleeting breath,
When mine eyes shall close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgment throne,*

*Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.*

*Augustus Montague Toplady (1740–1778)
Latin translation by William Ewart Gladstone
(1809–1898)*

5. The Burning Babe

As I in hoary winter's night
stood shivering in the snow,
Surpris'd I was with sudden heat
which made my heart to glow;
And lifting up a fearful eye to
view what fire was near,
A pretty Babe all burning
bright did in the air appear;
Who, scorched with excessive heat,
such floods of tears did shed
As though his floods should quench his
flames which with his tears were fed.
"Alas!" quoth he, "but newly born,
in fiery heats I fry,
Yet none approach to warm their
hearts or feel my fire but I!
My faultless breast the furnace is,
the fuel wounding thorns,
Love is the fire, and sighs the smoke,
the ashes shame and scorns;
The fuel Justice layeth on,
and Mercy blows the coals,
The metal in this furnace wrought
are men's defiled souls,
For which, as now on fire I am to
work them to their good,
So will I melt into a bath to
wash them in my blood."
With this he vanish'd out of sight
and swiftly shrunk away,

And straight I called unto mind
that it was Christmas day.

Robert Southwell (1561–1595)

6. Desideratum

Like as the hart desireth the waterbrooks,
so longeth my soul after thee, O God.
My soul is athirst for God,
yea, even for the living God.
When shall I come to appear
before the presence of God?

Psalms 42:1–2

7. The Jesse Tree

There shall come forth a shoot
out of the stem of Jesse,
and a branch shall
grow out of his roots.
That day the root of Jesse shall
stand for an ensign to the peoples.
It will be sought out by the nations
and its home will be glorious.
Let the wilderness and the solitary place,
Let the wasteland rejoice and bloom,
Let it bring forth flowers,
Let it blossom like the rose.
Rejoice and sing for joy.
A tender shoot has started
up from the root of grace,
as ancient seers imparted
from Jesse's holy race.
It blooms with a blight,
Blooms in the cold bleak winter
Turning our darkness into light.

Isaiah

8. Balulalou

O my dear heart, young Jesus sweet,
Prepare thy cradle in my spirit,
And I shall rock thee in my heart,
And never more from thee depart.

But I shall praise thee evermore,
With songs sweet unto thy gloir,
The knees of my heart shall I bow,
And sing that richt Balulalou.

*James (c.1495–1533), John (1500–1556)
and Robert Wedderburn (c.1510–c.1556)*

9. Where is this stupendous stranger

Where is this stupendous stranger,
Swains of Solyma, advise?
Lead me to my master's manger,
Shew me where my Saviour lies.
O most mighty! O most holy!
Far beyond the seraph's thought,
Art thou then so mean and lowly
As unheeded prophets taught?
O the magnitude of meekness!
Worth from worth immortal sprung;
O the strength of infant weakness,
If eternal is so young!
Nature's decorations glisten
Far above their usual trim;
Birds on box and laurels listen,
As so near the cherubs hymn.
God all-bounteous, all-creative,
Whom no ills from good dissuade,
Is incarnate, and a native
Of the very world he made.

Christopher Smart (1722–1771)

10. The Praises of St Francis

O quam gloriosum est,
sanctum et magnum in caelis habere patrem!
O how glorious it is,
to have a Holy and great Father in Heaven!
O quam sanctum, paraclitum,
pulchrum et admirabilem
talem habere sponsum!
O how holy, beautiful and admirable,
to have such a Spouse,
the Holy Paracelete!
O quam sanctum et quam dilectum et super omnia
desiderabilem habere.
O how holy, how beloved and desirable above
all things to have such a brother and such a son:
Our Lord Jesus Christ.
We are spouses when the faithful soul
is joined with our Lord Jesus Christ.
We are brothers when we do the will
of the Father who is in Heav'n!
We are brothers, we are mothers,
and to him we give birth through
a holy life which should shine.

St Francis of Assisi (1182–1226)

11. Del Nacimiento

Ya que'era llegado el tiempo
En que de nacer habia,
Así como desposado
De su talamo salia
Abrazado con su esposa,
Que en sus brazos la traia
Al cual la graciosa Madre
En un pesebre ponía,
Entre unos animales
Que a la sazón allí habia.
Los hombres decían cantares,
Los angeles melodia,

Festejando el desposorio
Que entre tales dos habia.
Pero Dios en el pesebre
Allí loraba y gemía,
Que eran joyas que la esposa
Al desposorio traía.
Y la Madre estaba en pasmo
De que tal trueque veía:
El llanto del hombre en Dios,
Y en el hombre la alegría,
Lo cual del uno y del otro
Tan ajeno ser solía.

*When the time came
for him to be born,
he went forth like a bridegroom
from his bridal chamber,
embraced his bride,
held her in his arms,
he, born of the gracious mother
laid in a manger
among animals
that were there at that time.
The men sang songs
and the angels melodies
to celebrate the marriage
happening between these two.
But God in the manger
cried and moaned there;
the tears were jewels brorought
to the wedding by the bride.
The mother looked in wonder
at such an exchange:
In God was man's lament
and in man was happiness,
the two things usually
strangers to one another.*

St John of the Cross (1542–1591)

12. **Que se llamaba María**
Entonces llamo a un arcangel,
Que San Gabriel se decia,
Y enviolo a una doncella
Que se llamaba María,
De cuyo consentimiento
El misterio se hacia;
En la cual la Trinidad
De carne al Verbo vestía.
Y aunque tres hacen la obra,
En el uno se hacia
Y quedo el Verbo encarnado
En el vientre de María.
Y el que tenia solo Padre,
Ya tambien Madre tenia,
Aunque no como cualquiera
Que de varon concebia;
Que de las entranas de ella
El su carne recibia
Por lo cual Hijo de Dios
Y del hombre se decia.

*Then he summoned an Archangel,
known as Gabriel,
and sent him to the virgin Mary,
at whose consent the
mystery was performed,
and in whom the Trinity
made the Word flesh.
Even though the action
was done by three
it was performed through one;
and the word became incarnate
in Mary's womb.
He that only had a father,
now had a mother also,
but he was not typical of
others conceived by man.
From her flesh he received flesh,*

and he is called the Son of God and man.

St John of the Cross

13. Song of the Nuns of Chester

Qui creavit coelum,
Lully, lully, lu,
Nascitur in stabulo
By, by, by, by, by,
Rex qui regit seculum
Lully, lully, lu.

Joseph emit paniculum
Lully, lully, lu,
Mater involvit puerum
By, by, by, by, by,
Et ponit in praesepio
Lully, lully, lu.

Inter animalia
Lully, lully, lu,
Jacent mundi gaudia
By, by, by, by, by,
Dulcis super omnia
Lully, lully, lu.

Lactat mater Dominii
Lully, lully, lu,
Osculatur parvulum
By, by, by, by, by,
Et adorat Dominum
Lully, lully, lu.

Roga mater filium
Lully, lully, lu,
Ut det nobis gaudium
By, by, by, by, by,
In perenni gloria
Lully, lully, lu.

*He who created the heavens,
Is born in stable,
The king who rules the world.*

*Joseph brings a garment,
Mary wraps up her child
And puts him in a manger.*

*Among the animals,
Lies all the world's joy,
truly never sweeter.*

*Mary suckles our Lord,
Kisses the little one
And keeps him from harm.*

*Mother, ask your son
To give us joy
In his eternal glory.*

*c.1430 Processional chant of the
original convent of St Mary's, Chester*

Three Motets

14. Ave Maria
Was this His coming! I had hoped to see
A scene of wondrous glory, as was told
Of some great God who in a rain of gold
Broke open bars and fell on Danae:
Or a dread vision as when Semele
Sickening for love and unappeased desire
Prayed to see God's clear body, and the fire
Caught her white limbs and slew her utterly:
With such glad beams I sought this holy place,
And now with wondering eyes and heart I stand
Before this supreme mystery of Love:
A kneeling girl with passionless pale face,
An angel with a lily in his hand,
And over both with outstretched wings the Dove.

Ave Maria gratia plena
Dominus tecum
Benedicta tu in mulieribus.

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women.*

Oscar Wilde (1854–1900)

15. The Evening Hymn of King Charles I
Close thine eyes and sleep secure
Thy soul is safe, thy body sure,
He that guards thee, He that keeps,
Never slumbers, never sleeps.
A quiet conscience in the breast
Hast only peace, hast only rest.
The music and the mirth of kings
are out of tune unless she sings,
Then close thine eyes and sleep secure.

Francis Quarles (1592–1644)

16. In No Strange Land
O world invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

Does the fish soar to find the ocean,
The eagle plunge to find the air –
That we ask of the stars in motion
If they have rumour of thee there?

Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars! –
The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places; –
Turn but a stone and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry; – and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry, – clinging to Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water,
Not of Genesareth, but Thames!

Francis Thompson (1859–1907)

17. The Breaking of Bread

And while he sat at meat with them,
he took bread, and blessed it, and brake it,
and gave it to them, and their eyes were opened.
Did not our hearts burn,
as he talked to us on the road?
The Lord is risen indeed,
and has appeared to Simon. Alleluia!
Open thou our eyes that we may know thee
In the breaking of bread.

From Luke 24

18. Christ is the morning star

Christ is the Morning Star,
who, when the night of this world is past,
gives to his saints the promise of the light of life,
and opens everlasting day.

Venerable Bede (c.672–735)

Acknowledgements

*Generous financial support from The Ida
Carroll Trust towards the making of this
recording is acknowledged with thanks.*

*Thanks also to the following who contributed
to the Crowdfunder Project to support this
recording at Bronze or Silver Reward level:*

*Silver Reward Supporters
Iain Burnside
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*And to the 36 Basic Reward supporters:
I'm most grateful!*

Martin Bussey

Sonoro

Sonoro, founded in 2016 by Neil Ferris and Michael Higgins, has attracted attention for its warm tone, rich blend of colours and vibrancy in performance. 'Sonoro' in Italian means 'sonorous, voices that are rich and full' and Sonoro lives up to that name as a choir with a distinctive and perfectly blended sound.

Sonoro have performed at major national and international festivals and venues including the London Chamber Music Society series at Kings Place, the Wimbledon International Music Festival, the St Magnus International Festival, Orkney and in St Gallen, Switzerland.

Sonoro's debut album *Passion and Polyphony* featuring works of James MacMillan and Frank Martin was released in March 2018 to critical acclaim. Their recent album *Christmas with Sonoro* was named *BBC Music Magazine's* 2018 'Christmas Choice'.

Neil Ferris (conductor)

Neil Ferris is Chorus Director of the BBC Symphony Chorus, Artistic Director of Sonoro and Music Director of Wimbledon Choral Society. He has worked with the

National Youth Choir of Great Britain, the National Youth Choir of Wales, London Symphony Chorus and the BBC Singers. He has conducted the London Symphony Orchestra, London Mozart Players, Orchestra of the Swan, the orchestra of Welsh National Opera and Florilegium. Neil is recognised as one of the UK's leading teachers of choral conducting and has led masterclasses in the UK, USA, Ireland, and Denmark.

Michael Higgins (organ)

Michael Higgins is a pianist, composer and arranger, and is Artistic Director of Sonoro. With a special interest in choral accompaniment, Michael is in demand with some of the leading choirs in the country and works with the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain, London Voices, and the BBC Singers. As a composer and arranger he has written for Farnham Youth Choir, the National Children's Choir of Great Britain, as well as music for television, corporate films and commercials. Many of his works are published by the Royal School of Church Music, Novello, and Oxford University Press. Michael studied piano at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, the Royal Academy of Music, London, and at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music, Budapest.



Martin Bussey

Martin Bussey has long combined the roles of composer, conductor and singer. He has directed the Chester Bach Singers for over thirty years, the BBC Daily Service Singers and Chetham's Chamber Choir, and is a vocal tutor at Manchester University. He is Chairman of the Finzi Friends and a director of Ludlow English Song.

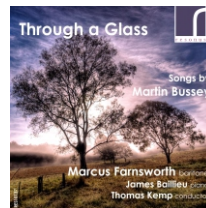
Martin's *Mary's Hand*, a one-woman show created with Di Sherlock and mezzo-soprano Clare McCaldin, premiered in 2018 to great critical acclaim, described as outstanding with evocative music by *The Independent* and linear, finely-wrought and daringly spare in *The Stage*. Performances, well into double figures, have included Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester. Two performances will take place at The Tower of London in 2020.

The BBC broadcasts performances of Martin's songs regularly from the Ludlow English Song Weekend and works on this disc have appeared in Choral Evensong broadcasts. Other recordings on Resonus Classics include *Through a glass*, a recording of Martin's songs, by Marcus Farnsworth, James Baillieu and

an ensemble directed by Thomas Kemp. Organist Tom Bell has recorded several of Martin's organ works on a London Independent Records disc, Northern Lights.

Martin was a Choral Scholar at King's College, Cambridge where he studied composition with Robin Holloway and singing with John Carol Case, after which continued singing studies at the Royal Northern College of Music. He ran the aural, academic music and choral programmes at Chetham's School of Music, where he taught from 1988 to 2013.

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Marcus Farnsworth (baritone),
James Baillieu (piano), Thomas Kemp (conductor)
RES10137

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The Observer



Passion & Polyphony: Sacred Choral Music by
Frank Martin & James MacMillan
Sonoro, Neil Ferris (conductor)
RES10208

'Conductor Neil Ferris encourages his singers to generate a rich, robust texture, abundant in vibrant colour and undoubted excitement.'
The Observer

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Recorded at St Jude's Church, Hampstead Garden Suburb, London on 11–13 February 2019

Producer, engineer & editor: Adam Binks

Recorded in 24-bit/96kHz resolution

Cover image: Milky Way by Denis Belitsky (www.shutterstock.com)

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