

The background is a reproduction of a medieval mural depicting the Annunciation. An angel with large, peacock-like wings stands on the left, facing the Virgin Mary on the right. Mary is kneeling on a wooden bench, holding a book. In the background, a man in a blue and white robe is shown in prayer. The scene is set within a series of stone arches.

Alpha & O

Music for Advent & Christmas

The Choirs Of St Catharine's
College, Cambridge
Edward Wickham

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St Catharine's College Choir ^{1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19}
St Catharine's Girls' Choir ^{2, 4-6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20}

Caius Lee *organ* ²⁰

Edward Wickham *conductor*

About The Choirs of St Catharine's College:

*'[...] unified by a thread of tenderness and warmth
that runs through the whole disc'*
The Telegraph

*'[...] firm, intelligent shaping of
this enterprising and rewarding recital'*
BBC Music Magazine

| | | | |
|---|--------|--|---------|
| Judith Weir (b.1954) 1. My Guardian Angel | [2:12] | Plainchant 12. O clavis David | [1:05] |
| Hannah Kendall (b. 1984) 2. Nativity | [4:28] | Christopher Fox O Antiphons 13. Open the Gate * | [1:53] |
| Joanna Forbes L'Estrange 3. Advent 'O' Carol | [6:14] | Plainchant 14. O Oriens | [0:47] |
| Paul Chihara (b.1938) 4. Magnificat | [4:31] | Christopher Fox O Antiphons 15. Morning Star * | [2:13] |
| Diana Burrell (b.1948) 5. Green groweth the holly * | [4:53] | Plainchant 16. O Rex gentium | [0:51] |
| Plainchant 6. O Sapientia | [0:54] | Christopher Fox O Antiphons 17. A Cornerstone * | [3:21] |
| Christopher Fox (b. 1955) O Antiphons 7. Alpha and O * | [2:57] | Plainchant 18. O Emmanuel | [0:53] |
| Plainchant 8. O Adonai | [0:56] | Christopher Fox O Antiphons 19. Trust Above All * | [3:51] |
| Christopher Fox O Antiphons 9. In a Flame of Fire * | [2:35] | Jeremy Thurlow 20. Magnificat * | [6:52] |
| Plainchant 10. O radix Jesse | [0:55] | Total playing time | [54:29] |
| Christopher Fox O Antiphons 11. Our Grace * | [1:59] | | |

* world premiere recording



My Guardian Angel

Judith Weir writes:

'*My Guardian Angel*, a setting of a short text by William Blake, celebrates the increased incidence of public appearances by angels and Christmas time. The music of the carol is based around a repeated fourteen-bar unison melody, 'Alleluia' which may be performed by the audience/congregation whilst the choir weaves a four-part counterpoint around it.'

Text:

The Angel that presided o'er my birth
Said, 'Little creature, form'd of Joy
and Mirth,
Go love without the help of anything
and earth'.

William Blake (1757–1827)

Nativity

Hannah Kendall writes:

'This work sets John Donne's poem *Nativity*, and words from the book of John (8:12). Three main interleaved sections articulate the changing nuanced connotations within these texts. The Biblical phrase is intermittently broken down into smaller phrases of varying length throughout the

piece, with specific focus on 'the light', highlighting the essence of Donne's reflective depiction of Christ's birth.'

Text:

He is the light of the world. Whoever follows Him will never walk in darkness...

Gospel according to John 8:12

Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb,
Now leaves His well-belov'd imprisonment,
There He hath made Himself to His intent
Weak enough, now into the world to come;
But O, for thee, for Him,
hath the inn no room?
Yet lay Him in this stall,
and from the Orient,
Stars and wise men will travel to prevent
The effect of Herod's jealous general doom.
Seest thou, my soul,
with thy faith's eyes, how He
Which fills all place,
yet none holds Him, doth lie?
Was not His pity towards thee
wondrous high,
That would have need to be pitied by thee?
Kiss Him, and with Him into Egypt go,
With His kind mother, who partakes thy woe.

John Donne (1572–1631)

Advent 'O' Carol

Joanna Forbes L'Estrange writes:

Advent 'O' Carol is inspired by the text and chants of the seven 'O' Antiphons which traditionally would have been sung in the days immediately preceding Christmas (known as the Greater Ferias). The 'O' refrain, which opens the piece and reoccurs between each of the seven verses, is based on the opening melodic chant of the Medieval antiphons, its 7/8 time signature reinforcing the piece's connection to the number seven. Ignoring the 'O', the first letter of each verse forms an acrostic which, when reversed, spells ERO CRAS, Latin for 'I shall be (with you) tomorrow'. I have reworded this as 'Tomorrow I will come' for the final resolution of the piece.'

Text:

| | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| <i>O Sapientia</i> | O Wisdom |
| <i>O Adonai</i> | O Lord and Ruler |
| <i>O Radix Jesse</i> | O Root of Jesse |
| <i>O Clavis David</i> | O Key of David |
| <i>O Oriens</i> | O Dawn of the East |
| <i>O Rex Gentium</i> | O King of the Gentiles |
| <i>O Emmanuel</i> | O Emmanuel |

We long for your coming, O WISDOM;
We long for your coming, O Lord.

Come and teach us the way of understanding;
You are the living word.

We long for you, O LORD AND RULER;
We long for your coming, O Lord.
Come and stretch out your arms and redeem us;
You are the living word.

We long for you, O ROOT OF JESSE;
We long for your coming, O Lord.
Come to deliver us and do not tarry;
You are the living word.

We long for you, O KEY OF DAVID;
We long for your coming, O Lord.
Come and bring forth the captive from his prison,
Who sits in the shadow of death.

O DAWN OF THE EAST,
We long for your coming, O Lord.
Come and lighten those who sit in darkness
And in the shadow of death.

We long for you, O KING OF THE GENTILES;
We long for your coming, O Lord.
Come and deliver man whom you formed
Out of the dust of the earth.

O EMMANUEL! When will you come?
Come to save us, O Lord our God.

O ERO CRAS, tomorrow I will come.

Joanna Forbes l'Estrange, based on traditional O Antiphons

Green groweth the holly

Diana Burrell writes:

'This exuberant carol whose text is attributed to King Henry VIII was commissioned by the 'Venus Unwrapped' season at Kings Place, London in 2019 for the lovely young voices of St Catharine's College, Cambridge. All four of the SATB lines of the College Choir and the two parts of the Girl's Choir have their moments of importance, and as the melodic lines become ever more energetic and athletic during the final section there is almost a competitive spirit developing in the music. As the alto melody follows the soprano, basses follow tenors and the Children's Choir finishes the sequence, one can almost imagine a dialogue such as the following taking place between the different voices; 'We can leap higher than you' ... 'But we can run faster' ... 'Yes but look what we can do' ... 'No, we're definitely best!' – before everyone comes together in the rich harmonies of the final sentence.'

Text:

Green groweth the holly,
So doth the ivy;
Though winter blasts blow ne'er so high,
Green groweth the holly.

Gay are the flowers,
Hedgerows and plough-lands;
The days grow longer in the sun,
Soft fall the showers.

Full gold the harvest,
Grain for thy labour;
With God must work for daily bread,
Else, man, thou starvest.

Fast fall the shed leaves,
Russet and yellow;
But resting buds are snug and safe
Where swung the dead leaves.

Green groweth the holly,
So doth the ivy;
The God of life can never die,
Hope! saith the holly.

Magnificat

Paul Chihara writes:

'I composed my *Magnificat* for treble voices in Berlin in 1965, while I was on a Fulbright Fellowship at the (West Berlin) Hochschule

für Musik. This *Magnificat* was my first publication (originally published when I was twenty-eight). Being Roman Catholic, my musical and Christian training was largely steeped in Gregorian Chant, and the Marian musical tradition, primarily the 'Ave Maria' and 'Magnificat.' I wanted to create a Magnificat that was not only joyful and rapturous, but also angry and agonized as well. After all, Mary was the first and greatest possible Jewish Mother, who could have said: This is my son, the Saviour of the world!

And that is exactly the awe and a secret emotional energy that I wished to express. I built the chant-like presentation of the Biblical text around a very personal harmonic sound – that is both very tonal and also dissonant: a D Major/Minor triad, and a cluster of minor seconds. In my inner ear and heart, I hear this sound as a unique and individual (stationary) tonal center. And angry outburst in the middle section of the *Magnificat* ('Fecit potentiam in Bracchio Suo'), which echos the agony in the Song of Hannah (from the First Book of Samuel) reminds us that the Jews were an occupied people during the life of Mary (and of Jesus). Embedded in my *Magnificat* is the 'Ave Maria' from the Gregorian First Ecclesiastical Mode.'

Text & translation:

Magnificat: anima mea Dominum.
Et exsultavit spiritus meus:
in Deo salutari meo.
Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae:
ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent
omnes generationes.
Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est:
et sanctum nomen ejus.
Et misericordia ejus a progenie
in progenies: timentibus eum.
Fecit potentiam in brachio suo:
dispersit superbos mente cordis sui.
Deposuit potentes de sede:
et exaltavit humiles.
Esurientes implevit bonis:
et divites dimisit inanes.
Suscepit Israel puerum suum:
recordatus misericordiae suae.
Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros:
Abraham et semini ejus in saecula.

*My soul doth magnify the Lord:
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God
my Saviour.
For he hath regarded the lowliness of his
handmaiden: for behold, from henceforth
all generations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath magnified me:
and holy is his name.
And his mercy is on them that fear him:
throughout all generations.*

*He hath showed strength with his arm:
he hath scattered the proud in the
imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from
their seat: and hath exalted the humble
and meek.
He hath filled the hungry with good
things: and the rich he hath sent empty away.
He remembering his mercy hath holpen
his servant Israel:
As he promised to our forefathers,
Abraham and his seed for ever.*

*ThurLOW setting only:
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Ghost:
As it was in the beginning, is now,
and ever shall be: world without end.
Amen.*

O Antiphons

Christopher Fox writes:
'This set of *O Antiphons* was written between 2004 and 2018: the first, *Open the gate*, for the choir of Winchester College, the rest for the choir of St. Catharine's College, Cambridge. Each antiphon sets both the Latin liturgical text and an English text, the latter either a version of the Latin, or related Biblical passages in John Wycliffe's translation.

The *O Antiphons* are dedicated to Lisa Colton, who helped me find texts and plainsong melodies, and to Edward Wickham, who encouraged me to complete the set and then performed them with his choir in the chapel of St Catharine's College. The sixth antiphon, *A cornerstone*, is also dedicated to my late wife, Susan McNally (1954–2018). Each antiphon is based around one or more phrases from the plainsong melody to which the Latin text might be sung; this is perhaps clearest at the start of *Open the gate* where a version of the plainsong is heard in long notes in the alto part. The first six antiphons are paired symmetrically – one sharing some aspects of its music with six, two, with five, three with four – and the final antiphon draws together elements of all its predecessors.'

Here we present each of the contemporary polyphonic settings preceded by the appropriate Gregorian chant, sung by the Girls' Choir.

Alpha and O

O Sapientia, quae ex ore Altissimi prodisti, attingens a fine usque ad finem, fortiter: suaviter disponensque omnia: Veni, ad docendum nos viam prudentiae.

O wisdom, coming forth from the Most High,

filling all creation and reigning to the ends of the earth; come and teach us the way of truth.

O Wisdom, [...] out of God's mouth [...] from east to west, from north to south, that all things made.

Fourteenth-century English version, Worcester Cathedral Library.

In a flame of fire

O Adonai, et dux domus Israel, qui Moysi in igne flammae rubi apparuisti, et ei in Syna legem dedisti: Veni, ad redimendum nos in brachio extento.

O Lord of Lords, and ruler of the House of Israel, you appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush, and gave him the law on Sinai: come with your outstretched arm and ransom us.

Hold forth thine [mine] hand and [...] in all thy marvels [...] deliver us.

Exodus, 3:20

Our grace

O Radix Jesse, qui stas in signum populorum, super quem reges continebunt

os suum, quem gentes deprecabuntur: Veni ad liberandum nos, iam noli tardare.

O root of Jesse, standing as a sign among the nations; kings will keep silence before you for whom the nations long; come and save us and delay no longer.

O from Jesse, thou noble root, that to thy people art sure mark; we call to thee, be thee our grace; in thee be granted all our work. Thy name exalted by lords and kings; no man to praise may suffice; from thee springs virtue and all good things: come and deliver us from our sins. Of thee may no malice grow; for thou art purest goodness; in thee be rooted what we show: and grant us bliss on our decease.

Fifteenth-century English version, Ritson Manuscript, British Library

Open the gate

O Clavis David, et sceptrum domus Israel, qui aperis et nemo claudit, claudis et nemo aperit: Veni, et educ vincitum de domo carceris, sedentem in tenebris et umbra mortis.

O key of David and sceptre of the House of Israel; you open and none can shut;

you shut and none can open: come and free the captives from prison, and break down the walls of death.

O David, thou noble key, sceptre of the house of Israel; thou open the gate and give us way, and save us from the cruel fiend. We be in prison; on us have mind, and loose us from the bond of sin; for that thou loosest no man may bind, and that thou bindest may no man twain. Lord bow thine ear; to thee we call; deliver thou us from wickedness, and bring us to thy joyful hall, where ever is life without distress.

Fifteenth-century English version, Ritson Manuscript, British Library

Morning star

O Oriens, splendor lucis aeternae et sol iustitiae: Veni, et illumina sedentem in tenebris et umbra mortis.

O morning star, splendour of the light eternal and bright sun of righteousness: come and bring light to those who dwell in darkness and walk in the shadow of death.

Shining morning star, give light in the darkness.

Revelations, 22:16 & Luke, 1:79

A cornerstone

O Rex gentium, et desideratus earum: lapisque angularis, qui facis utraque unum: Veni, salva hominem, quem de limo formasti.

O king of the nations, you alone can fulfil their desires: cornerstone, binding all together: come and save the creature you fashioned from the dust of the earth.

A cornerstone precious, proved, founded in the foundation; be thou strengthened, for I am with thee.

Isaiah, 28:16 & Haggai, 2:4

Trust above all

O Emmanuel, Rex et Legi fer noster, expectatio gentium et Salvator earum: Veni, ad salvandum nos, Domine Deus noster.

O Emmanuel, our King and Lawgiver, hope of the nations and their saviour: come and save us, O Lord our God.

The spreading of his wings shall fill the breadth of the land; and save us from mischief all.

Isaiah, 8:8. Fifteenth-century English version, Harley 45 Manuscript, British Library.

Magnificat

Jeremy Thurlow writes:

'A young woman – perhaps as young as thirteen or fourteen – has just had an overwhelming, inconceivable and impossible encounter with an extraterrestrial being, a messenger from the heavens. She is awestruck but also electrified, blazing with the intensity of a new vision of the world. This is the context in which Mary utters the words known as 'the Magnificat'. Setting these words for St Catharine's choir of girls' voices, I ask the singers to imagine themselves in this moment, to sing out these startling proclamations as if for the very first time, with the whirlwind of an angelic visitation still ringing in their ears.'

For text, see above.



Edward Wickham

St Catharine's College Choir

Sopranos
Hannah Bostock
Juliet Everson
Amy Fidler
Beatrice Greenhalgh
Isabella Savage

Altos
Ally Barrett
Isabel Bunce
Juliet Firth
Vicky Gray
Emelia Harrison
Frey Kalus
Rachel Kendal

Tenors
George Foster
George Merryweather
Alexander Wallace

Basses
Ed Cheung
Matt Haygarth
Caius Lee
Zhihan Nan
Giles Shaw

St Catharine's Girls' Choir

Eleanor Alban
Sara Garces
Victoria Hamilton
Eliza Robson-Brown
Maria Laura Tavares Jefferis
Isla Amies
Avni Balan
Flora Harrison
Margaret Purves
Ella Davidson
Matilda Tennant
Susanna Beale
Lilian Gleave
Maya Ruocco
Gabiella Zailer-Fletcher
Anna Morris
Francesca Hope Stevenson
Isabella Wickham

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; and since 2008 the choral tradition at St Catharine's has been augmented by a Girls' Choir, the first college-based choir of its type in the UK.

St Catharine's College Choir

The College Choir is drawn mainly from the college's undergraduate cohort and its main function is to maintain the weekly round of services in the college's eighteenth century chapel; but its work extends beyond, to broadcasts, recordings and concert tours. In recent years the choir has toured to Japan, Singapore, the United States and China, and makes frequent visits to the continent. The choir has released several discs on the Resonus Classics label, championing the best in contemporary British choral music as well as little-known Renaissance repertoire; recent releases have been devoted to previously unrecorded music from Reformation France and motets from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in honour of St Catharine.

St Catharine's Girls' Choir

The Girls' Choir was founded in 2008 as the first college-based choir for girls in the UK, breaking with the 900 year tradition of boys' only choirs and setting a precedent which has been followed by several other institutions. The ethos of the choir differs from many other choirs of its type. Neither a school choir, nor limited to traditional Church repertoire, we are always looking at ways to expand the musical experience and vision of choir members, and this is reflected in the diversity of the choir's

activities, which has included science outreach, working with musicians from the Middle East, and premiering experimental electro-acoustic works.

In its first ten years, the choir has given performances in such distinguished venues as St Paul's Cathedral, St David's Hall, Cardiff and St John's, Smith Square, and has sung services in the Cathedrals of Ely, Lichfield and Gloucester. The choir has toured to Eastern Europe and California, broadcast on BBC Radio and released two recordings on the Resonus Classics label, devoted to contemporary music.

Edward Wickham

Edward Wickham was appointed Director of College Music at St Catharine's in 2003. As well as his duties in Cambridge, he maintains an active career as a conductor, choral coach and academic. With his *Gramophone* award-winning vocal consort The Clerks, he recorded over twenty albums, and performed in many of the country's most prestigious concert halls. His work with choirs has taken him to the United States, the Far East and festivals throughout Europe, and he is founder and artistic director of The Oxford and Cambridge Singing School, which delivers music courses for children in the UK, Far East and Australia.

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Edward Wickham (conductor)
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