



SANSARA

INVISIBLE CITIES

CHORAL & ELECTRONIC MUSIC BY

MARCO GALVANI

Invisible Cities

Choral & Electronic Music by Marco Galvani

SANSARA

Tom Herring *artistic director*

About SANSARA:

'SANSARA slips easily into the elite ranks of exceptional performers...breathhtaking'
Choir & Organ

'[...] perfect intonation and a clean, pure sound...choral singing with real depth'
The Observer

Marco Galvani (b.1994)

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| 1. ALEPH | [3:02] |
| 2. Lamentations I | [4:48] |
| 3. Ubi caritas | [4:45] |
| 4. Lamentations II | [5:58] |
| 5. BETH | [3:14] |
| 6. Ave sanctissima Maria | [3:44] |
| 7. Ave maris stella | [5:04] |
| 8. Alma Redemptoris Mater | [3:21] |
| 9. GHIMEL | [4:26] |
| 10. Super flumina Babylonis | [4:51] |
| 11. O sacrum convivium | [6:16] |
| 12. DALETH | [5:10] |

Total playing time [54:47]



Invisible Cities

Invisible Cities is a sequence of sacred choral works and electronic refractions composed by Marco Galvani. The album was initially conceived as a collection of Marco's choral music, selected to showcase his distinct voice and consolidate our relationship with him as one of our Associate Composers. In March 2020, everything changed, and we had to postpone our original recording sessions.

Suddenly, we were spread all over the UK, not knowing when we would be able to meet, let alone sing together. We began to reflect on how best to reimagine the project to address the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic and its paralysing effect on society the world over. During this time, certain passages of text from the repertoire began to take on fresh significance. In particular, the famous line from the Lamentations of Jeremiah: 'Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo' / 'How lonely lies the city that was full of people'.

As cities around the world fell silent, we were reminded of Italo Calvino's novel *Invisible Cities*, with its fantastical places and meditations on humanity – vividly described by Marco Polo to the ageing Emperor Kublai Khan. Connections between people – real or

imagined – are a recurring theme in the novel and something we wanted to draw on as we contemplated the album anew.

The recording sessions in October 2020 were the first time the choir had sung together in person in several months and a timely reminder of the power of a *cappella* choral music. Our aim was to invest the music with a sense of longing and passion – giving voice to feeling in a time of social isolation.

*There runs an invisible thread that binds one living being to another for a moment, then unravels, then is stretched again between moving points as it draws new and rapid patterns so that at every second the unhappy city contains a happy city unaware of its own existence.**

The sequence is built around Marco's setting of the **Lamentations**. Originally commissioned by Jeremy Summerly for The Queen's College Chapel Choir in 2013, they exemplify his unique brand of polyphony mixed with passages of stasis and rich chordal textures. We first performed the set at the 2016 Passiontide at Merton festival in Oxford and have wanted to record it ever since. Throughout, Marco explores modal harmony with each tonal centre derived from the chant passages that open the two parts.

This Calvino-like structural device ties the whole set together, underpinning the surface textures with a subtle yet steady harmonic trajectory.

Drawing on famous settings by composers such as Thomas Tallis and Alonso Lobo, Marco gives considerable space to the Hebrew letters that punctuate the verses. Each one is distinct in texture and colour, and yet they all reside in the same dimension – a timeless space above and beyond the plane of the more descriptive passages. These passages form the basis for the four electronic tracks on the album which frame the choral pieces, drawing threads between them and providing space for reflection.

Between the two parts of the Lamentations is **Ubi caritas**, with its uplifting message of charity and love. Marco's setting stems from the plainsong chant which is presented in a series of variations punctuated by more declamatory passages. With its reserved sense of optimism, this piece represents the importance of community and hope in times of fear and uncertainty.

Marco Polo describes a bridge, stone by stone. 'But which is the stone that supports the bridge?' Kublai Khan asks. 'The bridge is not supported by one stone

or another,' Marco answers, 'but by the line of the arch that they form.'
Kublai Khan remains silent, reflecting. Then he adds: 'Why do you speak to me of the stones? It is only the arch that matters to me.' Polo answers: *'Without stones there is no arch.'* *

One of the core questions posed by this album is how sacred texts can speak to us today, particularly beyond performance in religious contexts and Christian spaces. The middle section of the sequence features settings of three Marian texts, each with a strong sense of devotion to the queen and gate of heaven. It is this idea of a celestial portal that gives this triptych its structural role in the wider context of the sequence, forming the central phase with two connected but independent worlds before and after.

*Travelling, you realize that differences are lost: each city takes to resembling all cities, places exchange their form, order, distances, a shapeless dust cloud invades the continents. Your atlas preserves the differences intact: that assortment of qualities which are like the letters in a name.**

In the Lamentations, we hear of the

destruction of Jerusalem and the plight of those in exile. **Super flumina Babylonis** is a lament for the lost city, with its remarkable line 'Quomodo cantabimus canticum Domini in terra aliena?' / 'How do we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?', strikingly set here by Marco. Jerusalem has become an invisible city, existing only in the memory of its captive and homeless population. As with the Lamentations, this text resonates today – particularly for refugees fleeing war and persecution around the world, but also in the global context of the pandemic. The closing verses speak of the importance of collective memory – the imagined worlds of the mind's eye.

The final choral work in the sequence is Marco's setting of **O sacrum convivium**. This text is also about memory and imagination, inspired by the 'sacred banquet' of Holy Communion where the memory of Christ's Passion is renewed, 'the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory to us is given.' Marco's approach to the text is particularly striking for its slow and steady increase in tempo and energy. Beginning with calm stasis, the music changes gear with each new line of text until the rapturous 'Alleluia' bursts through in cascading melodies in all voice parts before gradually dissipating back to stillness.

*The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space.**

At time of writing in March 2021, we remain in a liminal phase – caught between two worlds, the past and future simultaneously illusory and unreal. This album is our attempt to capture something of this moment, recorded in the midst of this stretched out 'in between'. We invite you to listen to the sequence in full and for it to be the soundtrack to personal reflection – as Marco Polo observes in *Invisible Cities*, 'it is not the voice that commands the story; it is the ear.'

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* Calvino, I. (1997) *Invisible Cities*. Trans. William Weaver (Vintage, London): p74, p125, pp133–4, p148



Texts and Translations

2. Lamentations I

Incipit Lamentatio Jeremiae prophetae.

*Here beginneth the Lamentations of the
Prophet Jeremiah.*

ALEPH.

ALEPH.

Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo!
Facta est quasi vidua domina gentium;
princeps provinciarum facta est sub tributo.

*How lonely lies the city that was full of people!
How like a widow has she become, she that
was great among the nations!
She that was a princess among the cities has
become a vassal.*

BETH.

BETH.

Plorans ploravit in nocte, et lacrimae ejus
in maxillis ejus:
non est qui consoletur eam, ex omnibus
caris ejus;
omnes amici ejus spreverunt eam, et facti
sunt ei inimici.

*She weeps bitterly in the night, tears on her
cheeks;
among all her lovers she has none to comfort her;
all her friends have dealt treacherously
with her, they have become her enemies.*

3. Ubi caritas

Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est.
Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor.
Exultemus, et in ipso iucundemur.
Timeamus, et amemus Deum vivum.
Et ex corde diligamus nos sincero.

*Where charity and love are, God is there.
Christ's love has gathered us into one.
Let us rejoice and be pleased in Him.
Let us fear, and let us love the living God.
And may we love each other with a sincere heart.*

Amen.

Amen.

Offertorium on Maundy Thursday

4. Lamentations II

De Lamentatione Jeremiae prophetae.

GHIMEL.

Migravit Judas propter afflictionem, et multitudinem servitutis; habitavit inter gentes, nec invenit requiem: omnes persecutores ejus apprehenderunt eam inter angustias.

DALETH.

Viæ Sion lugent, eo quod non sint qui veniant ad solemnitatem, omnes portæ ejus destructæ, sacerdotes ejus gementes; virgines ejus squalidæ, et ipsa oppressa amaritudine.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, convertere ad Dominum Deum tuum.

6. **Ave sanctissima Maria**, mater Dei, Regina caeli, porta paradisi, domina mundi. Pura singularis tu es virgo. Tu concepisti Jesum sine peccato. Tu peperisti creatorem et salvatorem mundi in quo ego non dubito. Libera nos ab omni malo et ora pro peccatis nostris.

The Lamentations of the Prophet Jeremiah.

GHIMEL.

Judah has gone into exile because of affliction and hard servitude; she dwells now among the nations, but finds no resting place; her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress.

DALETH.

The roads to Zion mourn, for none come to the appointed feasts; all her gates are desolate, her priests groan; her maidens have been dragged away, and she herself suffers bitterly.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem return unto the Lord thy God.

Hail most holy Mary, mother of God, Queen of heaven, gate of paradise, ruler of the world. You are a uniquely pure virgin. You conceived Jesus without sin. You bore the creator and saviour of the world in whom I do not doubt. Free us from every evil and pray for us sinners.



7. **Ave maris stella,**
Dei Mater alma,
Atque semper virgo,
Felix caeli porta.

Solve vincla reis,
Profer lumen caecis,
Mala nostra pelle,
Bona cuncta posce.

Vitam praesta puram,
Iter para tutum,
Ut videntes Jesum,
Semper collaetemur.

Sit laus Deo Patri,
Summo Christo decus,
Spiritui Sancto,
Tribus honor unus.

Amen.

8. **Alma Redemptoris Mater,**
quae pervia caeli porta manes,
et stella maris, succurre cadenti
sugere qui curat populo:

Tu quae genuisti, natura mirante,
tuum sanctum Genitorem:

Virgo prius ac posterius, Gabrielis ab
ore sumens illud
Ave, peccatorum miserere.

*Hail, star of the sea,
Nourishing mother of God,
Ever a virgin,
Joyous gate of heaven.*

*Release the chains of the guilty,
Bring light to the blind,
Take away our wrong-doing,
Demand all that is good.*

*Display a pure life,
Prepare your path,
So that we may see Jesus
And rejoice together always.*

*Let praise be to God the Father,
Glory to Christ the great,
To the Holy Spirit,
One honour in three.*

Amen.

*Loving Mother of the Redeemer,
who remains the gate by which we
mortals enter heaven,
and star of the sea, help your fallen
people who strive to rise:*

*You who gave birth, amazing nature,
to your sacred creator:*

*Virgin prior and following, taking from the
mouth of Gabriel that
Hail! Have mercy on our sins.*

10. **Super flumina Babylonis**
illic sedimus et flevimus,
cum recordaremur Sion.

In salicibus in medio eius suspendimus
organa nostra:
quia illic interrogaverunt nos, qui captivos
duxerunt nos, verba cantionum, et qui
abduxerunt nos: Hymnum cantate nobis
de canticis Sion.

Quomodo cantabimus canticum Domini
in terra aliena?

Si oblitus fuero tui, Jerusalem, oblivioni
detur dextera mea.

Adhaereat lingua mea faucibus meis,
si non meminero tui;
si non proposuero Jerusalem in
principio laetitiae meae.

Psalm 137, vv. 1–6

11. **O sacrum convivium** in quo
Christus sumitur;
recolitur memoria passionis ejus
mens impletur gratia,
et future gloriae nobis pignus datur.

Alleluia

*By the waters of Babylon we sat down
and wept,
when we remembered thee, O Sion.*

*As for our harps, we hanged them up upon
the trees that are therein:
for they that led us away captive required
of us then a song, and melody in
our heaviness:
Sing us one of the songs of Sion.*

*How shall we sing the Lord's song in a
strange land?*

*If I forget thee, O Jerusalem: let my right
hand forget her cunning.*

*If I do not remember thee, let my tongue
cleave to the roof of my mouth:
yea, if I prefer not Jerusalem in my mirth.*

*O sacred banquet! in which
Christ is received,
the memory of his Passion is renewed,
the mind is filled with grace,
and a pledge of future glory to us is given.*

Alleluia.

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SANSARA

Artistic Director & Conductor

Tom Herring

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Lucy Cox (solo: Lamentations II,

Alma Redemptoris Mater)

Fiona Fraser (solo: Lamentations II)

Victoria Meteyard*

Daisy Walford

Alto

Laura Baldwin (solo: Lamentations I, II)

Amy Blythe

Rosie Parker

Tenor

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Oscar Golden-Lee (solo: Lamentations I, II)

Jonathan Hanley

Bass

Piers Kennedy

Ben McKee

Ben Tomlin (solo: Lamentations I, II)

*Lamentations only



SANSARA

SANSARA is an award-winning vocal collective uniting the next generation of choral artists. Choirs are living, breathing instruments – bodies of voices with unparalleled expressive potential and powerful symbols of human coexistence. We harness this creative force through our engaged musicianship, communicating with passion and integrity to conjure spell-binding atmospheres.

Winners of the 2015 London International A Cappella Choir Competition, performance highlights include Barbican Sound Unbound, Kings Place, St John's Smith Square, V&A, Holy Week Festival, Temple Winter Festival, Newbury Spring Festival, Budleigh Festival and Winchester Festival.

The choir's debut recording, *Cloths of Heaven* (Convivium Records, 2017) received high praise for its 'perfect intonation and clean, pure sound' (*The Observer*) and 'breathtaking interpretations' (*Choir & Organ*). The group's second release, *The Waiting Sky* (Resonus Classics, 2019) was described as 'an excellent record' (*Gramophone*) and 'imaginative and eclectic' (*The Observer*). Both recordings have featured on BBC Radio 3 and 4 (*The Choir*, *Breakfast*, *Essential Classics*, *The World Tonight*).

'Choral singing with real depth'
The Observer

'SANSARA slips easily into the elite ranks of exceptional performers'
Choir & Organ

'Truly special'
Sir James MacMillan

'Hail SANSARA! A new star in the galaxy of wonderful chamber choirs.'
John Rutter

www.sansarachoir.com



Tom Herring

Tom is a conductor, singer and creative producer based in London. Co-founder and Artistic Director of SANSARA, he has directed the choir at festivals and venues across the UK and abroad, producing 'breath-taking interpretations' (*Choir & Organ*) of a broad range of repertoire. An alumnus of the Netherlands Chamber Choir's innovative NXT scheme, Tom sings regularly with Tenebrae and other professional ensembles as well as developing a solo career.

Tom read Music at the University of Oxford and has worked for Oxford Lieder, Association of British Orchestras, Intermusica and Sullivan Sweetland artist management. He is the producer of the Holy Week Festival at St John's Smith Square and a Project Manager and Mentor with Young People in the Arts.

Marco Galvani

Marco is a composer based in London, whose choral music is published by Edition Peters. Marco's choral pieces have been commissioned by the Royal Philharmonic Society, The Sixteen, Siglo d'Oro, Rushworth Foundation, and the Choir of The Queen's College Oxford, among others. His work in this area explores ways of reinterpreting polyphonic vocal writing for the twenty-first century, while drawing harmonic inspiration

from a variety of musical genres.

Marco has also worked extensively in the fields of opera and instrumental music, having been commissioned and performed by artists and foundation such as Matthew Schellhorn, The Hermes Experiment, CHROMA, London Accordion Orchestra, Borough New Music, and his two operas Rothschild's Violin and Autopilot Saves Model S were performed in 2016 and 2018, setting Chekhov and a New York Times inspired article/libretto by Leo Mercer respectively.

His recent work has explored the integration of electronics and AI with composition, including new commissions for Liverpool Light Nights Festival collaborating with virtual reality artist Rosie Summers and Leo Mercer, a new work for virtual ensemble Bandwidth, and a new operatic work exploring the idea of transhumanism for Tête-à-Tête Opera Festival 2021.

Marco has taught General Music and composition at the Yehudi Menuhin School since 2018, and divides his time between teaching and composing.

www.marcogalvani.co.uk

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Tom Herring (conductors)
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'Imaginative and eclectic'
The Observer



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Gramophone

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