



A BELFAST CHRISTMAS

BELFAST CATHEDRAL CHOIR
MATTHEW OWENS

A Belfast Christmas

Belfast Cathedral Choir
Gráinne Meyer *harp*^{3&13}
Jack Wilson *organ*

Matthew Owens *conductor and solo organ*^{6&19}

Elizabeth Poston (1905–87)		John Gardner (1917–2011)	
1. Jesus Christ the Apple Tree	[3:21]	12. A Gallery Carol, Op. 109, No. 4	[2:07]
Philip Ledger (1937–2012)		Philip Wilby (b.1949)	
2. The Voice of the Angel Gabriel	[4:05]	13. Moonless darkness stands between *	[4:08]
Gary Davison (b.1961)		Philip Ledger	
3. Rorate coeli desuper! *	[3:47]	14. Still, still, still	[3:02]
Philip Stopford (b.1977)		Elizabeth Poston	
4. Adam lay ybounden *	[2:57]	15. O Bethlehem	[3:02]
Philip Moore (b.1943)		Philip Moore	
5. Immortal Babe *	[1:48]	16. In the bleak midwinter *	[5:27]
John Ireland (1879–1962)		Philip Ledger	
6. The Holy Boy (A Carol of the Nativity)	[3:17]	17. On Christmas night (Sussex Carol)	[2:01]
Michael Praetorius (1571–1621) arr. Erling Pedersen (b.1944)		Philip Stopford	
7. A great and mighty wonder	[3:05]	18. What shall we offer thee, O Christ *	[3:18]
Patrick Hadley (1899–1973)		Matthew Owens (b.1971)	
8. I sing of a maiden	[2:58]	19. Tocatta on Good King Wenceslas	[3:57]
John Rutter (b.1947)		Bob Chilcott (b.1955)	
9. Mary's Lullaby	[4:05]	20. Good King Wenceslas	[2:58]
Philip Stopford		Total playing time	[67:59]
10. Lullay, my liking *	[5:34]		
Philip Moore			
11. Watts' Cradle Song	[2:51]		

* *World premiere recordings*



Introduction

I took up the role of Director of Music at Belfast Cathedral just six months before the first lockdown of the Covid-19 pandemic. I had loved this building for a long time, having been a frequent visitor to Northern Ireland for nearly twenty years prior to being appointed to my current position. I now feel very fortunate to make music regularly in this wonderful space, especially with its glorious acoustic.

Belfast Cathedral (the Cathedral Church of St Anne) is regarded as the national cathedral of Northern Ireland. It has stood for over 100 years as a place of Christian worship in the heart of the City of Belfast. Featuring the forty-metre stainless steel Spire of Hope (added in 2007), detailed mosaics, elaborately carved stonework, and beautiful stained-glass windows, this Hiberno-Romanesque building is one of the ecclesiastical and architectural gems of Northern Ireland.

As with many churches, Belfast Cathedral was completely closed to the public during the first lockdown of 2020 and beyond. This recording – the choir's first for Resonus Classics – took place in late June of 2021, under strict Covid-19 restrictions, and we were all thrilled to be able to use a window

of opportunity to record the works on this album.

Along with some familiar pieces, there are others which will be less well known, together with a number of world premiere recordings. It is our hope that this diverse offering will interest and inspire the listener, as well as giving a sense of comfort, joy, and peace at Christmas.

It is a real privilege and pleasure to lead this wonderful group of talented and committed musicians as we embark on this musical journey together.

Matthew Owens,
Director of Music, Belfast Cathedral
September 2021

Carols from Belfast Cathedral

Carol texts often have intriguing origins, and many date from medieval times.

Jesus Christ the Apple Tree (Track 1) is more recent, written by Richard Hutchins, a Baptist minister from Northamptonshire, and published in London's *Spiritual Magazine* in 1761. Its first musical setting appeared not in England but in New Hampshire, where it was published in *Divine Hymns, or Spiritual Songs* (1784) with a tune by Jeremiah Ingalls. Given this history, it's not surprising that the carol was often assumed to have American origins. The best-known setting is by Elizabeth Poston (1905–87), much of whose career was spent as a producer at the BBC (during World War Two – when she also worked for British Intelligence – and later for the newly-launched Third Programme). *Jesus Christ the Apple Tree* was first performed on 24 December 1967 in a broadcast from King's College, Cambridge, conducted by David Willcocks. Poston's **O Bethlehem** (Track 15) is an arrangement made in 1956 of a familiar Basque carol tune (usually set to the words 'Sing Lullaby'). It has a dedication 'In memory of Peter Warlock, for George C. Gray'. This was a very personal inscription: as a young woman, Poston knew Warlock (Philip Heseltine) well, writing after his death that

'his affectionate friendship was always the most delightful and happy thing for me.'

The other dedicatee was George Gray, the organist of Leicester Cathedral from 1931 to 1969.

Philip Ledger (1937–2012) was David Willcocks's successor at King's College. His setting of the Cornish carol **The Voice of the Angel Gabriel** (Track 2) (beginning with the line 'When gentle Joseph wedded was') is one of his last compositions, dedicated to Matthew Owens and the Choir of Wells Cathedral. It demonstrates his customary skill in treating a simple tune with ingenuity and respect, and the same qualities can be found in his ebullient arrangement of the **Sussex Carol**, (Track 17) based on the tune collected by Vaughan Williams in May 1904 at Monk's Gate near Horsham, Sussex. In Ledger's arrangement, each verse is preceded by a cascade of organ scales which become increasingly forceful. **Still, Still, Still** (Track 14) is more tranquil (Ledger marks it to be performed 'peacefully') and it's an arrangement of an old Austrian carol, its anonymous melody first noted at Salzburg in 1819.

While folk carols often paraphrase Biblical stories, the Latin introit **Rorate coeli desuper** (Track 3) is drawn directly from scripture (Isaiah 45:8). The usual plainsong melody

has been used for centuries in the Advent liturgy of the Roman Catholic church, but the tune here is entirely different: a Scottish folk melody, inventively arranged by the American composer Gary Davison (b.1961).

The words of **Adam lay ybounden** (Track 4) are known through a manuscript in the British Library, Sloane MS. 2593. Dating from around 1400, it was probably a minstrel song that may have been used in Mystery Plays. No early setting is known, but the text was printed in 1836 and twentieth century composers drawn to it included Peter Warlock, John Ireland, Boris Ord and Philip Ledger, as did Benjamin Britten in his *Ceremony of Carols*. The setting here is by Philip Stopford (b.1977) who has been associated with cathedral choirs since singing as a boy chorister at Westminster Abbey. After serving as Organ Scholar at Keble College, Oxford, he held posts at Canterbury and Chester before becoming Director of Music at Belfast Cathedral (2003–2010). Since 2016, he has worked at Christchurch, Bronxville, in New York. Stopford's version is a contrast to the settings by Ord and Britten as he gives the words a more reflective treatment. Stopford's **What shall we offer thee O Christ?** (Track 18) is a motet for Epiphany, written in 2019 for David Price and the choir of Portsmouth

Cathedral, with a text drawn from the Eastern Orthodox liturgy. The third Stopford piece is his 2019 setting of **Lullay, my liking** (Track 10) written for George P. Miller and the Loyola University Chapel Choir in Baltimore. Like *Adam lay ybounden*, the text is to be found in Sloane MS. 2593. It's a lullaby to the infant Jesus, and Stopford's setting emphasises the consoling character of Mary's words.

Philip Moore (b.1943) was in charge of music at Guildford Cathedral (1974–83) before becoming Organist and Master of the Music at York Minster (1983–2008). With famous versions by Harold Darke and Holst, it is a brave composer who takes on the challenge of producing a new setting of Christina Rossetti's **In the bleak midwinter** (Track 16). Moore's dates from 2001, written for the choir of the University of the South, in Sewanee, Tennessee. Moore creates an aptly desolate mood at the opening and his response to the poem never loses sight of its essentially melancholy quality, rising to a climax only at the closing words, 'Give my heart'. **Immortal Babe** (Track 5) dates from four decades earlier, based on a poem by Bishop Joseph Hall (1574–1656). Composed in 1960, Moore's version for upper-voices and organ brings a fresh sense of wonderment to the text.

Watts's Cradle Song ('Hush my dear, lie still and slumber') (Track 11), composed in 1965, is calmer, on a poem by Isaac Watts from 1715.

John Gardner (1917–2011) spent much of his life teaching at the Royal Academy of Music but he first came to prominence after John Barbiroli took up his First Symphony, giving it with huge success at the Cheltenham Festival in 1951. Gardner's choral pieces exude much the same energy and élan as his concert music and **A Gallery Carol** (Track 12) is no exception. Setting an anonymous text beginning 'Rejoice and be merry in songs and in mirth!', it was written in 1970 for Neville Atkinson and the Choir of the Perse School for Girls. Like his more famous *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day*, *A Gallery Carol* is a brilliant example of Gardner's spirited approach to carol composition.

Patrick Hadley (1899–1973) was another composer who devoted most of his career to teaching, firstly at the Royal College of Music, then for many years at Cambridge until his retirement in 1962. He was friends with many leading British musicians, including Vaughan Williams, Constant Lambert and Adrian Boult, but one of the most lasting influences was Delius. **I sing of**

a maiden (Track 8) is another medieval carol text to come from the British Library's Sloane Ms. 2593. It has attracted several composers – not least Britten in *A Ceremony of Carols* – but Hadley's 1936 version for upper voices has a tenderness that sets it apart.

Philip Wilby (b.1949) first became interested in composition during his teenage years thanks to classes given by Herbert Howells. Like Howells, much of his output has consisted of religious music. **Moonless darkness stands between** (Track 13) is not a setting of a conventional carol, but a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889) in which the poet longs for the Christmas star to guide him to a vision of the Christ-Child. Hopkins wrote it on Christmas Day 1865, more than a decade before his ordination as a Jesuit priest.

Mary's Lullaby (Track 9) is completely characteristic of John Rutter (b.1945), with a flowing melody in triple time, richly harmonised. It was written during his years as director of music at Clare College, Cambridge (1975–9), and the circumstances of its composition were not ideal: after a rehearsal for Christmas broadcast by the Clare choir, the producer was worried that the programme was too short and, as Rutter recalled, 'he asked

whether I could by any chance write him something for the choir to sing the following morning!'

Bob Chilcott (b.1955) was a chorister and choral scholar at King's College Cambridge. As a composer, several of his carols have found a lasting place in the repertoire. His extremely effective arrangement of **Good King Wenceslas** (Track 20) takes the tune originally set to the words 'Tempus adest floridum' (amusingly, an Easter carol rather than a Christmas one). This first appeared in *Piae cantiones* (1582), the Finnish collection that has served ever since as a veritable encyclopaedia of carol tunes. The story is based on the legendary deeds of St Václav of Bohemia (907–935), but the words are by John Mason Neale, something of a one-man Victorian carol factory who also wrote *Good Christian Men Rejoice* and the translations of *O come, O come, Emmanuel*, *Of the Father's love begotten* and *A Great and Mighty Wonder*.

It is Neale's words for **A great and mighty wonder** (Track 7) that are used in the arrangement of *Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen* by the Danish composer Erling Pedersen (b.1944). The tune was first published in the Speyer Hymnal in 1599 and is best known in the exquisite harmonisation made in 1609 by Michael Praetorius

(1571–1621). Composers have been lured by it ever since, including Brahms in one of his organ chorale preludes (Op. 122, No. 8) and Schoenberg in his *Weihnachtsmusik* (1921). Pedersen treats the melody sensitively, with delicately spiced harmonies.

This disc also includes two short organ pieces. John Ireland (1879–1962) originally wrote **The Holy Boy** (Track 6) for piano in 1913 and it appeared in a set of four preludes. The organ version was made in 1919 when the subtitle 'A Carol of the Nativity' was added. Matthew Owens (b.1971) composed the **Toccata on Good King Wenceslas** (Track 19) which precedes Bob Chilcott's arrangement. It's an animated and witty paraphrase, where the melody gradually enters the listener's consciousness before becoming much more apparent towards the end.

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Belfast Cathedral Choir

Soprano

Lynda Barrett ^{7, 10}
Ali Darragh ^{3, 7}
Susie Hunter
Susan Shepherd ^{1, 16}

Alto

Jenny Bourke ¹¹
India Chapman Webb
Tania Murphy
Elspeth Orr

Tenor

Chris Fitzgerald-Lombard (guest singer)
Caolan Keaveney
Owen Lucas
Matthew Quinn

Bass

Ethan Darby
Ryan Garnham
Adam Reaney ¹¹
Samuel Quartermaine Smith

Hand drum: Ryan Garnham ³
Finger cymbals: Elspeth Orr ³

Acknowledgments

With enormous thanks and gratitude to Mr Cameron Marshall for his generous financial support in the making of this recording.

Texts

1. Jesus Christ the Apple Tree

The tree of life my soul hath seen,
Laden with fruit and always green:
The trees of nature fruitless be
Compared with Christ the apple tree.

His beauty doth all things excel:
By faith I know, but ne'er can tell
The glory which I now can see
In Jesus Christ the apple tree.

For happiness I long have sought,
And pleasure dearly I have bought:
I missed of all; but now I see
'Tis found in Christ the apple tree.

I'm weary with my former toil,
Here I will sit and rest a while:
Under the shadow I will be,
Of Jesus Christ the apple tree.

This fruit does make my soul to thrive,
It keeps my dying faith alive;
Which makes my soul in haste to be
With Jesus Christ the apple tree.

*Anon. (from Divine Hymns or
Spiritual Songs, compiled by Joshua
Smith, New Hampshire (1784))*

2. The Voice of the Angel Gabriel

When gentle Joseph wedded was
To Israel's Hebrew maid,
The angel Gabriel came from heaven
And to the virgin said:
'Hail, blessed Mary, full of grace,
The Lord remain on thee:
Thou shalt conceive and bear a son,
Our Saviour for to be':

*Then sing you all, both great and small,
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell!
We may rejoice to hear the voice
Of the angel Gabriel.*

Then Joseph thought to shun all shame
And Mary to forsake;
But God's dear angel in a dream
His mind did undertake:
'Fear not, old Joseph, she's thy wife,
She's still a spotless maid;
There's no conceit or sin at all
Against her can be laid':

Then sing you all...

So Mary and her husband kind
Together did remain,
Until the time of Jesus' birth,
As scripture doth make plain.
As mother, wife, and virtuous maid,
Our Saviour sweet conceived;
And in due time to bring us him,
With whom we all are saved.

Then sing you all...

Cornish traditional carol

3. Rorate coeli desuper!

Rorate coeli desuper!
Heavens, distil your balmy show'rs;
For now is ris'n the bright Daystar,
From the rose Mary, flower of flowers:
The clear Sun, whom no cloud devours,
Surmounting Phoebus in the east,
Is comen of His heav'nly tow'rs,
Et nobis puer natus est.

Sinners be glad, and penance do,
And thank your Maker heartfully;
For He that ye might not come to,

To you is comen, fully humbly,
Your soul's with His blood to buy,
And loose you of the fiend's arrest,
And only of His own mercy;
Pro nobis puer natus est.

Celestial fowls in the air,
Sing with your notes upon the height,
In firrthès and in forests fair
Be mirthful now at all your might;
For passèd is your dully night;
Aurora has the cloudès pierced,
The sun is ris'n with gladsome light,
Et nobis puer natus est.

Sing, heav'n imperial, most of height,
Regions of air make harmony,
All fish in flood and fowl of flight,
Be mirthful and make melody;
All Gloria in excelsis cry,
Heaven, earth, sea, man, bird and beast;
He that is crowned above the sky
Pro nobis puer natus est.

William Dunbar (c.1460–c.1520)

4. **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 gracias!

Anon. fifteenth-century English

5. Immortal Babe

Immortal Babe, who this dear day
Didst change thy heaven for our clay,
And didst with flesh thy godhead veil,
Eternal Son of God, all hail!

Shine, happy star; ye angels, sing
Glory on high to Heaven's King:
Run, shepherds, leave your nightly watch,
See Heaven come down to Bethlehem's cratch.

Worship, ye sages of the east,
The King of gods in meanness dress'd.
O blessed maid, smile and adore
The God thy womb and arms have bore.

Star, angels, shepherds, and wild sages,
Thou virgin glory of all ages,
Restored frame of Heaven and Earth,
Joy in your dear Redeemer's birth!

Bishop Joseph Hall (1574–1656), c.1597, published 1660

7. A great and mighty wonder

A great and mighty wonder,
A full and holy cure!
The virgin bears the infant
With virgin-honour pure:
Repeat the hymn again:
'To God on high be glory,
And peace on earth to men.'

The word becomes incarnate,
And yet remains on high;
And cherubim sing anthems

To shepherds from the sky;
Repeat the hymn again:
'To God on high be glory,
And peace on earth to men.'

And idol forms shall perish,
And error shall decay,
And Christ shall wield his sceptre,
Our Lord and God for aye.
Repeat the hymn again:
'To God on high be glory
And peace on earth to men.'

*St Germanus (c.634–734/740), translated into
English by John Mason Neale (1818–1866)*

8. I sing of a maiden

I sing of a maiden
That is makeless;
King of all kings
To her son she ches.

He came all so still,
Where his mother was,
As dew in April
That falleth on the grass.

He came all so still
To his mother's bower,
As dew in April
That falleth on the flower.

He came all so still,
Where his mother lay,
As dew in April
That falleth on the spray.

Mother and maiden was never one but she:
Well may such a lady God's mother be.

Anon. (from the fifteenth-century Sloane Manuscript)

9. Mary's Lullaby

Words by John Rutter (b.1945)

10. Lullay, my liking

*Lullay, my liking, my dear son, my sweeting;
Lullay, my dear heart, mine own dear darling!*

I saw a fair maiden sitten and sing:
She lulled a little child,
A sweete lording:
*Lullay, my liking, my dear son, my sweeting;
Lullay, my dear heart, mine own dear darling!*

That eternal Lord is he
That made all thing;
Of alle lordes he is Lord,
Of alle kings King:
*Lullay, my liking, my dear son, my sweeting;
Lullay, my dear heart, mine own dear darling!*

There was mickle melody
At that Childes birth:
Though the songsters were heavenly
They made mickle mirth:
*Lullay, my liking, my dear son, my sweeting;
Lullay, my dear heart, mine own dear darling!*

Angels bright they sang that night,
And saiden to that child:
'Blessed be thou, and so be she
That is both meek and mild':
*Lullay, my liking, my dear son, my sweeting;
Lullay, my dear heart, mine own dear darling!*

Pray we now to that Child,
And to his mother dear,
God grant them all his blessing
That now maken cheer:
*Lullay, my liking, my dear son, my sweeting;
Lullay, my dear heart, mine own dear darling!*

Anon. fifteenth century

11. Watts' Cradle Song

Hush! my dear, lie still and slumber;
Holy angels guard thy bed!
Heav'nly blessings without number
Gently falling on thy head.

Sleep, my babe; thy food and raiment,
House and home, thy friends provide;
All without thy care and payment,
All thy wants are well supplied.

Soft and easy is thy cradle;
Coarse and hard thy saviour lay,
When his birthplace was a stable
And his softest bed was hay.

Lo! he slumbers in his manger,
Where the horned oxen fed;
Peace, my darling! Here's no danger;
Here's no ox a-near thy bed.

May'st thou live to know and fear him,
Trust and love him all thy days:
Then go dwell forever near him,
See his face and sing his praise.

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

12. A Gallery Carol, Op. 109, No. 4

Rejoice and be merry
In songs and in mirth!
O praise our Redeemer,
All mortals on earth!
For this is the birthday
Of Jesus our King,
Who brought us salvation,
His praises we'll sing!

A heavenly vision
Appeared in the sky;
Vast numbers of angels
The shepherds did spy,

Proclaiming the birthday
Of Jesus our King,
Who brought us salvation,
His praises we'll sing!

Likewise a bright star
In the sky did appear,
Which led the wise men
From the East to draw near.
They found the Messiah,
Sweet Jesus our King,
Who brought us salvation,
His praises we'll sing!

And when they were come,
Their treasures unfold,
And unto him offered
Myrrh, incense, and gold.
So blessed forever
Be Jesus our King,
Who brought us salvation,
His praises we'll sing!

Anon.

13. Moonless darkness stands between

Moonless darkness stands between.
Past, O Past, no more be seen!
But the Bethlehem-star may lead me
To the sight of Him Who freed me
From the self that I have been.
Make me pure, Lord: Thou art holy;
Make me meek, Lord: Thou wert lowly;
Now beginning, and alway:
Now begin, on Christmas day.

Gerald Manley Hopkins (1844–1899)

14. Still, still, still

*English translation of a traditional German Carol
by Meg Peacocke (b.1930)*

15. **O Bethlehem**

Words adapted by Elizabeth Poston from the English version of the Reverend J. O'Connor

16. **In the bleak midwinter**

In the bleak midwinter
Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter
Long ago.

Our God, heav'n cannot hold him
Nor earth sustain;
Heav'n and earth shall flee away
When he comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter
A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty —
Jesus Christ.

Enough for him, whom Cherubim
Worship night and day,
A breastful of milk,
And a mangerful of hay;
Enough for him, whom Angels
Fall down before,
The ox and ass and camel
Which adore.

Angels and Archangels
May have gathered there,
Cherubim and Seraphim
Thronged the air:
But only his mother in her maiden bliss
Woshipped the Beloved
With a kiss.

What can I give him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man
I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give Him,
Give my heart.

Christina Rossetti (1830–1894)

17. **On Christmas night (Sussex Carol)**

On Christmas night all Christians sing,
To hear the news the angels bring.
News of great joy, news of great mirth,
News of our merciful King's birth.

Then why should men on earth be so sad,
Since our Redeemer made us glad,
When from our sin he set us free,
All for to gain our liberty?

When sin departs before his grace,
Then life and health come in its place;
Angels and men with joy may sing,
All for to see the new-born King.

All out of darkness we have light,
Which made the angels sing this night:
'Glory to God and peace to men,
Now and for evermore. Amen.'

*Attributed to Bishop Luke Wadding (1628–c.1691),
Bishop of Ferns, Ireland*

18. **What shall we offer thee, O Christ**

What shall we offer thee, O Christ
Who for our sake has appeared on earth as a man?
Ev'ry creature made by thee offers thee thanks.
The angels offer thee a hymn;
The heavens, a star;
The magi, gifts;
The shepherds, their wonder.
The earth, its cave;
The wilderness, the manger.
And we offer thee a Virgin Mother.
O God from everlasting, have mercy on us.

The Eastern Orthodox Liturgy for Epiphany

20. **Good King Wenceslas**

Good King Wenceslas looked out
On the Feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about,
Deep, and crisp, and even:
Brightly shone the moon that night,
Though the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight,
Gathering winter fuel.

'Hither, page, and stand by me,
If thou know'st it, telling,
Yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?'
'Sire, he lives a good league hence,
Underneath the mountain,
Right against the forest fence,
By Saint Agnes' fountain.'

'Bring me flesh and bring me wine,
Bring me pine-logs hither:
Thou and I shall see him dine,
When we bear them thither.'
Page and monarch, forth they went,
Forth they went together:
Through the rude wind's wild lament
And the bitter weather.

'Sire, the night is darker now,
And the wind blows stronger;
Fails my heart, I know not how;
I can go no longer.'
'Mark my footsteps, good my page;
Tread thou in them boldly:
Thou shall find the winters rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly.'

In his masters step he trod,
Where the snow lay dinted;
Heat was in the very sod
Which the Saint had printed.
Therefore, Christian men, be sure,
Wealth or rank possessing,
Ye, who now will bless the poor,
Shall yourselves find blessing.

John Mason Neale (1818–1866)

Belfast Cathedral Choir

Choral music has always played a significant and central role at Belfast Cathedral, since its consecration in 1904 when there was a cathedral choir of forty-eight voices (ladies, gentlemen, and twenty-four boy choristers). Since then, the choir has undergone various transformations, most latterly in the late summer of 2019, when it became an all-adult, fully professional vocal ensemble.

This 'new' cathedral choir brings together some of the finest singers in Northern Ireland who lead the liturgy and worship of Belfast Cathedral, known locally as 'St Anne's'. Under the direction of Matthew Owens, who took up the post of Director of Music in September 2019, the choir has performed a wide and diverse range of works from the Mediaeval period through to the present day, including world premiere performances of works by Judith Bingham, the late John Joubert, and Philip Stopford.

A number of world premiere performances of newly composed works for the *Cranmer Anthem Book* are scheduled from the autumn 2021 to the summer of 2022, by Richard Allain, Luke Bedford, Michael Berkeley, Richard Causton, Naji Hakim, Gabriel Jackson, Philip Moore, and Philip Stopford. In addition, Howard Skempton

began as Belfast Cathedral's first ever Composer-in-Association, in September 2021.

Under Owens the cathedral choir has broadcast (live and recorded) on both BBC Radio 4 and BBC Radio Ulster. The choir now records exclusively for Resonus Classics.

Gráinne Meyer (harp)

Harpist and Pianist Gráinne Meyer has recently completed a postgraduate diploma in classical and Irish traditional music at the TU Dublin conservatoire of music, receiving tuition from Cliona Doris, Denise Kelly and Gráinne Hambly. She previously received an honours music degree from the University of York, where she was awarded the Thomas Beecham scholarship.

Gráinne studied piano for her degree and began learning concert harp whilst at university. Within five years of learning she was playing professionally as principal harp with the Ulster Orchestra. Gráinne has a busy and varied performance schedule across Ireland. She has recorded for BBC on both harp and piano. She is a performer for the Live Music Now scheme which facilitates performances in the community for older people and children with special educational needs. She has performed for HRH The Prince of Wales on each of his last

two visits to Northern Ireland, and at both the Edinburgh and Wales international harp festivals, as well the Lorient Festival Interceltique in Brittany. She featured as a soloist in the 2020 Belfast International Festival of Chamber Music and for Harp Ireland's Harp Day North Festival.

As a traditional musician Gráinne has won multiple All Ireland and Ulster medals. As well as performing, Gráinne is in demand as a teacher and is harp tutor for City of Belfast School of Music, Glengormley School of Traditional Music, Dun Uladh, Omagh Comhaltas, and Ceoltoiri Crosskeys. Gráinne is also musical director of the award winning Elver Harp Ensemble and the Comhaltas Mind and Music Orchestra. Her harp arrangements have been recently featured on Classic FM and RTÉ.

Jack Wilson (organ)

Born in Londonderry in 1998, Jack began his musical training as a chorister of the Cathedral Church of St Columb, Londonderry. He began piano lessons at the age of six with the locally respected jazz musician and teacher Roy Mitchell, latterly progressing to begin organ studies at the age of sixteen under the tutelage of Ian Mills and Derek Collins. He studied at Limavady Grammar School, and is a

graduate of The Queen's University of Belfast, where he read music, being awarded the May Turtle Scholarship for future academic study. In 2020 he completed the MMus in Choral Studies at the University of Cambridge, in conjunction with holding the post of Graduate Organ Scholar at Sidney Sussex College, and Organ Scholar of the St John's Voices.

Jack has held the posts of Organ Scholar, Acting Assistant Organist, and most recently Assistant Director of Music of Belfast Cathedral where he was principal accompanist for all cathedral services, studying the organ with David Stevens and Matthew Owens.

Jack has broadcast live on BBC Radio 4 and Radio Ulster, as well as live on BBC One, playing for the funeral service (in Belfast Cathedral) of the journalist Lyra McKee. In September of 2021, Jack took up the full-time position of Graduate Organ Scholar at Ely Cathedral.

Matthew Owens (conductor and solo organ)

Matthew Owens became Director of Music at Belfast Cathedral in September 2019 where he leads the fully professional, all adult choir of Northern Ireland's national cathedral. He is the head of the cathedral's music department and responsible for all aspects of the cathedral's music. Later in 2019 he founded the Ulster Consort, a new professional vocal and instrumental ensemble for Northern Ireland. Previously, he had been Organist and Master of the Music at St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh (1999–2004), and Organist and Master of the Choristers at Wells Cathedral (2005–2019). Under his leadership, Wells Cathedral Choir was named by an international jury for *Gramophone* as the best choir in the world with children, and the sixth greatest overall. Matthew served as President of the Cathedral Organists' Association (2010–2013); he was made an Honorary Fellow of the Guild of Church Musicians in November 2012; and in October 2017 he was made a Prebendary (Canon) of Wells Cathedral 'for outstanding service' to the Diocese and the Cathedral. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in October 2020.

Matthew was educated at Chetham's School of Music, Manchester; The Queen's College,

Oxford; the Royal Northern College of Music; and the Amsterdam Conservatorium. Studying with Gordon Stewart, Margaret Phillips, and Jacques van Oortmerssen, he won all the major prizes in the diplomas of the Royal College of Organists and the Silver Medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians. As an organist, he has given recitals in Australia, France, Ireland, New Zealand, Spain, Switzerland, the USA, and throughout the UK.

He has guest conducted, among others, the London Mozart Players, English Symphony Orchestra, Scottish Ensemble, and the Nash Ensemble. As a conductor he has made over thirty discs with major labels, and now records exclusively for the award-winning label, Resonus Classics.

He has championed new music, particularly of British composers, conducting over 200 world premieres, including works by leading composers ranging from Jools Holland to Sir James MacMillan, and John Rutter to Sir Peter Maxwell Davies. He is Director of the *Cranmer Anthem Book* (launched in October 2017); a project that will set all eighty-eight Collects from the *Book of Common Prayer* to music, by some of the world's finest composers. As a composer himself, Matthew is published by Oxford University Press, Novello, and the Royal School of Church Music.





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