

A watercolor illustration of a winter landscape. Bare trees with dark trunks and branches are silhouetted against a warm, orange and yellow sky where a sun is rising. The ground is covered in snow, with long, colorful shadows cast by the trees. The overall style is soft and painterly.

THE DAWN OF GRACE
music for christmas

SOMERVILLE COLLEGE CHOIR
OXFORD
WILL DAWES



The Dawn of Grace: Music for Christmas

Somerville College Choir sings in the only non-denominational college chapel at Oxford, in a college founded with the radical ambition – for 1879 – of enabling both women and non-conformists to come to Oxford when most universities refused them entry. Given this unconventional heritage, how do you think we might respond when invited to record our very own Christmas album?

The answer is that we have stayed true to our college's distinctive origins by recording an album featuring twenty works composed entirely by women. Together, these pieces tell a different story of the nativity, one appropriate to our choir – which is known for singing some of the most eclectic, forward-looking music at Oxford – but also to the times we live in, when diversity and equality capture the spirit not only of Christ but Christmas itself.

These pieces are not the well-loved canonical classics you often hear at Christmastime. All twenty of them display the originality and compositional mastery of the women that composed them. Many are first recordings, others captured our imaginations for their sheer variety – which runs from the soloistic optimism

of **Behind the clouds**, to the jazzy and vibrantly energetic arrangement: **Ding Dong Diggety!**, via the quasi-counterpoint of **Drop down, ye heavens** and simple melodic beauty of **Peace on earth**. You will also notice that the album is split into thirds, narrating the story of the nativity from the build-up to Christmas (tracks 1–7) to Jesus's birth (tracks 8–13) and the ensuing celebrations (14–20). Recognising the importance of the organ at Oxford, each section contains a solo organ work based on a familiar Christmas hymn: **Veni, veni Emmanuel** takes inspiration from plainchant to create this tranquil keyboard work, the tune of 'Silent Night' can be found lurking in the dense harmonic undergrowth of **The Dawn of Redeeming Grace**, and **Adeste fideles**, which forms the melodic basis of the popular carol: 'O come, all ye faithful'. The organ and choir come together in harmony (pun intended) for the songs **The holly and the ivy** and **Gaude et laetare**, but what is more unexpected is the use of handbells in **This endris night** – a refreshing and appropriately atmospheric compositional choice, rooted in the American tradition.

We hope that, wherever you are and however you celebrate the holiday season, this album offers you a new soundtrack to Christmas, one which celebrates the Somervillian value of including the excluded,

while also reaffirming the message of the season, bringing people together in peace and harmony and welcoming a new beginning based on these principles — in other words, a dawn of grace.

O come, o come, Emmanuel

The first section of the album contains music appropriate for the period of advent, centring around the foretelling of Jesus's coming and the period of preparation leading to it. The album begins with Cecilia McDowall's **O Oriens**, a setting of a Great Advent Antiphon with scintillating vibrant harmonies reflecting the light and hope which the birth of Jesus represents for many. This theme of bringing light to darkness is continued into the next piece, Abbie Betinis' **Behind the clouds**. The text is based on a prose-poem written by the composer's great-grandfather Rev. Bates G. Burt in a Christmas card circulated in 1942 during the dark days of the Second World War. Beginning with just a solo soprano melody, the eager anticipation of relief from the darkness becomes more resolved each verse as the harmonies extend gradually to full choir, as though the proverbial clouds are clearing.

The atmosphere of anticipation continues with a setting of a section of the Advent

Prose, **Drop down, ye heavens** by Anna Semple. The highly illustrative arrangement sets each voice part in a percussive counterpoint, and the close harmonies throughout create a tense and earnest atmosphere. Next follows a piece for organ, Pamela Decker's **Veni, veni, Emmanuel**. The piece is based on another of the Great Advent Antiphons and draws on the famous plainchant-inspired melody, creating an air of restrained tranquillity appropriate to the theme of advent and preparation.

The next two pieces – Cheryl Frances-Hoad's **There is no rose** and Kerensa Briggs' **A tender shoot** – concern Jesus' mother Mary, and extol the miracle of Jesus's virgin birth. Briggs sets an anonymous 15th-century German text in a quasi-chorale fashion. The soft lilting harmonies are punctuated by moments of harmonic intensity, illustrating for instance the 'cold bleak winter' and 'God of endless might'. Frances-Hoad brings out the wonder to be found in Jesus's human birth through complex tonal shifts and terraced dynamics, encouraging all to rejoice with the angels in a rapturous setting of the phrase 'Gloria in excelsis Deo!'. It was a particular pleasure to record the latter piece with the composer present, and the fact that she composed it at the age of fourteen

makes the award-winning composition even more impressive. The final piece in this first section is **Ivy, chief of trees** composed by Sarah Cattle, the daughter of Janet Wheeler, also represented in this programme. The text, found in a manuscript in Oxford's Bodleian Library, draws on traditional English folklore and iconography, which is illustrated by the folk-like melody and free-flowing quaver patterns. The piece features verses sung in alternating fashion between full choir and pairs of soloists, ending with the full choir in a reverent climax featuring dancing polyrhythms and rich harmony.

Silent Night

The second section of the album is more intimate, presenting standard Christmas scenes in a private and devotional sense. The first work in the section is Judith Bingham's **The Dawn of Redeeming Grace** for solo organ, an atmospheric and reserved setting of the popular carol Silent Night. This is followed by Joanna Marsh's powerful work **O magnum mysterium**, a piece characterised by lush and complex harmony and use of the choir's full vocal range.

The next track features only the soprano section of the choir, who sing the beautiful,

dark, and reflective **Peace on earth** by Errolyn Wallen, which – through Wallen's own text – presents the hope that Christ's arrival brings in the stillness of winter. Yshani Perinpanayagam's **In Bethlehem above** follows, presenting the nativity scene immediately following Christ's birth. The music alternates from a celebratory mood in the verses, which describe images of the nativity scene, with a more mystical and initially intimate setting of the chorus 'Gloria in excelsis Deo'. This piece precedes **Star of Rohini** by Shruthi Rajasekar, a work which sees the converging of two faiths – Christianity and Hinduism. The song draws a link between the Star of Bethlehem – under which Jesus was born – and the Star of Rohini – under which the Hindu deity Krishna was born. These influences are strongly felt in the music, with the harmony resembling elements of Indian Classical music and the piece conveying a strongly ethereal atmosphere.

This section of the album closes with Sarah Quartel's refreshing setting of the traditional 15th-century text **This endris night**. Quartel's melody embodies the character of folk music, and the use of handbells at the opening and close of the piece give a shimmer which evokes the magical nature of Christmas as presented in the text.

O come all ye faithful

The third and final section of the album consists of music which portrays the festive and jubilant spirit of the Christmas season. The French composer Jeanne Demessieux's **Adeste fideles** is a colourful presentation of the traditional carol, 'O come, all ye faithful', transforming the well-known tune into rich counterpoint, and making use of the organ's wide and appropriately French timbral range.

The feeling of joy explodes in the next track, **Noel: Verbum caro factum est**, by Tamsin Jones, a catchy and tuneful setting of an anonymous 16th-century text. The rhythmic refrain, an indestructible earworm by the end of the piece, is alternated with verses sung as duets or solo singers. The following piece, Judith Weir's **My Guardian Angel**, is equally festive, and features a second choir, formed by members of the wider college community and various relations and friends of members of the college choir, who sing the 'audience' part. The work is made up of a simple 'Alleluia' motif, sung by the audience, interlocking with the choir's lines, representing the awe and wonder towards the angels of the nativity.

The following two works both have a melody

with French roots. Janet Wheeler's **Ding Dong Diggety!** exuberantly integrates the Westminster chimes into a vibrant twist on 'Ding dong merrily on high', featuring a swung setting of the familiar tune, accompanied by lively and syncopated vocal lines, finger clicks and vocal percussion. June Nixon's **The holly and the ivy** is a darker setting of the traditional carol, with lilting organ motifs, in a distinctly melancholic tone. The last verse is reminiscent of the final verse of a traditional carol, with a descant soaring above the choir and lavish, eventually triumphant organ writing beneath.

The celebratory atmosphere continues with Ghislaine Reece-Trapp's **Alleluia! A New Work is Come on Hand**, which rings out with continued acclamations of "Alleluia", heralding the birth of Jesus and the fulfilment of the prophecy.

The final track, **Gaude et laetare**, by Cecilia McDowall, is the second of McDowall's works on the album, which, along with the first piece, act as bookends to the journey of the programme. It sets a text from the Ambrosian Rite to sparkling organ accompaniment with a formidable rhythmic drive, ending the album full of the exultant and jubilant spirit of Christmas.

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Texts and Translations

Cecilia McDowall (b.1951)

1. O Oriens

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

*O Star of the morning, splendour of eternal light,
and sun of righteousness:
come, and shine
upon those who sit in darkness
and in the shadow of death.*

*Anonymous, liturgical: Great Advent
antiphon for December 21st*

Abbie Betinis (b.1980)

2. Behind the clouds

Text by Abbie Betinis after Rev. Bates G. Burt

Anna Semple (b.1997)

3. Drop down, ye heavens

Drop down, ye heavens, from above,
and let the skies pour down righteousness.
Let all the earth be fruitful, and bring forth a Saviour.
Drop down ye heavens.
Drop down.

Anonymous, liturgical: Advent Prose

Cheryl Frances-Hoad (b.1980)

5. There is no rose

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

For in this rose containèd was
Heaven and Earth in little space,
Res miranda.

By that rose we may well see
There be one God in persons three,
Pares forma.

The angels sungen the shepherds to:
Gloria in excelsis Deo!
Gaudeamus.

Leave we all this wordly mirth,
Follow we this joyful birth
Transeamus.

Alleluia, Res miranda, Pares forma,
Gaudeamus, Transeamus.

Anonymous, 14th century

Pamela Decker (b.1955)

6. A tender shoot

A tender shoot hath started
Up from a root of grace,
As ancient seers imparted,
From Jesse's holy race,
It blooms without a blight,
Blooms in the cold bleak winter,
Turning our darkness into light.

This shoot Isaiah taught us
From Jesse's root should spring;
The Virgin Mary brought us
The branch of which we sing;
Our God of endless might
Gave her this child to save us,
Thus turning darkness into light

German 15th century
Versified by Otto Goldschmidt
Translated by William Bartholomew

Sarah Cattley (b.1995)
7. Ivy, chief of trees

Ivy, chief of trees, it is;
Veni, veni coronaberis.

The most worthy is she in town;
He that saith other, doth amiss;
Worthy is she to bear the crown;
Veni, veni coronaberis.

Ivy is soft, and meek of speech;
Against all woe she bringeth bliss;
Happy is he that may her reach:
Veni, veni coronaberis.

Ivy is green, of colour bright,
Of all trees the chief she is;
And that I prove will now be right;
Veni, veni coronaberis.

Ivy, she beareth berries black;
God grant to all of us his bliss!
For then we shall nothing lack;
Veni, veni coronaberis.

Bodleian Library MS.Eng.Poet.e.1.XV Century
Adapted by the composer

Joanna Marsh (b.1970)
9. O magnum mysterium

O magnum mysterium,
et admirabile sacramentum,
ut animalia viderent Dominum natum,
jacentem in praeseptio!

Beata Virgo, cujus viscera
meruerunt portare
Dominum Jesum Christum.
Alleluia!

O great mystery,
and wonderful sacrament,
that animals should see the newborn Lord,
lying in a manger!

Blessed is the virgin whose womb
was worthy to bear
the Lord, Jesus Christ.
Alleluia!

Anonymous, liturgical: Responsory at
Matins on Christmas Day

Errolyn Wallen (b.1958)
10. Peace On Earth

Text by Errolyn Wallen

Yshani Perinpanayagam (b.1983)
11. In Bethlehem above

Text by Yshani Perinpanayagam

Sarah Quartel (b.1982)
12. This endris night

This endris night I saw a sight,
A star as bright as day,
And ever among, a maiden sung,
“Lully, by by, lullay”

This lovely lady sat and sang,
And to her child did say,
“My son, my brother, father dear,
Why liest thou thus in hay?”

“My sweetest bird, ‘tis thus required,
Though thou be king veray,
But nevertheless I will not cease
To sing ‘By by, lullay.’”

The child then spake whilst she did sing,
And to his mother did say,
“Yea, I am known as Heaven-King
In crib though I be laid.

“For angels bright down on me light;
Thou knowest ‘tis no nay.
And for that sight thou may delight
To sing, ‘By by, lullay.’”

“Now sweet Son, since it is so,
That all is at thy will,
I pray Thee grant to me a boon,
If it be right and skill,—

“That child or man, who will or can
Be merry on my day,
To bliss them bring and I shall sing,
Lully, by by, lullay”

Anonymous, 15th century (adapted)

Shruti Rajasekar (b.1996)
13. Star of Rohini

Adapted from Matthew 2:2, 2:9-10, and the Bhagavata
Purana, Canto 10 with additions from the composer

Tamsin Jones (b.1972)
15. Noel: Verbum caro factum est

Noel!

This night there is a child y-born
That sprang out of Jesse's thorn;
We must sing and say therefor:
‘Verbum caro factum est.’

Jesus is the childes name,
And Mary mild is his dame;
All sorrow is turned to game:
‘Verbum caro factum est.’

It fell upon the high midnight:
The stars they shone both fair and bright;
The angels sang with all their might:
‘Verbum caro factum est.’

Now kneel we down upon our knee,
And pray we to the Trinity
Our help, our succour for to be:
'Verbum caro factum est.'

Noel!

Anonymous, 16th century (adapted)

Judith Weir (b.1954)
16. My Guardian Angel

Alleluia!

The Angel that presided o'er my birth
Said, "Little creature, form'd of Joy and Mirth,
"Go love without the help of any Thing on Earth."

Alleluia!

William Blake (1757–1827)

Anonymous, French 16th century
arr. Janet Wheeler (b.1957)
17. Ding Dong Diggety!

Ding dong! merrily on high in heav'n the bells
are ringing:
Ding dong! verily the sky is riv'n with angels singing.
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

E'en so here below, below, let steeple bells
be swungen,
And 'io, io, io' by priest and people sungen.
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

Pray you, dutifully prime your matin chime, ye ringers:
May you beautifully rhyme your evetime song, ye singers.
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

*Anonymous, traditional, translated from French
by George Ratcliffe Woodward (1848–1934)*

Anonymous, traditional
arr. June Nixon (b.1942)
18. The holly and the ivy

The holly and the ivy
When they are both full grown,
Of all the trees that are in the wood
The holly bears the crown,
O the rising of the sun,
The running of the deer,
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweet singing in the choir.

The holly bears a prickle
As sharp as any thorn,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
On Christmas Day in the morn,
O the rising of the sun,
The running of the deer,
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweet singing in the choir.

The holly bears a bark
As bitter as any gall;
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
For to redeem us all,
O the rising of the sun,
The running of the deer,
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweet singing in the choir.

The holly and the ivy
When they are both full grown,
Of all the trees that are in the wood
The holly bears the crown.
O the rising of the sun,
The running of the deer,
The playing of the organ,
Sweet singing, sweet singing in the choir.

Anonymous, traditional

Ghislaine Reece-Trapp (b.1992)
19. Alleluia! A New Work is Come on Hand

A new work is come on hand
Through might and grace of Goddes son,
To save the lost of every land,
For now is free what erst was bound;
We may well sing Alleluia!

Now is fulfilled the prophecy
Of David and of Jeremy,
And also of Isaiah,
Sing we therefore both loud and high!
Sing we therefore both loud and high: Alleluia!

This sweete song
out of a green branch it sprung,
God send us the life that lasteth long,
Now joy and bliss be him among.
That thus can sing Alleluia!

Anonymous, 15th century (adapted)

Cecilia McDowall (b.1951)
20. Gaude et laetare

Gaude et laetare, exultatio angelorum.
Gaude Domini virgo, prophetarum gaudium.
Gaudeas benedicta, Dominus tecum est.
Gaude, quae per angelum gaudium mundi suscepisti.
Gaude, quae genuisti Factorem et Dominum.
Gaudeas quae digna es esse Mater Christi.
Gaude et laetare!

*Rejoice and be glad, you who are the angels' exultation;
Rejoice, the Lord's virgin, the prophets' joy;
May you rejoice, blessed one, the Lord is with you;
Rejoice, you who received the world's joy through the
angel [Gabriel];
Rejoice, you who bore the Creator and Lord;
May you rejoice, you who are worthy to be Mother of Christ;
Rejoice and be glad!*

4th century, attributed to St Ambrose

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and Helen Morton: both friends of the choir.*

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to Virginia Ross, without whom this
recording would not have taken place.*

Somerville College Choir

Soprano

Hannah Andrusier (soloist, track 7)[†]
Kaia Cochran
Ismay Forsyth
Steph Garrett (soloist, track 2)[†]
Rosie Thorogood (soloist, track 15)
Niamh Robinson-Wakefield (soloist, track 10)
Jemima Storey
Emma Walker
Angie Wyatt

Alto

Trina Banerjee
Kathryn Boast
Sadie Boshier (soloist, track 15)
Michelle Chan
Caroline Murphy-Racette (soloist track 7)
Vivian Ng
Elisabeth Siegel
Phoebe Tealby-Watson

Tenor

Jarek Jankowski¹
Franco Lopez
Sacha Meadowcroft (soloist, track 15)
Luca Morgante²
Andrew Orr
Nikita Ostrovsky (soloist, track 7)
Dhruv Sengupta

Bass

Jack Abbott
Robert Clark (soloist, track 7)
Tristan l'Anson-Sparks
Augustine McMahon (soloist, track 15)
Luke Mulholland
Jonathan Pratt³
Asher Sandbach
Jacob Timmins
Isaac Walton

Director of Chapel Music: Will Dawes
Organ Scholar/Piano: Luca Morgante

Handbells: Martin Winter and Sandra Winter,
Handbell Ringers of Great Britain

[†]Chloe and Helen Morton Choral Scholar
1 – Tracks 2, 5, 11–13, 15–20
2 & 3 – Tracks 1–3, 5–7, 9, 12, 19

Audience choir in track 16:

*Ruth Akinradewo	Jonathan Pratt
*Katie Bank	*Steve Rayner
*John Boyd	Jake Reading
*Claire Cockcroft	*Virginia Ross
*Gwendoline Davenport	*Rex Sandbach
*Jack Evans	Ruth Sandbach
Cheryl Frances-Hoad	*James Standfield
*Eileen Gartside	Jake Sternberg
Cosima Gillhammer	Sean Telford
*Chloe Green	*Amanda Thomas
Peter Groves	Toby Thorogood
*Adina Henson	Joe Waymouth
*Luca Morgante	

³Member of the Somerville
Community



Will Dawes (conductor)

Will Dawes is the Director of Chapel Music at Somerville College, Oxford, and Director of Music at the church of St Mary Magdalen, Oxford. He is a graduate of Edinburgh University and the Royal Academy of Music where he studied Choral Conducting and Singing under the guidance of Paddy Russill. He is an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music, an award offered to past students of the Academy for a distinguished and significant contribution to the music profession, and has worked with choirs all over the world, including in Auckland, Shenzhen, Mumbai, Guanajuato, Ramallah, and numerous venues across the USA.

In the UK, he has directed the BBC Singers, the Eric Whitacre Singers, and the chorus of Ludus Baroque. He has also been the director of numerous excellent choral societies and chamber choirs, including Henley Choral Society, Bath Choral Society, the Orlando Chamber Choir, Edinburgh Camerata, and Ensemble 45. In 2014 he became the founding Director of Frideswide Voices (Oxford's first liturgical choir for 7–14 year-old girls), which in 2019 became the girls choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford.

Will started singing aged 4 as part of the Berkshire Young Musicians Trust and was then a chorister at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. He is now active as a consort singer and is a member of the internationally acclaimed vocal ensemble Stile Antico. The group performs all over the globe, including regular concerts at Wigmore Hall, Boston Early Music Festival, and at the BBC Proms. The group has won numerous international awards (including two Gramophone awards) and has been nominated for three GRAMMYS, performing at the 2020 awards ceremony in Madison Square Garden. He is a former Lay Clerk of Christ Church, Oxford, and has sung with the BBC Singers, The Cardinal's Musick, Collegium Vocale Gent, Dunedin Consort, Gabrieli Consort, Eric Whitacre Singers, Tenebrae, and Polyphony.

To keep in touch, follow him on Twitter: @wjbawes

Luca Morgante (organ & piano)

Born in Toronto, Canada, Luca Morgante began singing on stage at the age of six with the Canadian Children's Opera Company, culminating in an understudy role in a Puccini opera production at Canada's premier opera house. In his early teens, Luca was the youngest member accepted into the prestigious Taylor Academy for Young Artists at Toronto's Royal Conservatory of Music studying vocal performance, and by the age of sixteen had completed the diploma program in piano performance with honours becoming an Associate of the Royal Conservatory of Toronto.

During this time, Luca also attended the Anglican choir school of Royal St. George's College, becoming both the choral and organ scholar to the College-Cathedral of St. Alban the Martyr. As Organ scholar, Luca toured and performed at numerous venues in North America and Europe including the Eastman School of Music, Salzburg Cathedral, Dresden Frauenkirche, and numerous UK Cathedrals. As both a classical pianist and tenor, Luca has won numerous regional competitions and awarded scholarships to study abroad in the United States, Europe and in Britain.

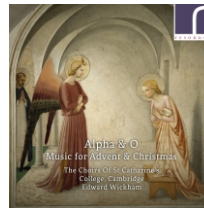
Luca now holds the position of Organ Scholar at Somerville College where he reads Music at the University of Oxford.

Somerville College Choir is made up of 31 singers from Somerville College and the wider Oxford community. Consisting of choral scholars and volunteers, the choir meets twice weekly and is the only College Choir that sings primarily secular events. Choral Contemplation at Somerville is every Sunday in term and plays a central role in College life. Members of the Choir also sing in the National Youth Choir of Great Britain, the Rodolfus Choir, Genesis Sixteen, and Schola Cantorum of Oxford. Recent highlights include workshops with Ben Parry (Director of the National Youth Choir), the King's Singers, Giles Underwood, Dame Emma Kirkby (an alumna of the college), and Rachel Nicholls, performances of Bach St John Passion and Mozart Requiem with the Instruments of Time and Truth, as well as a gig with the Basin St Brawlers. In December 2018, the Choir became the first Oxford College Choir to tour to India engaging in outreach with multiple charities. Forthcoming events in 2023 include Encaenia and tours to Germany and India.

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