



A Winter Breviary

Choral Works for Christmas

ST MARTIN'S VOICES
Andrew Earis

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St Martin's Voices
Polina Sosnina *organ*
Elizabeth Bass *harp*

Andrew Earis *conductor*

Olivia Sparkhall (b.1976)

1. **All and some** [2:03]

Cecilia McDowall (b.1951)

2. **There is no rose** [3:30]

Reena Esmail (b.1983)

A Winter Breviary

3. We Look For You
(Evensong – Raag Hamsadhwani) [3:09]

4. The Year's Midnight
(Matins – Raag Malkauns) [3:11]

5. The Unexpected Early Hour
(Lauds – Raag Ahir Bhairav) [2:43]

Sarah MacDonald (b.1968)

The Manger is Empty

6. Like the snow in winter [3:05]

7. As among broken glass [1:50]

8. The manger is empty [3:16]

Nils Greenhow (b.1989)

9. **Advent Calendar** [4:20]

Thomas Hewitt Jones (b.1984)

10. **Love is the Answer** [5:32]

Lucy Walker (b.1998)

The Christmas Life

11. The Christmas Life [3:14]

12. We shall walk [2:56]

13. The Angels' Song [1:45]

Yshani Perinpanayagam (b.1983)

14. **When God made Eve** [2:40]

Roderick Williams (b.1965)

15. **Queen Elizabeth's Winchester
Carol (The Royal Carol)** [3:17]

Bob Chilcott (b.1955)

Mary, Mother

16. A child in Galilee [3:39]

17. Carpentry Carol [2:53]

18. After the angel [3:21]

19. Walking Carol [3:01]

20. Dear heart [3:42]

21. Hymn [2:51]

Total playing time [66:06]



A Winter Breviary: Choral Works for Christmas

This selection of contemporary choral works for the Christmas season presents settings of poetry from the fifteenth century to the present day. These new carols explore themes of winter snowscapes, the anticipation and contemplation of Advent, the Christmas story as seen by the women at its heart, and the joy of coming in from the cold to celebrate together.

The disc opens with two settings of anonymous fifteenth-century texts, both written in the macaronic style which interlaces phrases of liturgical Latin with vernacular Middle English. **All and some** by Olivia Sparkhall is a lively exhortation to sing together in joyful chorus, celebrating Christ's birth and the 'bliss' of salvation. The irresistible, dance-like triple metre draws the listener in as an active participant in the carol, emphasising the inclusive and invitational message of the text. Cecilia McDowall's setting of **There is no rose** was commissioned by Daniel Hyde and the Choir of King's College, Cambridge, for their 2021 Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols. McDowall creates an atmosphere of spaciousness and awe, combined with a sense of yearning, heard in the repeated dissonances which evoke the rose's thorns

and the prophesied suffering of Christ. The first three stanzas are musically contemplative, then the rousing shepherds' song 'Gloria in excelsis Deo' adopts a more animated quality, before reaffirming the opening text and concluding in shimmering stillness.

The first of three carol triptychs included on this disc, Reena Esmail's **A Winter Breviary** is an ingenious interweaving of three traditional Christian services (Evensong, Matins and Lauds) and three Indian classical Raags which chart those same hours from dusk to dawn (Raag Hamsadhvani, Raag Malkauns and Raag Ahir Bhairav). The texts by American poet Rebecca Gayle Howell take inspiration in the cycles and sequences of the natural world, rich in details of flora and fauna, and the powerful imagery of the changing seasons. 'We Look For You' introduces the idea of the winter solstice night, depicting a solitary pilgrim walking through woods, where the trees glisten with sleet, and twilight renders the landscape monochrome. 'The Year's Midnight' is a beautiful Matins prayer for nighttime birds and beasts, poetically mirroring the animals present at the nativity, in a meditative and consonant musical setting. After the serenity of these first two carols, 'The Unexpected Early Hour' brings contrasting

rhythmic vibrancy as the voices chime in carillon effect, like bells ringing in the dawn on Christmas morning.

The Manger is Empty is a trio of carols by Sarah MacDonald, setting texts by the twentieth-century Welsh poet R. S. Thomas. 'Like the snow in winter' is adapted from Thomas's 1972 poem *Song* – a deceptively simple text, layered with poignant contrasts between purity and suffering, as embodied in the birth and passion of Christ. MacDonald's setting draws out these contrasts, alternating between sparse, echoing coolness and passages of homophonic warmth. 'As among broken glass' is a livelier setting in compound time. Much of the carol is sparkling and playful, following the nursery-rhyme innocence of Thomas's text, right up until the jarring simile of light refracting in broken glass, which MacDonald accentuates with sudden unison. The triptych ends with 'The manger is empty', adapted by MacDonald into a wistful lullaby which echoes the well-known Coventry Carol, aligning Thomas's uniquely melancholic poetry with historical pageantry.

The next two pieces are standalone works written for St Martin's Voices in recent years. **Advent Calendar** by Nils Greenhow sets a popular poem by former Archbishop

of Canterbury Rowan Williams and was originally composed for BBC broadcast by St Martin's Voices in 2018. The text anticipates the coming of Christ through visceral imagery, combining intense beauty with the harsh realities of winter and the discomfiting proximity of birth and death. Greenhow responds with a setting that is sonorous and expansive, colouring the text with piquant dissonances and vivid climaxes.

Thomas Hewitt Jones's **Love is the Answer** was dedicated to St Martin's Voices during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is a lilting and warm carol for choir and organ, celebrating the Christmas story through four verses of the composer's own poetry, framed by a soaring refrain about the power of singing together – especially at Christmas time. Hewitt Jones has described the piece as 'an antidote to the gloom' experienced during the pandemic, and a reminder of the importance of choral singing 'as the essence of our musical community'.

Appointed as St Martin's Voices' inaugural Composer-in-Residence in May 2023, Lucy Walker's atmospheric triptych of carols, entitled **The Christmas Life**, was commissioned to form the centrepiece of this album. The composer herself writes of these carols:

'The Christmas Life': Wendy Cope's poem conjures a heartwarming image of Christmas in the comfort of home. This setting translates this imagery into a classic Christmas choral sound – mellow, warm harmonies and a simple tune that alternates between triple and quadruple time to give a natural lilt. The second verse, filled with references to light, blossoms and features more exploratory harmonic directions. The opening music returns in the lower voices and expands into a richly scored final verse.

'We shall walk': Adapted from the poem *Velvet Shoes* by Elinor Wylie, the text of this carol portrays the tranquil, almost eerie atmosphere of walking in fresh snow. The music reflects this imagery, with a soaring melody, which is re-harmonised in each verse to explore the nuances of the poetry. Time signatures change frequently to accommodate the natural flow of the text, and the sound world is modal, almost folk-like, with shifting musical colours driven by semitones and swirling chord progressions. The carol ends as quietly as it began, with a soprano solo.

'The Angels' Song': This carol sets the final three verses of Sara Teasdale's light-hearted retelling of the nativity story, in which a host of angels arrive at the stable bringing a joyful song. This song is characterised by a

buoyant 'Alleluia' motif, and the rhythm is kept lively by alternations between 7/8 and compound time. Each verse ends with a sequential refrain beginning in the upper voices. The ending of the carol, using silence and repetition, is intended to bring the last line of poetry to life in a humorous way! – Lucy Walker, 2023.

The next piece returns to Advent-tide, with a fresh perspective on a theme long associated with Advent services: Creation and The Fall. In **When God made Eve** Yshani Perinpanayagam reframes the narrative with Eve at the centre, exalting her as the founder of the matriarchal lineage leading to Mary as Mother of Christ. Perinpanayagam's innovative text portrays Eve as a benevolent, powerful figure, made all the stronger by her experience of failure and suffering. The choral setting reflects this, with passages of high drama and intensity giving way to tender sincerity and quiet dignity.

Roderick Williams's **Queen Elizabeth's Winchester Carol (The Royal Carol)** was commissioned by The Friends of Winchester Cathedral to commemorate the ninetieth birthday of Queen Elizabeth II in 2018. The text by King Henry VIII was chosen to emphasise the royal connection and, although it is essentially a secular

poem, its central metaphor of an enduringly faithful, evergreen holly tree lends itself to the sacred context of a Christmas carol. Williams' musical interpretation sculpts the text lithely over nuanced, shifting harmonies and melodic lines wreathed like boughs of holly and ivy.

The album concludes with Bob Chilcott's **Mary, Mother** – a carol suite in six movements, with libretto by Georgia Way, which was premiered by St Martin's Voices in December 2022. Chilcott and Way collaborated closely to craft a work which shines a light on the human experience of Mary, as the woman at the heart of the Christmas story – tracing her youth, her courtship with Joseph, and her journey to becoming a mother.

Chilcott writes: 'I had the idea to write a sequence of singable, tuneful carols that would present Mary very much from a human perspective within the Christmas story and I approached my friend, the writer Georgia Way, to write new poems. The piece is scored for choir, harp and organ and is made up of five carols along with a new hymn, which we imagined sung by the choir and the audience together.'

Way writes: 'When Bob and I first talked

about these carols, it was important to both of us that we presented the figure of Mary as a real, human woman with thoughts and feelings. How would it feel to grow up in Galilee? What would her thought process have been at the Annunciation? I hope listeners are able to see themselves in Mary's story.'

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Texts

Olivia Sparkhall (b.1976)

1. All and some

Refrain:

Nowell sing we, both all and some,
Now *Rex pacificus* is ycome.

Exortum est in love and lysse.
Now Christ his gree he gan us gysse,
And with his body us bought to bliss.

De fructu ventris of Mary bright,
Both God and man in her alight,
Out of disease he did us dight.

Puer natus to us was sent,
To bliss us bought, fro bale us blent,
And else to woe we had ywent.

Gloria tibi, ay, and bliss,
God unto his grace he us wysse,
The rent of heaven that we not miss.

Anonymous, fifteenth century

Cecilia McDowall (b.1951)

2. There is no rose

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

For in this rose contained was
Heav'n and earth in little space:
Res miranda.

By that rose we may well see
That he is God in persons three:
Pares forma.

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

Now leave we all this worldly mirth,
And follow we this joyful birth;
Transeamus.

Anonymous, fifteenth century

Reena Esmail (b.1983)

A Winter Breviary

3. We Look For You (Evensong –
Raag Hamsadhwani)

4. The Year's Midnight (Matins –
Raag Malkauns)

5. The Unexpected Early Hour (Lauds –
Raag Ahir Bhairav)

Text by Rebecca Gayle Howell (b.1975)

Sarah MacDonald (b.1968)

The Manger is Empty

6. Like the snow in winter

7. As among broken glass

8. The manger is empty

Text by R. S. Thomas (1913–2000)

Nils Greenhow (b.1989)

9. Advent Calendar

He will come like last leaf's fall.
One night when the November wind
has flayed the trees to bone, and earth
wakes choking on the mould,
the soft shroud's folding.

He will come like frost.
One morning when the shrinking earth
opens on mist, to find itself
arrested in the net
of alien, sword-set beauty.

He will come like dark.
One evening when the bursting red
December sun draws up the sheet
and penny-masks its eye to yield
the star-snowed fields of sky.

He will come, will come,
will come like crying in the night,
like blood, like breaking,
as the earth writhes to toss him free.
He will come like child.

Rowan Williams (b.1950)

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Thomas Hewitt Jones (b.1984)

10. **Love is the Answer**
Up on a hillside the shepherds were calling,
Watching and waiting, perpending life's worth.
Then from the sky came an angel's sweet cry,
Bringing glorious news of a birth.

Refrain:

Love is the answer: for this was his sign,
Rousing great hymns that shall ring throughout time.
Laud him with heavenly descants sublime,
Fountain of life divine.

Wandering south along flatlands of Jordan,
Lit by a beaming beacon of love.
None could express so much fear, so much feeling,
Upheld by light from above.

Lying so sweetly the infant so sacred,
Swaddled so humbly right there in a stall,
Sages of old offering gifts of great worth,
Extolling their new Lord of all.

Pardon from sinning, now truth is the paradigm,
Some are perplexed by the miracle claim.
Proof for the hopeful and hope for the fearful,
Healing to quell earthly shame.

Text by Thomas Hewitt Jones

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Lucy Walker (b.1998)

The Christmas Life

11. The Christmas Life

Bring in a tree, a young Norwegian spruce,
Bring hyacinths that rooted in the cold.
Bring winter jasmine as its buds unfold –
Bring the Christmas life into this house.

Bring red and green and gold, bring things that shine,
Bring candlesticks and music, food and wine.
Bring in your memories of Christmas past.
Bring in your tears for all that you have lost.

Bring in the shepherd boy, the ox and ass,
Bring in the stillness of an icy night,
Bring in the birth, of hope and love and light.
Bring the Christmas life into this house.

Wendy Cope (b.1945)
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United Agents, London

12. We shall walk
We shall walk in the white snow
In a soundless space;
With footsteps quiet and slow,
At a tranquil pace,
Under veils of white lace.

We shall walk through the still town
In a windless peace;
We shall step upon white down,
On silver fleece,
On softer than these.

We shall walk in velvet shoes:
Wherever we go,
Silence will fall like dews
On white silence below.
We shall walk in the snow.

Elinor Wylie (1885–1928). Adapted by the composer

13. The Angels' Song
Alleluia, alleluia.

The angels came from heaven high,
And they were clad with wings;
And lo, they brought a joyful song
The host of heaven sings.

The kings they knocked upon the door,
The wise men entered in,
The shepherds followed after them
To hear the song begin.

The angels sang through all the night
Until the rising sun,
But little Jesus fell asleep
Before the song was done.

Sara Teasdale (1884–1933)

Yshani Perinpanayagam (b.1983)
14. When God made Eve
When God made Eve, He made her in His image
From a rib warmed by Adam's beating heart.
God saw she was good.
One fateful day, for tricks and an apple,
Eve faltered, and, though ashamed, she stood:
Glorious woman of life and love!
In pain, she bore child after child,
Her daughters bore daughters who bore daughters
Until one daughter bore Mary Heavenly Queen,
Mother of Christ, blood of the Mother of All!
Though she would never live to see,
Eve's love meant Jesus could be born to conquer Death.
World without end, Amen.

Text by Yshani Perinpanayagam
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Roderick Williams (b.1965)
**15. Queen Elizabeth's Winchester Carol
(The Royal Carol)**
Green groweth the holly,
So doth the ivy.
Though winter blasts blow never so high,
Green groweth the holly.

As the holly groweth green
And never changeth hue,
So I am, ever hath been,
Unto my lady true.

As the holly groweth green
With ivy all alone
When flowers cannot be seen
And greenwood leaves be gone,

Now unto my lady
Promise to her I make,
From all other only
To her I me betake.

King Henry VIII (1491–1547)

Bob Chilcott (b.1955)
Mary, Mother
16. A child in Galilee
When Mary was a little girl, a child in Galilee,
She named the grape-vine, named the cedar,
named the olive tree.
'Raise your voice, young Mary,' called out the olive tree,
'For one day I will crown you as Queen of Galilee.'

When Mary was a young girl, a girl in Galilee,
She named the chestnut, named the myrtle,
named the apple tree.
'Eat my fruit, young Mary,' cried out the apple tree,
'For one day I will kneel to you as Queen of Galilee.'

When Mary was a woman, all grown in Galilee,
She sought the shade of a sycamore,
a sighing sycamore tree.
'Mary, if you name me, if you tie yourself to me,
You'll never name the Tree of Life, as Queen of Galilee.'

17. Carpentry Carol
Mary fell in love, watching
Joseph shape the sycamore tree.
And while he worked, he started to sing:
O sing, sycamore, sing!
Building a crib for the future king.

She fell for his hands as gnarled as old roots,
his mind as young as green timber.
All the while he hummed to the tune:
O sing, sycamore, sing!
Melodies carved for the future king.

Falling in love is hammer and saw,
chisel and knife, feeling safe
in a house on fire, and wanting more.
O sing, sycamore, sing!
Nazareth waits for the song of the king.

Mary gave her promise that day
to the man with the tender heart and hands,
carving joy with a plane and a lathe.
O sing, sycamore, sing!
Crafting our world for our heav'nly king.

18. After the angel
And after the angel, Mary dreamt.
Lord, she prayed, you have locked the gate,
locked is the gate to the common pasture,
you have taken away the keys,
taken the keys to my husband's house
and the door overshadows my heart.

And the Lord appeared, and opened the gate.
Mary, here are the keys to the house,
I have opened the door that you dreamt.
Here is paradise in the pasture,
and today I give you the keys
to heav'n in the human heart.

19. Walking Carol
On the road to David's town,
the days are very long.
We count our steps, we count and sing,
to speed the miles along:

One for Bethlehem's endless road,
Two for bread to eat as we go,
Three for the times we've lost our way,
Four – cold and hungry all day.

Five for the rain that troubles our eyes,
Six for Mary, frightened and shy,
Seven for Caesar in far-off Rome,
Eight for wishing we could all go home.

Nine for the months of growth and pain,
Ten for the census and taxes to pay,
Eleven for Joseph, worried and tired
And twelve for the joy of the unborn child.

Lord, the road to happiness is long as winter's night.
Send a star to brighten us.

20. Dear heart
Dear heart –
Do you remember before you were here?
The house and the stable, the turn of the year?
Last night I lost my heart to a star.
Lully, lulla.

Now heart, you are sleeping, and hardly stir.
Quietened by frankincense and myrrh.
Last night I lost my heart to a star.
Lully, lulla.

Sheep and shepherds, oxen and kings:
Mortal the gifts that Bethlehem brings.
Your starlight has carried my heart away.
Oh lovely child, lully, lullay.

Even while sleeping, even so new,
Now and forever my heart is you.
Last night I lost my heart to a star.
Lully, lulla.

21. Hymn
In my heart is a sycamore tree,
Tend it, Lady, Heavenly Queen.
Sow the seeds of love today,
Nurture every soul, I pray.
O sing alleluia!
In excelsis gloria!

Queen of heaven, pray for me,
Pray for every sycamore tree,
Pray for every flowering bud,
Every mother, every child.
O sing alleluia!
In excelsis gloria!

Hear the angels sing on high,
'Christ the Lord is born this night!'
Born to save the world from sin,
Every heart shall let him in.
King of Kings, alleluia!
In excelsis gloria!

The Sycamore Carols
Georgia Way (b.1992)
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St Martin's Voices

Soprano

Rachel Haworth
Sarah Keating
Daisy Walford*

Alto

Lowri Bufton
Lydia Ward

Tenor

James Botcher
Thomas Perkins

Bass

George Cook
Thomas Rayner
Ben Tomlin

*Soloist track 20

St Martin's Voices

St Martin's Voices is one of the UK's most versatile, professional vocal ensembles. They sing for concerts, broadcasts and special services at London's iconic St Martin-in-the-Fields and beyond, and perform alongside the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, London Mozart Players, Southbank Sinfonia, and Will Todd Ensemble. They have toured to the USA and South Africa as well as undertaking extensive tours across the UK. The choir regularly feature in broadcasts including BBC Radio 3 Choral Evensong, BBC Radio 4 Sunday Worship and Classic FM. In response to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, St Martin's Voices have extended their digital recording projects, as well as featuring in the Church of England's online worship resources that have attracted more than four million downloads. www.stmartinsvoices.com

Polina Sosnina (organ)

Polina Sosnina is Organist and Director of the Junior Choir at St Martin-in-the-Fields, and Director of Music at Brasenose College, Oxford. In July 2022, she graduated with a distinction from the Royal College of Music, (RCM) where she studied organ performance with David Graham and Andy Dewar. Her

studies were supported by the RCM Kenneth and Violet Scott Scholarship, the Organists Charitable Trust, Eric Thompson Trust and the Leonard Freestone Scholarship from the Royal College of Organists. Polina is also a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists and graduate of Magdalene College, Cambridge, where she read Natural Sciences.

As Organist at St Martin-in-the-Fields, Polina regularly accompanies professional ensemble St Martin's Voices for concerts, recordings, and radio broadcasts. She is also an active recitalist: performances in 2023 include solo recitals at the Three Choirs Festival and St John's Smith Square, London. Polina is particularly interested in Baroque organ music; she was an Emerging Artist with the London Bach Society in 2021 and performed a Bach Corner Recital at the 2019 International Organ Festival in St Alban's.

Elizabeth Bass (harp)

Elizabeth Bass is an international award-winning harpist based in the UK. In the Spring of 2022 Elizabeth was appointed Section Principal Harp of the BBC Concert Orchestra – a position she shares with Anne Denholm. Elizabeth also freelances with ensembles including the BBC Symphony, City of London Sinfonia, Royal Northern Sinfonia and the London Sinfonietta.

Elizabeth remains dedicated to solo and chamber music, and gives recitals for various festivals across the UK. She was a 2020 winner of Making Music's Philip and Dorothy Green Award as well as an artist on the Countess of Munster Recital Scheme. In 2016 Elizabeth won second prize at the prestigious USA International Harp Competition and has also been a winner of an international Lyon&Healy Award (2013).

Elizabeth graduated from the Royal Academy of Music in 2017 with a First Class Honours Degree having studied with Skaila Kanga, and later studied for a year at the Conservatoire Nationale Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris with Isabelle Moretti. She has also studied privately with internationally renowned teachers, Sivan Magen and Eleanor Turner. In 2023 Elizabeth was made an associate of the Royal Academy of Music.

Andrew Earis (director)

Andrew Earis is Director of Music at St Martin-in-the-Fields, where he has overseen the growth of the music programme to now encompass a broad programme of concerts, worship services and special events. This includes several voluntary choirs, choral training programmes for young professionals, and orchestral ensembles. Andrew is also director of the professional ensemble,

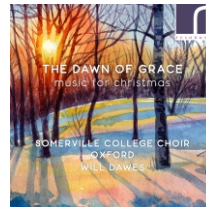
St Martin's Voices, which has presented concerts internationally, and has performed for major broadcasts on the BBC and Classic FM. Andrew regularly works with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields and has also directed performances by the London Mozart Players and Southbank Sinfonia. As an organist, he has performed at King's College Cambridge, Westminster Abbey and Washington National Cathedral.

Alongside his work at St Martin's, Andrew acts as music consultant to the Church of England. He was responsible for producing online music resources which were used by millions of churches during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond. Andrew is also a frequent contributor to the BBC's religious programmes as conductor and music consultant. He is a producer of output including Radio 4 Sunday Worship and Radio 3 Choral Evensong.

Andrew is a graduate of the Royal College of Music and Imperial College, London, and holds a PhD from the University of Manchester. In 2022 Andrew was made an Associate of the Royal School of Church Music and was also awarded the Thomas Cranmer Award for Worship by the Archbishop of Canterbury.



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Producer, engineer & editor: Adam Binks

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