

THE CHOIR OF



ST JOHN'S
CAMBRIDGE

ASH WEDNESDAY
NETHSINGHA



ASH WEDNESDAY

| | | | |
|----------------|---|-----------------------------------|---------|
| 1 | The Preces | William Byrd (c.1539-1623) | [1.39] |
| 2 | Miserere mei, Deus | Gregorio Allegri (1582-1652) | [13.08] |
| 3 | The First Lesson | Isaiah 1 vv. 10-18 | [2.03] |
| 4 | Magnificat <i>The Short Service</i> | Thomas Weelkes (c.1576-1623) | [3.03] |
| 5 | The Second Lesson | Luke 15 vv. 11-end | [3.21] |
| 6 | Nunc Dimittis <i>The Short Service</i> | Thomas Weelkes | [1.38] |
| 7 | The Apostles' Creed | | [1.05] |
| 8 | The Responses | William Byrd | [6.25] |
| 9 | Ne irascaris, Domine | William Byrd | [10.54] |
| 10 | The Prayers | | [2.29] |
| 11 | Prelude in E Minor, BWV 548i | Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) | [7.40] |
| Total timings: | | | [53.22] |

THE CHOIR OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE
JAMES ANDERSON-BESANT ORGAN
ANDREW NETHSINGHA DIRECTOR

CONDUCTOR'S REFLECTIONS

Ash Wednesday marks the start of Lent, the forty-day period of fasting and penitence which precedes Easter. Ashes are placed on worshippers' foreheads in the shape of a cross, as a sign of repentance. Evensong on this day has been an especially important service in the liturgical year at St John's; the BBC started transmitting it live in 1972. For several decades the service was broadcast annually; more recently it has been biennial. 2019 was a live broadcast year, however the recording on this release uses our own microphones, permanently installed in St John's College Chapel for webcasting, rather than those of the BBC.

A regular feature of the service is the singing of Gregorio Allegri's famous setting of Psalm 51, *Miserere mei, Deus*. The evolution of this work is described later in the booklet by our Organ Scholar, James Anderson-Besant. Some choirs treat it as a set of variations, with different embellishments in each verse. That is interesting in a concert, or as part of an academic study. However, in an act of worship, my strong preference is to stick with the one familiar version throughout, despite its lack of strict authenticity. The aim is to conjure up

a hypnotic, repetitive, healing atmosphere, in which waves of sound wash over the listener without surprises. This is conducive to meditation, to reflection, to worship - for believers it cleanses the soul, and that is at the heart of the Lenten journey. For non-believers it can be equally restorative to one's mental health and well-being. Edwin Fischer regarded the two movements of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 111 as symbolising "here and beyond". It is the latter, a sense of the transcendent, to which we aspire in music-making within the liturgy. After our Choir sings a radio broadcast, the thing that pleases me most is when a listener writes in to say that they could sense a prayerful quality over the radio. It has interested me to learn that some musicologists feel uncomfortable discussing the religious aspects of the performance of sacred music; conversely, people speak of the *religious* quality of Beethoven's (secular) Op. 111.

There is a particular frisson to a live broadcast of the Allegri, with its famous top Cs. In 2019 I had trained up two boys who could sing the high solo pretty perfectly - my plan was to alternate them during the five top Cs, thus reducing the pressure on each boy. All

was going swimmingly the previous evening, but on the morning of Ash Wednesday I received a text message to say that one of these soloists was ill - and a couple of hours later he went home. The remaining boy, 13-year-old Freddie Harrison, sailed through the solos with extraordinary composure and artistry, with half a million people listening. If there's a more challenging vocal solo for a singer of any age, then I'd like to know what it is! It is moving to remember that by the time this recording comes out, Freddie will have left the Choir and his voice will probably have changed so that he will never sing treble again. Naturally I hope that our present Choristers will go on to have wonderful adult voices, like Sir Simon Keenlyside who sang treble in the very first Ash Wednesday broadcast here. But - imagine going to a museum to look at a precious Ming vase, in the certain knowledge that by the time you next visit the museum the vase will have been dropped on the ground. It's important to take a photograph of the vase that can be kept forever.

A few years before he died, Sir Colin Davis came to Cambridge to receive an Honorary Degree. In conversation with my colleague Sir Stephen Cleobury at King's College, Stephen

mentioned that our daily routines include 8 a.m. Chorister rehearsals. Sir Colin was astonished and asked, "why on earth don't you get an assistant to direct those"? In fact, you couldn't possibly do that without losing the essence of the Choir. The early morning rehearsals are where one creates and nurtures the sound and character of the Choir; every year is a subtly different vintage of wine, in a way that doesn't happen to the same extent with orchestras.

For Byrd's *Ne irascaris, Domine* I kept in mind the thought of it being sung secretly behind closed doors, at a time when Catholics were being persecuted; this is deeply personal, intimate music. The Israelites' sorrow at their exile from Jerusalem mirrored the recusant Byrd's desolation at the lack of Catholicism in England. Whilst singing the motet I asked the Choristers to imagine they were in Central Park just after 9/11, mourning the loss of friends and colleagues who had died; I am fortunate to have Choristers with such mature artistry and musical empathy.

We used different parts of the College Chapel for the service; the sanctuary for *Miserere mei, Deus*, to create a sense of space and

distance from the congregation; the choir stalls for Weelkes's Short Service, so as to facilitate antiphonal effects; the sanctuary again for the Byrd motet *Ne irascaris, Domine* - this time striving for a sense of intimacy on the radio, engendered by a reduced number of singers standing close to one another. In this recording we are not seeking to be compared against studio and concert performances by mixed-voice professional choirs. Rather we are wanting to present a snapshot of an honest, reverential service - a real act of liturgy using the beautiful Book of Common Prayer, as we do each day. Ian Bostridge has written of "the unrepeatability and ineffability of the singular live performance". This is something I feel particularly strongly in a vocal ensemble where around a third of the membership changes every year.

The treble soloist and I had discussions about the best word underlay for "Jerusalem" in the final phrase containing a top C. It seems we didn't come to a definite conclusion, and I smile when I hear him hurriedly change vowel *during* the final high note - a record of a unique event in time. Ash Wednesday would be pointless if we didn't have imperfections!

The recording will be released around the same time as our Dean, Mark Oakley, releases a book on George Herbert's poems, called *My Sour Sweet Days*. I hope some people may choose to enjoy the book and the recording in tandem because, as Mark said in his first sermon here: "I believe that when we walk in here [The Chapel], we walk into a poem. The liturgy is poetry in motion, and we sometimes fail to understand its density of suggestion, the eavesdropping on the soul, the sensitive state of consciousness that its poetry can prompt".

Andrew Nethsingha

THE MUSIC

Gregorio Allegri (1582-1652)
Miserere Mei, Deus

Gregorio Allegri's famous setting of Psalm 51 is something of a one-hit wonder, and is notable in its rich and mysterious heritage. The famous version sung by St John's is a product of all sorts of traditions, transcriptions and horrendous mistakes! Barely anything at all survives intact from what was sung in Allegri's time, making the story of this 'work' all the more interesting.

The trail begins in the Sistine Chapel in 1514 under Pope Leo X, when the tradition of singing Psalm 51 (“Have mercy upon me, O God”) to a special musical setting during Holy Week was started. There came to be twelve settings in use by Allegri’s time (including his own, written circa 1638), all founded on an old principle of *falso bordone*, where the text is chanted to chords in speech rhythm. Despite its basis on these simple chanted chords, Allegri’s original version was written with his choir’s strange and complex system of ornamentation (or *abbellimenti*) in mind – a system that would come to define much of the Sistine Chapel Choir’s mysticism. Singers would have known instinctively from the ‘in-house’ tradition how to embellish a particular phrase, and this has its roots in singers’ improvising over a plainsong *cantus firmus* (fixed tune).

Fast-forward 150 years and the *abbellimenti* practices had changed: thus the music of the *Miserere* was already rather detached from its original form. Then, in 1770, the story goes that the 14-year-old Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart heard the Sistine Chapel Choir singing the *Miserere* twice during Holy Week, and made his own transcription by ear. Due

to the repetitive nature of the *falso bordone* structure, alternating between chorus and solo verses with plainsong verses in between, the feat was by no means extraordinary. The Pope gave him a knighthood anyway. Threats of excommunication from the Catholic Church for disseminating copies at this time are almost certainly complete myth, though it is true that the Vatican closely guarded the work. It only handed out a few copies to important figures like Emperor Leopold I. Even then they did so without the secret *abbellimenti* written in; Leopold complained that his score bore little resemblance to what he remembered hearing.

Charles Burney published an edition in 1771 soon after meeting Mozart, and it is possible that it was based on a copy Mozart might have given to him. Burney’s is different to other versions from the time, and is notable in its complete lack of any ornamentation. Even the iconic treble top Cs aren’t to be found here – or, indeed, anywhere else at this point.

In 1831 Mendelssohn made his own transcription from the Vatican, which, intriguingly, he wrote a fourth higher than had been previously notated, giving rise to some top Cs in the solo verse treble part. Perhaps this was because the Sistine

Chapel worked at a higher pitch than elsewhere. Later, in 1880 the editors of the first edition of Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians accidentally inserted a section of Mendelssohn’s higher transposition into the solo verse. This has been reproduced in later performing editions, solidifying into practice the bizarre solo verses surviving to this day, resulting in the lone top C and a striking (but inadvertent!) change of mode. A-flats are abruptly introduced and each verse ends with a Phrygian cadence into a ‘Tierce de Picardie’ on G – completely out of keeping with the rest of the setting. This is what The Choir of St John’s sings, along with the final chorus verse which probably does survive fairly intact from Allegri’s original. Editions in this format, including George Guest’s, are sung by cathedral and collegiate choirs across the country with no attempt or claim at authenticity, but without apology, representing a history of changing practices.

William Byrd (c.1539-1623)

Not much at all is known about William Byrd’s early life, but he may well have been a chorister at St Paul’s Cathedral, as his two brothers were. In 1563, Byrd was appointed Organist and Master of the Choristers at

Lincoln Cathedral, where the bulk of his music for Queen Elizabeth’s Anglican Church was written. He became a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal in 1572 alongside his friend and mentor Thomas Tallis, and together the two of them embarked on a publishing venture – the 1575 *Cantiones Sacrae* – with support from the Queen in the form of a monopoly on music printing in London. This, along with Byrd’s later publications in 1589 and 1591, sets Latin texts, almost certainly designed to be performed not in Anglican worship but rather in the home. The fact that this music was so publicly available is evidence of the Queen’s ‘middle path’ in her attitude towards national religious practice, as a Protestant with a fondness for the ritual and ceremony of the old Catholic church.

The Preces and Responses

Byrd composed several settings of the Preces and Responses, of which this is the best known. Written for the services of Matins and Evensong within the new Anglican Church (probably when Byrd was at Lincoln), they represent the simplicity of word setting required by the liturgy of the time. Cranmer’s often-quoted instruction that there should be “for

every syllable, a note” was a reaction against the complex and florid church music of the pre-Reformation period, and many shared his view. Erasmus himself, upon attending a service in King’s College Chapel, Cambridge, remarked that “the congregation cannot hear one distinct word”. Byrd’s setting of the Responses almost entirely adheres to Cranmer’s directive, save for some movement in the inner parts and a brief *melisma* (multiple notes per syllable) sung by the trebles on the word “joyful”. The “Amen” following the final chanted collect is more drawn-out than the others, and has a striking ‘English cadence’. This is a technique where two parts move to a resolution in opposite directions, resulting in a simultaneous clash or ‘near miss’. However, the sonority here is only conjectural, as the second Alto part has had to be completely reconstructed, the original having been lost.

Ne Irascaris, Domine

When Byrd published his *Liber Sacrarum Cantionum* in 1589, he was in a phase of setting Latin texts on persecution, with one theme appearing most often: the biblical captivity of the Israelites in Babylon. These references, familiar to church liturgy in the poignant words

of Psalm 137 (“By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept”), could be considered as expressions of Byrd’s personal desperation at the state of English Catholicism. Of Byrd’s three ‘Jerusalem motets’ in his 1589 publication, *Ne irascaris, Domine* has always been the best known and most performed.

The start of the motet is derived (slightly unexpectedly) from a song called *O doux regard* by the Flemish composer Philip van Wilder, who worked in Henry VIII’s court in the first half of the 16th century. It is dark in tone, and comparatively low in the voices’ ranges compared with the rest of the piece. A section in homophony – “Ecce” (look!) – draws our attention to the plight of the captives in exile, and the first half concludes with an affirmative set of imitative entries on the text “populus tuus omnes nos” (we are all thy people). The second part *Civitas sancti tui* begins inconspicuously, but the polyphony soon draws to a halt at a cadence on E major. A section of incredible poignancy then unfolds, starting with an implicitly hushed return to G major where two groups of voices sing “Sion deserta facta est” (Sion is made a wilderness). Out of this emerge the voices in imitation repeating the cry “Jerusalem, Jerusalem”,

rather evocative of the refrain from Tallis’s *Lamentations of Jeremiah*: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, convertere ad Dominum Deum tuum” (Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return unto the Lord thy God). From this follows an astonishing set of 54 entries on the words “desolata est”, utterly despondent at the captivity of the Lord’s people in Babylon. The shape of these entries is subtly altered from G-F#-E-E-D to G-F#-E-G-D, recalling the start of *Civitas*, before the final cadential motif ripples upwards from the lower parts. The motet ends with a sense of calm and tranquillity.

I have always been amazed at how Byrd creates such a resigned and “desolata” atmosphere without the use of a minor mode or extensive dissonance. Perhaps another composer such as Tomkins might have set it in the latter way, using the ‘English’ false relations and clashes to illustrate the pain of exile. However, it is the subtlety of word-setting and expressive use of imitation and texture that make *Ne irascaris, Domine* stand out as a true masterpiece. An apt comment is passed down from an anonymous copyist in the time of Byrd, simply annotating his manuscript “good song”.

Thomas Weelkes (baptised 1576-1623) *The Short Service*

The lifetime of Thomas Weelkes saw the styles of Anglican church music evolve from their infancy in Byrd’s time. *The Short Service*, one of Weelkes’s many settings of the canticles appointed for Matins and Evensong, represents a tradition well into its maturity, descending from the first simple English canticles by Tallis and Tye. It was probably written while Weelkes was serving as Organist and Master of the Choristers at Chichester Cathedral, where he worked from around 1601 until his death. Although biased by Cathedral Chapter’s view of Weelkes, virtually all records of his employment paint him in a thoroughly negative light. After being charged for absence from the Bishop’s visitation in 1609, he was regularly noted for public drunkenness, and was reported to the Bishop in 1616 for being a “notorious swearer and blasphemer”. He was fired in 1617, but somehow managed to get his job back by 1622. Stories passed down from lay-clerk to lay-clerk suggest that he even once urinated onto the Dean’s head from the organ loft.

The simple and syllabic *Short Service* is so called to distinguish it from the ‘Verse’ services (where solo verses with independent organ accompaniment alternate with full choir responses) and ‘Great’ services (employing a variety of verses with divided sets of parts and more extended imitation, all doubled by the organ). Although Weelkes’s choir at Chichester is thought to have been rather small in size, larger choral traditions elsewhere have provided an opportunity to adapt his music as it has been passed on. For example his original ‘full’ setting of an Alleluia for Chichester was changed at Durham so that the music alternated between the ‘Decani’ and ‘Cantoris’ sides of the choir, creating a spatial effect. This is how the St John’s Choir sing Weelkes’s *Short Service* today, with movement from side to side marked in by the editor. The simple text-setting shows echoes of Cranmer’s “for every syllable, a note” well into the 17th century, and this lent much inspiration to the later services of Humfrey, Blow and Purcell.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) ***Prelude in E minor (BWV 548i)***

Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Prelude in E minor* (BWV 548i) is one of the most large-scale and arguably most harmonically driven of all Bach’s Preludes; its attached “Wedge” Fugue is the longest of his output in that genre. It was almost certainly composed in Leipzig between 1727 and 1736, making it one of the last of the Preludes and Fugues Bach wrote, the majority having been written before 1720.

The *Prelude* displays a grand architecture of structure and tonality. The powerful theme at the start, underpinned by an articulated ‘pedal point’ (a prolonged note above which the harmony changes), is used as a refrain throughout the piece in alternation with various ‘verses’ in contrasting styles. This is known as *ritornello form*, and is typical of much Baroque instrumental music, especially the Concerto Grosso. One of the verses which is expanded upon and developed in the *Prelude* is a manuals-only section in the reduced scoring of three parts. Another is characterised by a harmonic progression rising in semitones and a pedal part in the style of a ‘walking bass’. There are remarkably few cadences in the

Prelude, and those that do occur are generally the impetus for a new idea or section, diminishing any sense of finality and instead heightening tension throughout. It is only at the very end therefore, following the last of four sustained pedal points on A, D, G and finally B (the ‘dominant’ of the piece), that the cadence truly resolves without interruption, bringing to a close one of Bach’s greatest organ movements.

James Anderson-Besant

THE ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE

For many years now, Choral Evensong on Ash Wednesday has held a particularly cherished place in the life of St John’s College Chapel. In this recording of Evensong, a rite which forms part of the daily round of worship offered at St John’s, ancient words and music invite us to reflect upon this most solemn of holy days.

By tradition, Christians strive to deepen their discipleship during Lent, in expectation of the celebration of Christ’s passion and resurrection. Lent originated as a time of preparation for baptismal candidates, and

later became associated with those who had committed grave public sins, in preparation for their readmission to the rites of the Church at Easter. The modern-day period of Lent which commences on Ash Wednesday is symbolic of the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness after his baptism and before his public ministry. On this day, the crosses from the previous Palm Sunday are burned and used to mark the sign of the cross on the foreheads of worshippers, who thereby commit themselves to a season of fasting, self-examination, and prayer.

The *Opus Dei* (the Work of God) is upheld by Anglicans today through the offices of Morning and Evening Prayer, which have been the framework of daily Anglican worship since Thomas Cranmer adapted the monastic pattern of prayer almost 500 years ago. The words of Evening Prayer - or the sung version, Evensong - remain as Cranmer left them, yet they offer fresh meaning to those who seek to encounter God in our own age. The unchanging text of The Preces, Magnificat, Nunc Dimittis, and Responses is included daily, yet crucially its musical setting (along with the specifically-appointed readings, prayers, and the anthem) sets the tone of the liturgy. Evensong

on Ash Wednesday is a turning point in the Christian year: it offers the opportunity to make the connection between our life and the life of God through soul-searching music and words.

The Lenten liturgy mirrors the plainer, humbler lives of penitent Christians through the simple adornment of the space, restrained use of the organ, and abandonment of more extravagant musical works. And yet, the season offers some of the most sublime church music in the repertoire. Witness the setting of Psalm 51 by Allegri, handed down to us in a version containing the famous top Cs of a lone treble, the evoked emotions of which are surely intensified in the atmosphere of a live broadcast. The beautifully simple *Preces and Responses* by Byrd, and Weelkes's *Short Service*, are both products of Cranmer's stipulation that the texts should be "understanded of the people". By contrast, Byrd's astonishing anthem in Latin, *Ne irascaris, Domine*, paints a picture of the Catholic composer lamenting his own exile. The readings from the Book of Isaiah and the Gospel of Luke speak of vanity, social injustice, the exploitation of the powerless, and the squandering of precious resources. These

themes resonate powerfully today.

This rather sombre dimension should not obscure Lent's renewing purpose, however. Liturgical customs such as the absence of flowers, the veiling of bejewelled crosses, the shutting of triptychs and the wearing of linen vestments do not seek to condemn; rather, they provide the backdrop to a life in which Christians may see more clearly the love of Christ, acknowledge their own shortcomings, and grow in self-awareness. In both the first lesson (in which Isaiah condemns the waywardness of Judah and Jerusalem) and in the second lesson (the Parable of the Prodigal Son), the underlying message is that of redemption. As the Advent candle in a dark Cambridge winter anticipates the birth of Christ, so too does the season of Lent, with etymological roots in the Old English word for 'springtime', fill Christians with hope in the knowledge of Christ's resurrection. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of this journey of renewal, urged on by the Collect's petition for perfect remission and forgiveness.

John Challenger

TEXTS

MISERERE MEI, DEUS

Gregorio Allegri

Miserere mei, Deus,
secundum magnam misericordiam tuam :
Et secundum multitudinem miserationum
tuarum,

dele iniquitatem meam.

Amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea :

et a peccato meo munda me.

Quoniam iniquitatem meam ego cognosco :

et peccatum meum contra me est semper.

Tibi soli peccavi, et malum coram te feci :

ut iustificeris in sermonibus tuis, et vincas

cum iudicaris.

Ecce, enim in iniquitatibus conceptus sum :

et in peccatis concepit me mater mea.

Ecce enim veritatem dilexisti :

incerta et occulta sapientiae tuae

manifestasti mihi.

Asperges me hyssopo, et mundabor :

lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor.

Auditui meo dabis gaudium et laetitiam :

et exultabunt ossa humiliata.

Averte faciem tuam a peccatis meis :

et omnes iniquitates meas dele.

*Have mercy upon me, O God,
after thy great goodness :*

*According to the multitude of
thy mercies,
do away mine offences.*

*Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness :
and cleanse me from my sin.*

*For I acknowledge my faults :
and my sin is ever before me.*

*Against thee only have I sinned, and done this
evil in thy sight : that thou mightest be justified
in thy saying, and clear when thou art judged.*

*Behold, I was shapen in wickedness :
and in sin hath my mother conceived me.*

*But lo, thou requirest truth in the inward parts :
and shalt make me to understand wisdom
secretly.*

*Thou shalt purge me with hyssop, and I shall be
clean : thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter
than snow.*

*Thou shalt make me hear of joy and gladness :
that the bones which thou hast broken may
rejoice. Turn thy face from my sins :
and put out all my misdeeds.*

Cor mundum crea in me, Deus :
et spiritum rectum innova in visceribus meis.
Ne proicias me a facie tua :
et spiritum sanctum tuum ne auferas a me.
Redde mihi laetitiam salutaris tui :
et spiritu principali confirma me.
Docebo iniquos vias tuas :
et impii ad te convertentur.
Libera me de sanguinibus, Deus, Deus salutis
meae :
et exsultabit lingua mea iustitiam tuam.
Domine, labia mea aperies :
et os meum annuntiabit laudem tuam.
Quoniam si voluisses sacrificium, dedissem
utique :
holocaustis non delectaberis.
Sacrificium Deo spiritus contribulatus:
cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non
despicias.
Benigne fac, Domine, in bona voluntate tua
Sion :
ut aedificentur muri Jerusalem.
Tunc acceptabis sacrificium iustitiae,
oblations, et holocausta :
tunc imponent super altare tuum vitulos.

Psalm 51

*Make me a clean heart, O God
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from thy presence :
and take not thy holy Spirit from me.
O give me the comfort of thy help again :
and stablish me with thy free Spirit.
Then shall I teach thy ways unto the wicked :
and sinners shall be converted unto thee.
Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou
that art the God of my health :
and my tongue shall sing of thy righteousness.
Thou shalt open my lips, O Lord :
and my mouth shall shew thy praise.
For thou desirest no sacrifice, else would I
give it thee :
but thou delightest not in burnt-offerings.
The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit :
a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt thou
not despise.
O be favourable and gracious unto Sion :
build thou the walls of Jerusalem.
Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifice
of righteousness, with the burnt-
offerings and oblations :
then shall they offer young bullocks upon
thine altar*

THE SHORT SERVICE

Thomas Weelkes

Magnificat

My soul doth magnify the Lord :
and my spirit hath rejoiced in
God my Saviour.
For he hath regarded :
the lowliness of his hand-maiden.
For behold, from henceforth :
all generations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath magnified me :
and holy is his Name.
And his mercy is on them that fear him :
throughout all generations.
He hath shewed strength with his arm :
he hath scattered the proud in the
imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seat :
and hath exalted the humble and meek.
He hath filled the hungry with good things :
and the rich he hath sent empty away.
He remembering his mercy hath holpen
his servant Israel :
as he promised to our forefathers,
Abraham and his seed for ever.

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

Luke 1 vv. 46-55

Nunc Dimittis

Lord now lettest thou thy servant
depart in peace :
according to thy word.
For mine eyes have seen :
thy salvation,
Which thou hast prepared :
before the face of all people;
To be a light to lighten the Gentiles :
and to be the glory of thy people Israel.

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

Luke 2 vv. 29-32

NE IRASCARIS, DOMINE

William Byrd

Ne irascaris, Domine, satis,
et ne ultra memineris iniquitatis nostrae :
Ecce, respice, populus tuus omnes nos.

Civitas sancti tui facta est deserta,
Sion deserta facta est, Jerusalem desolata est.

Isaiah 64 vv. 9-10

*Be not wroth very sore, O Lord,
neither remember iniquity for ever:
behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people.*

*Thy holy cities are a wilderness,
Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation.*

THE CHOIR OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE



© Nick Rutter

Trebles

Adam Ahmad
Felix Bamford
William Buttery
Jaylen Cheng
Lewis Cobb ²
Joshua Davidson
George Ducker
Lorenzo Granado
Alfred Harrison ²
Harry L'Estrange ²
Toby L'Estrange
Jonathan Mews
Lucas Nair-Grepinet
Ewan Tatnell
Thomas Watkin ²

Counter Tenors

Hugh Cutting ²
Alec D'Oyly
Alexander Simpson
Laurence Trowsdale-Stannard
Thomas Watts

Tenors

Jack Bazalgette
Benedict Flinn
Gopal Kambo ^{1,8}
Henry Laird
Louis Watkins

Basses

James Adams
Thomas Butler

James Conway
Matthew Gibson
Simon Grant
Oliver Morris ²
William O'Brien

Herbert Howells Organ Scholar

Glen Dempsey

Junior Organ Scholar

James Anderson-Besant *

Director of Music

Andrew Nethsingha

Numbers indicate soloist credits for each CD track

** This organist was playing for the service*

The Choir of St John's College, Cambridge is one of the finest collegiate choirs in the world, known and loved by millions from its broadcasts, concert tours and recordings. Founded in the 1670s, the Choir is known for its distinctive rich, warm sound, its expressive interpretations and its breadth of repertoire. Alongside these musical characteristics, the Choir is particularly proud of its happy, relaxed and mutually supportive atmosphere. The Choir is directed by Andrew Nethsingha following a long line

of eminent Directors of Music, recently Dr George Guest, Dr Christopher Robinson and Dr David Hill.

The Choir is made up of around 20 Choristers and Probationers from St John's College School and around 15 Choral Scholars who are members of St John's College, its primary purpose being to enhance the liturgy and worship at daily services in the College Chapel. The Choir has a diverse repertoire spanning over 500 years of music. It is also

renowned for championing contemporary music by commissioning new works, including recent compositions by Judith Bingham, Julian Anderson, Anna Semple, Lara Weaver, David Nunn, Cecilia McDowall, and the College's former Composer in Residence, Michael Finnis.

Each term the Choir sings Bach Cantatas liturgically with St John's Sinfonia, its period instrument ensemble. This Bach series is now entering its second decade.

The Choir brings the 'St John's Sound' to listeners around the world through its weekly webcasts (available at www.sjchoir.co.uk). The Choir has also live-streamed video broadcasts of Chapel services on Facebook, in association with Classic FM. In addition to regular radio broadcasts in this country and abroad, the Choir releases multiple recordings each year. In May 2016 the College launched its new 'St John's Cambridge' recording label (in conjunction with Signum Classics) on which the Choir has released the BBC Music Magazine award-winning recording of Jonathan Harvey's music: DEO; *Christmas with St John's*; KYRIE (works by Poulenc, Kodály and Janáček); *Mass in G minor*

(works by Vaughan Williams); *Advent Live* (a collection of live recordings from the College Chapel's Advent Carol Services, broadcast each year by the BBC); *Locus Iste*, the Choir's 100th commercial recording which celebrated the 150th anniversary of the Consecration of St John's College Chapel, and *Magnificat*, a recording of six settings of the Evening Canticles.

The Choir also performs concerts outside of Cambridge and tours internationally each year. Recent destinations have included France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Hong Kong and Singapore. It also performs regularly in the UK, with venues including Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Royal Albert Hall and Royal Festival Hall, London.

JAMES ANDERSON-BESANT JUNIOR ORGAN SCHOLAR

James Anderson-Besant is Organ Scholar at St John's College, Cambridge, holding the post of Junior Organ Scholar from 2017-19 and Herbert Howells Organ Scholar from 2019. He is in his final year studying Music. In his role as Organ Scholar he accompanies the Choir in its daily round of services under the direction of Andrew Nethsingha, and also assists in the training of the boy Choristers. James has broadcast live on BBC Radio 3 and Radio 4, and his playing will feature in a number of upcoming recordings, including a première recording of music by Michael Finnis.

He recently gave recitals at King's, Queen's and St John's Colleges as well as Truro and St Alban's Cathedrals, and looks forward to upcoming engagements at Stockholm Cathedral and Trinity College, Cambridge. James won second prize at the 2019 Northern Ireland International Organ Competition, and was also Organ Scholar for the Charles Wood Summer School and Festival in Armagh, giving him the opportunity to work under Dr David Hill and Philip Scriven. James also



© Benjamin Ealovega

enjoys conducting, having organised and directed a performance of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* in 2019. He has plans to conduct Bach's *St John Passion* in 2020.

James was a music and academic scholar at Abingdon School, and in his final year was Organ Scholar of the Cathedral Singers of Christ Church, Oxford. He spent his gap year as Organ Scholar of Gloucester Cathedral, where he accompanied services sung by all

four cathedral choirs, helped train the choristers and assisted in a primary school singing outreach programme. James' year at Gloucester was especially exciting due to the addition of the first ever girl choristers in the cathedral's history.

For seven years James learned the organ with James Brown, and he now studies with Stephen Farr. He would love to pursue a career in cathedral music.



© James Bealock

**ANDREW NETHSINGHA,
DIRECTOR OF MUSIC
ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE**

Performing in North America, South Africa, the Far East, and throughout Europe, Andrew Nethsingha has been Director of Music at St John's College, Cambridge since 2007. He has helped to set up the recording label, 'St John's Cambridge', in conjunction with Signum Classics. His first disc on this label, DEO (music by Jonathan Harvey), was a 2017 BBC Music Magazine Award winner.

Andrew Nethsingha was a chorister at Exeter Cathedral, under his father's direction. He later studied at the Royal College of Music, where he won seven prizes, and at St John's College, Cambridge. He held Organ Scholarships under Christopher Robinson at St George's Windsor, and George Guest at St John's, before becoming Assistant Organist at Wells Cathedral. He was subsequently Director of Music at Truro and Gloucester Cathedrals, and Artistic Director of the Gloucester Three Choirs Festival.

Andrew's concerts conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra have included: Mahler's 8th

Symphony, Beethoven's 9th Symphony, Britten's *War Requiem*, Brahms's *Requiem*, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* and *The Kingdom*, Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, Poulenc's *Gloria* and Duruflé's *Requiem*. He has also worked with: the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, London

Mozart Players, Britten Sinfonia, Orchestra of St Luke's (New York), Aarhus Symfoniorkester, BBC Concert Orchestra. Venues have included the BBC Proms, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Verbier Festival, Tokyo Suntory Hall, Konzerthaus Berlin, and Singapore Esplanade.



Acknowledgements

The Choir would like to thank those who continue to support the 'St John's Cambridge' recording label through **The CD Recording Fund**, in particular Mr Archie Burdon-Cooper.

Publishers

Allegrì; Byrd (Oxford University Press)
Weelkes (Stainer and Bell)

Scripture passages for the First and Second Lessons are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission.
All rights reserved worldwide.

Recorded live in St John's College Chapel, Cambridge, UK
on Wednesday 6th March, 2019

Post-production - Matthew Bennett & Dave Rowell
Reader for First Lesson - Harry Redding
Reader for Second Lesson - Sarah Cox
Prayers - The Rev'd Carol Barrett Ford
Dean - The Rev'd Canon Mark Oakley
Project Manager - James Proctor

Cover Image – Shutterstock, edited by Premm Design
Design and Artwork – Woven Design
www.wovendesign.co.uk

© 2020 The copyright in this sound recording is owned by Signum Records Ltd
© 2020 The copyright in this CD booklet, notes and design is owned by Signum Records Ltd

Any unauthorised broadcasting, public performance, copying or re-recording of Signum Compact Discs constitutes an infringement of copyright and will render the infringer liable to an action by law. Licences for public performances or broadcasting may be obtained from Phonographic Performance Ltd. All rights reserved. No part of this booklet may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission from Signum Records Ltd.

SignumClassics, Signum Records Ltd., Suite 14,
21 Wadsworth Road, Perivale, Middlesex UB6 7LQ, UK.
+44 (0) 20 8997 4000 E-mail: info@signumrecords.com
www.signumrecords.com

ALSO AVAILABLE



Locus Iste

Choir of St John's College, Cambridge
Andrew Nethsingha *Director*
SIGCD567

★★★★★ *'a glint of sunlight, inspired and inspiring'*
BBC Music Magazine

'Beautifully captured'
BBC Radio 3, Record Review



Vaughan Williams

Choir of St John's College, Cambridge
Andrew Nethsingha *Director*
SIGCD541

★★★★★ *'Formidably attractive'*
Choral CD of the Month, BBC Music Magazine

'Director Andrew Nethsingha shapes a performance of profound dignity and power, beautifully sung by this always impressive choir' The Guardian

SIGNUMCLASSICS

Available through most record stores and at www.signumrecords.com For more information call +44 (0) 20 8997 4000

ALSO AVAILABLE



Jonathan Harvey: Deo

Choir of St John's College, Cambridge
Andrew Nethsingha *Director*
SIGCD456

★★★★★ *'ecstatic... the Choir tackles it all with confidence and clarity'* **The Observer**

★★★★★ *'characterful yet authoritative performances of which they can be justly proud'* **Choir & Organ**



Kyrie

Choir of St John's College, Cambridge
Andrew Nethsingha *Director*
SIGCD489

"The treble voices of St John's bring an ineffably poised gravity... a signal virtue of this new recording is the moulded caress of every luscious harmony in what are predominantly homophonic works" **Gramophone Magazine**

SIGNUMCLASSICS

Available through most record stores and at www.signumrecords.com For more information call +44 (0) 20 8997 4000