

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 21 December 2024
7.30pm

The English Concert

Harry Bicket director, harpsichord

Nadja Zwiener leader, violin	Alexander Jones bass	Matthew Wells trumpet
Manami Mizumoto violin	Katy Bircher flute	Ross Brown trumpet
Elizabeth MacCarthy violin	Rosie Bowker flute	Sergio Bucheli theorbo
Kinga Ujszászi violin	Clara Espinosa Encinas oboe	Tom Foster harpsichord
Alfonso Leal del Ojo viola	Sarah Humphrys oboe	Tommy Foster timpani
Joseph Crouch cello	Simon Munday trumpet	

Chiara Skerath soprano

Katie Bray soprano

Jess Dandy alto

James Way tenor

Morgan Pearse bass

Anastasia Bevan ripieno soprano

Catriona Holsgrove ripieno soprano

Anna Semple ripieno alto

Thomas Herford ripieno tenor

Richard Bannan ripieno bass

Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643-1704)

In nativatem Domini nostri Jesu Christi canticum H414

Alessandro Stradella (1639-1682)

Si apra al riso ogni labro

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Behold, I bring you glad tidings Z2

Interval

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Magnificat in D BWV243 (c.1732-5)

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Marc-Antoine Charpentier did not hold a position at the court of Louis XIV. Yet his prolific output – almost 500 religious works survive – and a mastery of most genres brought him considerable renown. Upon his return to Paris after studying in Italy, Charpentier was gifted an apartment in the Hôtel de Guise by Marie de Lorraine. ‘Mademoiselle de Guise’ was an important figure in Paris life, and Charpentier seems to have lived as a kind of composer-in-residence and singer until shortly before her death in 1688. After his opera *Médée* (1693), he devoted the rest of his career to composing religious music.

Charpentier’s *In Nativitatem Domini nostri Jesu Canticum* H414 probably belongs to the period after the death of de Guise, when Charpentier became director of music at Saint Paul, the main Jesuit church in Paris. Combining ‘high’ art music with more folksy, popular elements, particularly energised by the two violin parts, Charpentier captures the diverse set of characters in the Nativity story. There is dance-like Italianate profusion, as well as wonderfully evocative recitative (the melisma on ‘vigilabant’, for example, represents the lively vigilant watching of the shepherds).

Alessandro Stradella’s biography reads like a never-ending tale of bad luck (most likely, brought upon himself). He was chased out of Rome, beaten almost to death in Turin, and then stabbed in the Piazza Banchi in Genoa. Despite always seemingly short of money, Stradella’s music was much in demand. He received commissions from Genoese nobility and the city’s churches, and also received success in Venice and Rome.

Stradella’s *Si apra al riso ogni labro* is one of two surviving Christmas cantatas (the only religious holiday for which Stradella is known to have composed). The soprano, alto and bass singers represent the shepherds. The strings, too, in how they take up vocal motives in the *ritornellos*, seem to bolster the shepherds in number. The sense of structure is unique: there is a porousness between aria and recitative, and Stradella creates a form of continuous flow that engenders the excitement of the narrative. The cantata’s joyous opening fantastically sets the questions – why? how? who? – that move in quick imitation between the shepherds.

Behold, I bring you glad tidings dates from 1687. Its text, three verses from Luke 2, suggests that it was written for Christmas in the Chapel Royal – making it **Purcell**’s only extant anthem composed specifically for the Feast of Christmas. Purcell’s word-setting is surely at its finest. Through melodic direction, sometimes intriguingly transgressive in momentary dissonances, as well as rhythmic patterns, he expertly conveys the emotional landscape. There’s miracle

and majesty, the joyful propagation of good news, and heavenly joy. The Alleluias, alternating between the soloists and strings, reinforce that sense of dialogue between earth and heaven – surely, the theological crux of Christmas.

During his first Christmas in Leipzig, **Bach** revived *Christen, ätztet diesen Tag*, BWV 63. The cantata was probably premièred on Christmas Day 1714 in Weimar. But in 1723, Bach needed something to accompany the work. The Magnificat in E flat major was composed for this occasion (it predates the D major, revised version BWV 243). Additional texts, including three carols and a ‘Gloria in Excelsis Deo’, were interpolated between the verses of this work.

Despite this being an extremely busy time of the year, Bach was inventive (the work thus challenges the all too simple narrative that Bach recycled music due to mere time constraints). Most obvious is Bach’s playing with different colours and musical imagery. The choir enters with musical laughter – rhetoric which is later drawn upon by the trilling trumpets. Even within the enveloping polyphony, there are moments of intricate detail and repose: a pair of flutes momentarily emerge, as if to grab air. All human life – grand and small – is celebrated here.

Reflective verses of the Vespers are assigned to the soloists. In the ‘Et misericordia’, a duet for alto and tenor, the flutes shadow the violins with the fragility of pious fear (the compound quadruple time and E minor key foreshadow the opening of the *St Matthew Passion*, to be performed in Leipzig four years later). In ‘Suscepit Israel’, Bach gives the oboes a plainsong melody – the melody Mozart would go on to use in the ‘Lux Aeterna’ of his Requiem. The alto and soprano soloists weave mournfully around this chant, wrapping its simplicity in eerily ethereal ribbons.

In contrast to that sonic vapour, ‘Omnes generationes’ is a vigorous fugal chorus. Bach’s interest in genealogy becomes structurally inspiring. In two separate sections, Bach arranges the fugal entries in a stepwise ascending pattern. Each vocal part imitates the last, at a regular distance of two beats, and one degree of the scale higher. These fugal entries, each superseding the last, cover the range of an entire octave—twice; it’s a huge family tree painted in sound.

But Bach’s final trick is perhaps the best musical pun of them all. As the doxology closes ‘as it was in the beginning’, Bach treats us to a condensed recapitulation of the opening movement. A musical metaphor that’s as fresh and brilliant as it was 300 years ago.

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Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643-1704)

In nativitatem Domini nostri Jesu Christi canticum H414

Anonymous

Frigidæ noctis umbra totum orbem tegebat	The shade of chill night
Et immersi iacebant omnes	covered all the earth, and all things
In somno profundo.	lay plunged in deep sleep.
Pastores autem Iudeæ	Meanwhile the shepherds of Judaea
Vigilabant super regem suum.	were watching over their flocks.
Et ecce angelus Domini stetit iuxta eos,	And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them,
Et claritas Dei circumfulsit eos.	and the glory of the Lord shone round them;
Timuerunt autem pastores timore magno;	and they were sore afraid
Et dixit illis angélus.	And the angel said unto them:
Nolite timere, pastores.	Fear not, shepherds,
Ecce enim annuntio vobis	for behold, I bring you tidings
Gaudium magnum	of great joy,
Quod erit omni populo:	which shall be to all people.
Quia natus est hodie Salvator vester	For unto you is born this day
In civitate David;	in the city of David a Saviour;
Et hoc erit vobis signum:	and this shall be a sign unto you:
Invenietis pannis involutum	you shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes,
Et reclinatum in prasepio.	lying in a manger.
Ite, pastores, et adorate illum.	Go, shepherds, and worship him.
Surgamus, festinemus, eamus usque Bethlehem.	Let us arise and hasten, unto Bethlehem
Properemus, eamus usque Bethlehem	Let us go now even unto Bethlehem.
Ibi videbimus puerum	There we will see the child
Qui natus est nobis.	who is born for us.
Ibi laudabimus et adorabimus Deum	There we will praise and worship God,
Sub forma peccatoris velatum.	clothed as he is in the form of a sinner.
Quid moramur, quid cunctamur	Why do we stay, why do we delay,
O pastores inertes?	O sluggish shepherds?
Euntes autem pastores pervenerunt ad locum	Then the shepherds departed and came to the place

Ubi puer natus erat, et intrantes domum	where the child was born, and entering the house
Invenerunt Mariam et Ioseph	they found Mary and Joseph
Et puerum involutum pannis	with the child wrapped in swaddling clothes
Et reclinatum in præsepio.	and lying in a manger
Et procidentés adoraverunt eum,	And they knelt down and worshipped him,
Inculto sed devoto carmine dicentes:	with a crude yet devout song, saying:

Salve puerule, Salve, tenellule,	Hail, little child, hail, little tender boy,
O nate parvule, Quam bonus es!	O tiny newborn child, how good you are!
Tu cœlum deseris, Tu mundo nasceris,	You foresake heaven, you are born into the world
Nobis te ut miseris Assimiles.	to share the lot of us poor mortals.
O summa bonitas, Excelsa deitas,	O highest goodness, the supreme deity
Vilis humanitas,	has become base humanity
Fit hodie Aeternus nascitur	on this day. The eternal is born,
Immensus capitur,	his immensity is contained
Et rei tegitur, Sub specie.	and wrapped in human form.
Virgo puer pera,	The virgin has given birth;
Beata viscera Dei cum opera,	her blessed womb through the workings of God
Dant filium.	has yielded up a son.
Gaude flos virginum, Gaude spes hominum,	Rejoice, flower of virgins, rejoice, hope of mankind,
Fons lavans crimum Proluvium.	fountain that washes away our abundant guilt.

Please do not turn the page until the piece and its accompaniment have ended.

Alessandro Stradella (1639-1682)

Si apra al riso ogni labro

Aria

Primo Pastore

S'apra al riso ogni
labro

e si racchiuda ogni pupilla al
pianto!

Aria

First Shepherd

Let every lip break into a
smile

and every eye be closed
to tears!

Recitativo, Arioso e Duetto

Secondo Pastore

Di giu bilo contanto
chi fia giocondo
fabro?

Primo Pastore

La torbida tempesta
raserenar conviene
d'ogni cura
molesta,
e spezzar le catene
ch'il primo genitor
ci pose al piè.

Recitative, Aria and Duet

Second Shepherd

Who is the joyful creator
of such immense
rejoicing?

First Shepherd

The turbid storm
of each molesting care
it behooves us now to
quiet,
and to break the fetters
our first progenitor
put on our feet.

Secondo Pastore

Perché?

Second, Third Shepherd

Why?

Primo Pastore

La cagion d'ogni gioia è il
gran Natale
di fanciullo reale
a cui gl'astri più
belli
ornan le chiome.

First Shepherd

The cause of all joy is the
great nativity
of a royal Child
whose hair the finest
stars
adorn.

Secondo, Terzo Pastore

Come?

Second, Third Shepherd

How?

Primo Pastore

Quel ch'al fato dà legge,
quel che dà il volo
ai venti,
il corso all'acque,
quello ch'il mondo regge
sotto povero tetto or
ora nacque;
e in sembianza di tenero
bambino
il suo corpo
divin
d'umanità vesti.

First Shepherd

He who rules over fate,
he who gives the winds
their flight
and waters their course,
he who governs the world
is born this day under a
humble roof;
and in the semblance of a
tender infant
has clothed his divine
body
with human fiesh.

Secondo, Terzo Pastore

Second, Third Shepherd

Chi?

Primo Pastore

Vostra stupida mente
non si confonda più:
quello ch'è nato è il
Redentor Gesù

Who?

First Shepherd

Let your foggy minds
no longer be confused:
he who was born is our
Redeemer, Jesus.

Secondo Pastore

O fortunato avviso!

Second Shepherd

O glad tidings!

Terzo Pastore

O prospera novella!

Third Shepherd

O happy news!

Secondo, Terzo Pastore

S'apra ogni labro
al riso!

Su su, al canto si sciogla ogni
favella!

Second, Third Shepherd

Let every lip break into a
smile!

Come, let every tongue
break into song!

Ritornello

Madrigale a 3

*Primo, Secondo, Terzo
Pastore*

O di notte felice e beata
ombra
amata,
gradito orrore in cui
sorge
e vita a noi
porge
delle stelle il Supremo
Fattore.

Madrigal for 3

*First, Second, Third
Shepherd*

O well loved darkness
of a happy and blessed
night,
O welcome fearfulness in
which
the stars' Supreme Maker
arises
and grants us
life.

Ritornello

Aria – Recitativo - Aria

Primo Pastore

Con insoliti e chiari splendori,
al Natale del Re
delle sfere
ogni tenebra par che
s'indori
e scintillin le nubi più
nere.
Le caligini oscure il ciel
disgombra,
all'apparir del sol sparisce
ogn'onombra.

Aria - Recitative - Aria

First Shepherd

With uncommon, bright
splendor,
at the birth of the king of
the spheres
all darkness seems to
take on a golden hue
and the blackest cloud to
sparkle.
Of sombre fog the sky is
cleared:
as the sun rises all
shadows vanish.

Aria

Terzo Pastore
Della gregge mansueta
fida turba
conduttrice,
godì pur festosa e
lieta
ad annuncio sì felice.

Madrigale a 3

*Primo, Secondo, Terzo
Pastore*
Temer più non lice
d'arciera severa
il colpo mortale:
spezza al nascer di Dio
morte lo strale.

Aria – Recitativo - Aria

Primo Pastore
Or mirate il gran
Tonante,
ch'umanato
pargoleggia
e nel fieno ha
la sua reggia,
ch'ha nel ciel soglio
stellante.
Gl'occhi volgete a Dio
ch'a voi si
svela;
quindi ardetè per lui,
s'ei per voi
gela.

Aria - Accompagnato

Secondo Pastore
All'ignudo Redentore,
se non fosse troppo angusto
e di colpe così onusto,
offrirei per cuna il
core
o, col foco de' caldi sospir
miei,
le fredde membra sue
riscalderei.

Aria

Third Shepherd
O trusted multitude
who shepherd meek
flocks,
rejoice in glee and
happiness
at such joyful tidings.

Madridgal for 3

*First, Second, Third
Shepherd*
No more must you fear
the merciless archer's
mortai blow:
at the birth of God, death
breaks its arrow.

Aria - Recitative - Aria

First Shepherd
Now see how the great
Thunderer,
made human, bears
himself as a babe
and has his kingly
mansion in hay,
he whose star-like throne
is in Heaven.
Turn your eyes to God
who manifests himself
to you;
then burn with love for
him who suffers
freezing cold for you.

Aria - Accompanied

Second Shepherd
To my naked Redeemer,
were it not so mean
and so laden with sins,
I would give my own heart
as a cradle
or, with the fire of my
ardent sighs,
I would warm his cold
limbs.

Aria – Recitativo - Aria

Terzo Pastore
Con quel gel ch'il sen
gl'agghiaccia
vibra altrui celeste
arsura,
ond'avvien ch'ogn'alma pura
dolcemente si disfaccia.
Ei regge il mondo eppur
vagusce infante:
ha le saette in mano ed è
tremante.

Duetto

Primo, Terzo Pastore
Mentre ingemmano il suo
viso
vive perle ruggiadose,
da sue lagrime preziose
ha il natale il nostro riso.
E mentre ei dà principio a un
mesto pianto
il nostro lagrimar termina
intanto.

Aria

Primo Pastore
E non si spezza
a tant'amore
l'aspra durezza
d'ingrato core.

Ritornello

Madrigale a 3

*Primo, Secondo, Terzo
Pastore*
O gran bontà del regnator
dell'Etra:
Iddio si fa di carne e
l'uom di pietra.

Please do not turn the page until the piece and its accompaniment have ended.

Aria - Recitative - Aria

Third Shepherd
From the ice that freezes
his breast
divine burning heat he
radiates,
so that every pure soul
sweetly melts.
He rules the world, yet as
a babe he cries:
his hands hold lightning,
and yet he is trembling.

Duet

First, Third Shepherd
While his face is
bejeweled
with bright dewy pearls,
from his precious tears
our laughter is born.
And while he begins a sad
lament,
our own weeping comes
to an end.

Aria

First Shepherd
Yet the cruel hardness
of ungrateful hearts
does not break
at so much love.

Madrigal for 3

*First, Second, Third
Shepherd*
O great goodness of the
king of the Aether:
God is made flesh and
man is made stone.

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Behold, I bring you glad tidings Z2

Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy,
Which shall be to all people.
For unto you this day is born a Saviour,
Which is Christ the Lord.

Glory to God on high, and on earth peace, good will
towards men.

Interval

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Magnificat in D BWV243 (c.1732-5)

Liturgical text

<i>Chorus</i> Magnificat, anima mea, Dominum.	<i>Chorus</i> My soul doth magnify the Lord:
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<i>Aria</i> Et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo, salutari meo	<i>Aria</i> And my spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour.
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<i>Aria</i> Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae. Ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent	<i>Aria</i> For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden. For behold from henceforth
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<i>Chorus</i> Omnes generationes.	<i>Chorus</i> All generations shall call me blessed.
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<i>Aria</i> Quia fecit mihi magna, qui potens est, Et sanctum nomen eius.	<i>Aria</i> For he that is mighty hath magnified me, and holy is his name.
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<i>Duet</i> Et misericordia eius a progenie in progenies, Timentibus eum.	<i>Duet</i> And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations.
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<i>Chorus</i> Fecit potentiam in brachio suo, Dispersit superbos mente	<i>Chorus</i> He hath showed strength with his arm, he hath scattered the proud in the
--	--

cordis sui.	imagination of their hearts.
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<i>Aria</i> Deposuit potentes de sede Et exaltavit humiles.	<i>Aria</i> He hath put down the mighty from their seat and exalted the humble and meek.
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<i>Aria</i> Esurientes implevit bonis, Et divites dimisit inanes.	<i>Aria</i> He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent empty away.
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<i>Trio</i> Suscepit Israel puerum suum Recordatus misericordiae suae.	<i>Trio</i> He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel:
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<i>Chorus</i> Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros, Abraham et semini eius in saecula.	<i>Chorus</i> As he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever.
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<i>Chorus</i> Gloria Patri et Filio Et Spiritui Sancto, Sicut erat in principio et nunc, Et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.	<i>Chorus</i> 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.
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Translation of 'In nativitatem Domini nostri Jesu Christi canticum' is by Charles Johnston.