

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 22 December 2023
7.30pm

Hey for Christmas

Siglo de Oro

Hannah Ely soprano*
Fiona Fraser soprano
Stephanie Franklin alto
Rebekah Jones alto*
Chris Fitzgerald-Lombard tenor*
Oscar Golden-Lee tenor
Patrick Allies baritone, director
David Le Prevost baritone
Piers Connor Kennedy bass
Ben Rowarth bass*

Spinacino Consort

Eric Thomas lute, theorbo, director
Aaron McGregor violin
Claire Horáček viol
Annemarie Klein recorders

Callum Armstrong bagpipes,
recorders
Tom Hollister percussion

*soloist

Collected by **John Playford**
(c.1623-1686)

Trad/English

Thomas Ravenscroft (c.1592-1635)

Trad/Irish

John Dowland (1563-1626)

Anon

William Byrd (c.1540-1623)

Collected by **John Playford**

William Byrd

Collected by **John Playford**

Trad/English

Collected by **John Playford**

Martin Peerson (c.1571-1651)

Collected by **John Playford**

Traditional

Trad/English

Granny's Delight (pub. 1702) *arranged by Spinacino Consort*

As I Outrode This Enderes Night

Remember, O thou man (pub. 1611)

The Darkest Night in December

The Earl of Essex Galliard (pub. 1604)

Sweet was the song the Virgin sang *arranged by
Thomas Hamond*

O Magnum Mysterium (pub. 1607)

Drive the Cold Winter Away (pub. 1651) *arranged by Siglo de Oro
and Spinacino Consort*

Interval

In winter cold (pub. 1611)

The Beggar Boy (pub. 1651) *arranged by Spinacino Consort*

The truth sent from above

Sir Christmas *attributed to Richard Smert*

Paul's Wharf (pub. 1651) *arranged by Spinacino Consort*

Upon my lap my sovereigne sits (pub. 1620)

A Wassail Tune (pub. 1651) *arranged by Spinacino Consort*

Now to Conclude Our Christmas Mirth

Hey for Christmas

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Picture the scene. It's 24 December, at some point in the mid-17th Century. You have just arrived at your relatives' for Christmas at their house in London. After weeks of restraint during Advent, they have 12 days of revelry lined up for you. There will be feasting: meat, cake, custard, ale. But more importantly, there will be lots of music.

Of course, there will be beautiful carols. Some – by the 17th Century – are already timeless classics: *As I Outrode this Enderes Night*, with its bouncy refrain, has its origins in the mystery plays in medieval Coventry. And *Sir Christemas* was composed in the 15th Century, possibly by **Richard Smert**, a vicar choral at Exeter Cathedral. It combines virtuosic duos with solid choruses sung in three parts. Others are old tunes that have been brought up-to-date for early modern tastes, such as **Thomas Hamond's** skilful arrangement of *Sweet was the song the Virgin sang*, four voices intertwining in a lullaby full of the nuance of Baroque harmony.

Just as important to the festive entertainment as the singing is the dancing. Fortunately your family has just the right combination of plucked and bowed strings, woodwind and percussion to get the party going, and the band strikes up with a series of tunes published by **John Playford**, the London bookseller who had his shop in the porch of Temple Church. Playford's *The Dancing Master*, first issued in 1651, contained over a hundred melodies, together with instructions for those on the dance floor. The tunes vary widely in style and mood, from the vibrant energy of *Granny's Delight* and *Paul's Wharf* to the wintry melancholy of *The Beggar Boy*. Some of the tunes published by Playford have associated texts, such as *Drive the Cold Winter Away*. The words that match this hearty tune hail the delights of the 12 days of Christmas: food, drink, carols, carousing and warming fires.

Some members of your family have connections to London's music scene, and therefore their sheet music collection includes pieces by the finest composers of the day. One rare gem is *Upon my lap my soveraigne sits* by the English musician **Martin Peerson**, appointed Master of the Choristers at St Paul's Cathedral in the 1620s. The conceit of the piece is that the infant Christ is on the poet's lap, being sung soothing lullabies. And it would probably be the Catholic members of your family who have brought along **William Byrd's** Latin Mass propers for Christmas. These include his *O Magnum Mysterium*, with its elegant yet concise polyphonic lines, relating the wonder of Christ's birth in a lowly manger. From the secular world of the partsong, Byrd's *In winter cold* has a moralistic message. The words by the poet Geoffrey Whitney tell the story of the grasshopper

and the ant, one of whom spent summer enjoying themselves and failing to prepare for winter. Byrd is alive to the nuance of every word, from the grasshopper's plaintive cries to the ant's haughty put-downs.

Alongside Peerson and Byrd are two of their contemporaries, both of whom would have been suitable guests at a musical Christmas party. **Thomas Ravenscroft** was a singer, composer, music theorist and collector of tunes, who was best known for his collections of catches and rounds. His *Remember, O thou man* begins in a slightly stern style, but softens into a sweet retelling of the Christmas story. Renowned lutenist and composer **John Dowland** is represented by *The Earl of Essex Galliard*. The Earl associated with this jaunty tune is Robert Devereux, for a time a favourite of Queen Elizabeth I before his eventual downfall.

Alongside these 16th and 17th-century tunes are three that are harder to date with any confidence. Two of these are found in an Irish collection: the *Kilmore Carols*, the survival of which is credited to the 18th-century priest Fr Peter Devereux. *The Darkest Night in December* has an ornamented melody that lilts and soars as it tells the story of Jesus's birth, while *Now to Conclude Our Christmas Mirth*, with its more jaunty rhythms, was intended to be heard on the twelfth day of Christmas. *The truth sent from above* is a simple English song with a rich text that links the fall of man to Christ's redeeming arrival on earth. The survival of these tunes owes much both to an oral tradition dating back centuries, and to folksong collectors who preserved them in written form.

The programme ends with the riotous festive ballad *Hey for Christmas*. The text was published in the mid-17th Century as a ballad-sheet, a cheap mass-printed format. The melody was specified as *Dargason*, a contemporary dance tune. The words tell the story of young people gathering at Christmas time at their village green for roasted pig, mustard, beer and morris dancing. The more they drink, the more wild the dancing becomes, eventually spilling over into violence against the fiddle player. Only some of the party-goers make it home in one piece, and even fewer manage to pay their bills...

We would be delighted if you would like to join in the light-hearted chorus:

Then hey for Christmas once a year
When we'll have cakes, both ale and beer,
And to our christmas feast there comes,
Young men and maids to shake their bums.

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