

WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 4 December 2024
7.30pm

A Christmas Conversation

Tenebrae

Anna Grieve soprano
Laura Newey soprano
Laura Oldfield soprano
Áine Smith soprano
Rosanna Wicks soprano
Clover Willis soprano
Hannah Cooke alto
Nigel Short conductor
Clive Mantle actor
Garth Bardsley writer

Martha McLorinan alto
Anna Semple alto
Olivia Shotton alto
Jacob Ewens tenor
Jack Granby tenor
Nicholas Madden tenor
Dominic Wallis tenor

Thomas Lowen bass
Angus McPhee bass
Jonathan Pratt bass
George Vines bass
Simon Whiteley bass

Anon

In dulci jubilo *arranged by Robert Lucas Pearsall* • Ding Dong
Merrily on High *arranged by Charles Wood*

James Lord Pierpont (1822-1893)

Jingle Bells *arranged by Ben Parry*

Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

Sing lullaby

Henry Gauntlett (1805-1876)

Once in Royal David's City *arranged by David Willcocks*

Ben Parry (b.1965)

The Aldeburgh Carol

Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

In the Bleak Midwinter

June Collin

The Quiet Heart (pub. 1968)

Franz Xavier Gruber (1787-1863)

Silent Night (1818) *arranged by Jonathan Rathbone*

Traditional

The Twelve Days of Christmas *arranged by Ian Humphris*

Ben Parry

Flame • Christmas Cards

Michael Praetorius (c.1571-1621)

Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen (pub. 1609) *arranged by Jan Sandström*

Bob Chilcott (b.1955)

The Shepherd's Carol

Traditional

We wish you a merry Christmas *arranged by Nigel Short*

Jonathan Rathbone (b.1957)

The Oxen (1991)

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Folk ballads and popular theology, often intertwined, have shaped the traditions of Christmas and the music and verse that bring them to life. The great inheritance of carols from the past continues to influence works written in our time, including compositions conceived to celebrate Christ's birth and its promise of light to a world shrouded in darkness. Tenebrae's programme embraces the joy and mystery wrapped up in the nativity story, and the nostalgia that somehow, against the clamour of secular sideshows and yuletide commerce, draws people year after year to a place of comfort and good cheer. Familiar carols and unforgettable songs, rooted in the beautiful simplicity of the first Christmas, speak more clearly, more deeply than all the seasonal sermons and homilies combined.

The words of *In dulci jubilo* ('In sweet rejoicing') were reportedly revealed in a vision to the 14th Century mystic Heinrich Suso and probably married by him to an existing dance tune, destined to become a Christmas staple in German-speaking lands. Robert Lucas Pearsall, a wealthy amateur musician from Bristol, revived Suso's song after moving to Germany in the 1820s. Pearsall's sonorous arrangement for double choir, composed for the Karlsruhe Choral Society, reached new audiences after he translated its text into English. 'Ding! Dong! Merrily on High' likewise began life overseas, as a rustic French round dance. It was transformed into an evergreen carol in the early 1900s by Charles Wood, university lecturer in harmony and counterpoint at Cambridge, and the Anglican priest George Ratcliffe Woodward.

James Lord Pierpont's greatest hit, originally published in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1857 as 'One Horse Open Sleigh', secured Christmas fame as 'Jingle Bells'. **Ben Parry** made his big-band-style arrangement for the Swingle Singers, conjuring magic from its eight vivacious voice parts. 'The Aldeburgh Carol', written for the Old Royal Naval College Chapel Choir and Aldeburgh Voices in 2012, unfolds with meditative stillness and concentration. Parry's ringing harmonies and tender lyricism draw the listener into spellbinding words by the writer, director and singer Garth Bardsley. 'Flame for eight voices' grows from a simple alto melody embroidered with heterophonic decorations and imitations in the soprano part. It conveys an image, cultivated by the Buddha, of thousands of candles being lit in the world from a single candle without shortening the first candle's life; in like fashion, 'happiness never decreases by being shared'. 'Christmas Cards', originally written as a solo song and later arranged for the four voices of Cantabile, extracts sparkling humour from its yuletide message of friendship and goodwill.

Christina Rossetti's *A Christmas Carol*, familiar as 'In the Bleak Midwinter', explores the contrasts between Christ's lowly birth and the promised glory of his Second Coming. Her words inspired **Gustav Holst** to fashion a melody of folk-like humility and grace, first published in 1906 in *The English Hymnal*, a landmark in the history of Anglican church music. 'We wish you a merry Christmas' belongs to the folk tradition of wassailing, the age-old custom of singers going from door-to-door to offer good luck and a

drink in exchange for gifts. Harmonic richness supports the tranquillity of 'The Quiet Heart', first published in *The Musical Salvationist* in 1968. In her response to James Morgan's evocative verse, **June Collin** gives voice to rapt reverence and fervent private prayer.

'Sing lullaby', one of three 'carol-anthems' written by **Herbert Howells** in the wake of the First World War, sets words by the so-called 'Laureate of Gloucestershire', the Catholic convert F.W. Harvey, probably written while he was a prisoner-of-war in Germany. During the next global conflict, Howells deputised for Robin Orr, organist of St John's College, Cambridge, and was invited to compose a set of canticles for the choir of nearby King's College. The annual Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at King's, introduced to the college in 1918, always opens with 'Once in Royal David's City'. Its child's-eye view of the Nativity was conceived in the late 1840s by Cecil Frances Humphreys, later Alexander, for use in Sunday school. Mrs Alexander's work delivers moral instruction; it also teaches people of all ages lessons of unconditional love and empathetic joy.

The distinctive combination of Cambridge, Christmas and choral singing shaped **Bob Chilcott's** formative experiences as a boy chorister and choral scholar at King's College. 'The Shepherd's Carol' was commissioned by King's for its carol service in 2000. Chilcott's contemplative piece, made timeless by its folksong idioms, considers the Nativity from the perspective of the shepherds drawn by starlight to Bethlehem. Jan Sandström's sublime deconstruction of *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen*, completed in 1990, evokes a sense of sacred time, free from the tyranny of the clock. His hypnotic setting pierces the four-square solidity of a chorale harmonisation by **Michael Praetorius** assigned here to one choir, with floating chords from a shadow choir.

Born the son of an impoverished weaver, **Franz Xaver Gruber** earned immortal fame in 1818 with a last-minute addition to the Christmas Eve service at the Church of St Nikolaus in Oberndorf, near Salzburg. Gruber, aided by the Catholic priest and musician Joseph Mohr, hastily composed the music and words of 'Silent Night', which was first performed with guitar accompaniment. The carol's reach extended far beyond Austria, thanks initially to two travelling families of folk singers, then to hit versions recorded by, among others, Bing Crosby, Ella Fitzgerald and Nat King Cole. Ian Humpris's arrangement of 'The Twelve Days of Christmas', a veritable feast of festive fun, meanwhile, dovetails farmyard sounds into its ingenious part-writing for double choir.

Thomas Hardy's fireside meditation on the eve of Christmas recalls the moment of Christ's birth and the reverence shown by humble animals to the new-born child. **Jonathan Rathbone**, a former member of the BBC Singers, opens his setting of 'The Oxen' with a gentle evocation of the nativity scene before putting on increasingly complex chromatic harmonies, unsettling symbols of 'So fair a fancy' that finally resolve to sound a message of hope.

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Anon

In dulci jubilo

arranged by Robert Lucas Pearsall

Anonymous

In dulci jubilo

Let us our homage shew:

Our heart's joy reclineth

In praesepio;

And like a bright star shineth

Matris in gremio,

Alpha es et O!

O Jesu parvule,

My heart is sore for thee!

Hear me I beseech thee,

O puer optime;

My prayer let it reach Thee,

O princeps gloriae!

Trahe me post te.

O patris caritas!

O Nati lenitas!

Deep were we stained.

Per nostra crimina:

But thou hast for us gained

Coelorum gaudia,

O that we were there!

Ubi sunt gaudia,

Where if that they be not there?

There are Angels singing

Nova cantica;

There the bells are ringing

In Regis curia.

O that we were there!

Ding Dong Merrily on High

arranged by Charles Wood

George Ratcliffe Woodward

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 rime your evetime song, ye
singers.

Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

James Lord Pierpont (1822-1893)

Jingle Bells

arranged by Ben Parry

James Lord Pierpont

Jingle bells, jingle bells,

Jingle all the way.

Oh, what fun it is to ride

In a one-horse open sleigh.

Dashing through the snow

In a one-horse open sleigh,

O'er the fields we go,

Laughing all the way;

Bells on bobtail ring,

Making spirits bright,

What fun it is to ride and sing

This sleighing song tonight!

Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

Sing lullaby

Frederick William Harvey

Sing lullaby, while snow doth gently fall,

Sing lullaby to Jesus born in an oxen-stall.

Sing lullaby to Jesus born now in Bethlehem,

The naked blackthorn's growing to weave his
diadem.

Sing lullaby to Jesus, while thickly snow doth fall,

Sing lullaby to Jesus the Saviour of all.

Henry Gauntlett (1805-1876)

Once in Royal David's City

arranged by David Willcocks

Cecil Frances Alexander

Once in royal David's city

Stood a lowly cattle shed,

Where a mother laid her baby

In a manger for his bed:

Mary was that Mother mild,

Jesus Christ her little Child.

He came down to earth from heaven.

Who is God and Lord of all.

And his shelter was a stable,

And his cradle was a stall:

With the poor, and mean, and lowly,

Lived on earth our Saviour holy.

Song continues overleaf. Please turn the page as quietly as possible.

Not in that poor lowly stable,
With the oxen standing by,
We shall see him: but in heaven,
Set at God's right hand on high;
When like stars his children crowned
All in white shall wait around.

Ben Parry (b.1965)

The Aldeburgh Carol

Garth Bardsley

Blessed, blessed is the child
No more than dust,
The tiny seed lies dormant in her hand.
Its precious secret, safely clasped within,
Shall be revealed when nurtured by the land.
Sheltered and nourished,
No raging storm can then its course impede
And from the earth a matchless gift springs forth;
A lovely flower where once there was a seed.

With love, each child we must empower,
That he may bloom as does the flower.

Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

In the Bleak Midwinter

Christina Rossetti

In the bleak mid-winter,
Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter
Long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold Him,
Nor earth sustain;
Heav'n and earth shall flee away
When He comes to reign:
In the bleak mid-winter
A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty
Jesus Christ.

Enough for Him, whom Cherubim
Worship night and day,
A breastful of milk
And a mangerful of hay;
Enough for Him, whom Angels
Fall down before,
The ox and ass and camel
Which adore.

What can I give Him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd,
I would bring a lamb,
If I were a wise man,
I would do my part,
Yet what I can I give Him;
Give my heart.

June Collin

The Quiet Heart

(pub. 1968)
James Morgan

'Twas in the stillness of the night that Jesus came;
No blare of trumpets heralded his birth
Nor broke the wonted silence of the earth;
No clang of bells or blatant hue and cry
Disturbed the calm beneath the Bethlehem sky.
When Jesus came 'twas night,
And the world was still.

'Tis to the quiet heart he loves to come:
Not often 'midst the tumult of the day,
When we can find small time to think or pray,
Or when, confused by agitating care,
We find no secret place for him to share.
We must be still if we his voice would hear.
'Tis to the quiet heart he loves to come.

Franz Xavier Gruber (1787-1863)

Silent Night

(1818)
arranged by Jonathan Rathbone
Joseph Mohr, trans. John Freeman Young

Silent night, holy night!
All is calm, all is bright.
Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child.
Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace!

Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight.
Glories stream from heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia,
Christ the Saviour is born!
Christ the Saviour is born!

Silent night, holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light.
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth!
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth!

Traditional

The Twelve Days of Christmas

arranged by Ian Humphris

Anonymous

On the First day of Christmas my true love sent to me – a Partridge in a Pear Tree.
On the Second day of Christmas my true love sent to me – two Turtle Doves, and a Partridge ...
On the Third day of Christmas my true love sent to me – three French Hens, two Turtle Doves ...
On the Fourth day of Christmas my true love sent to me – four Calling Birds, three French Hens ...
On the Fifth day of Christmas my true love sent to me – five Gold Rings, four Calling Birds ...
On the Sixth day of Christmas my true love sent to me – six Geese a-laying, five Gold Rings ...
On the Seventh day of Christmas my true love sent to me – seven Swans a-swimming, six Geese a-laying...
On the Eighth day of Christmas my true love sent to me – eight Maids a-milking, seven Swans a-swimming ...
On the Ninth day of Christmas my true love sent to me – nine Ladies dancing, eight Maids a-milking ...
On the Tenth day of Christmas my true love sent to me – ten Drummers drumming, nine Ladies dancing ...
On the 'Leventh day of Christmas my true love sent to me – 'leven Lords a-leaping, ten Drummers drumming ...
On the Twelfth day of Christmas my true love sent to me – twelve Pipers piping, 'leven Lords a-leaping ...

Ben Parry

Flame

Garth Bardsley

A flame

Dispels the dark
Its delicate light repels the shadows
A flame alone

Brings within its flicker
A welcoming warmth
A single flame

That shares its light
Is but strengthened by this splitting in two
And as each flame
Begets another
Its life and light is multiplied
To become unending
Forever burning
A beacon that both beckons and guides

So to light the world

Christmas Cards

Garth Bardsley

I've heard people say that the postman knocks twice
But that saying, it seems is somewhat imprecise
Let me tell you the truth, and the truth is quite
shocking
For the man from the mail he keeps knocking
And knocking...

I am surrounded by cards, Christmas cards they
abound
Everywhere that I look Christmas cards can be found
And I'm really astounded not to say quite dumb-
founded
To know that my friends really love me

On the ground by the door there's a Christmas card
mound
And the pile it has grown to proportions profound
Though the postman is brownd off
My day has been crowned off
In knowing my friends really love me

There are cards on the mantelpiece and cards on the
chairs
There are cards in the sitting room and cards on the
stairs
Cards stand to attention in the kitchen extension
There are even a few cards in the room I daren't
mention...

There are cards on the landing and on Mum's four-
poster
There are cards in the oven and cards in the toaster
There are cards on the telly and pinned to dad's belly
And the cards in the sock drawer are a little bit
smelly...

There are sixty-three robins and fifty-four mangers
Twelve angels, nine shepherds and three Power
Rangers
And forty-four donkeys, the number keeps mounting
And so many stars that I couldn't keep counting

There are hundreds of hounds chasing fugitive foxes
And pictures of mices in big woolly socks
And baskets of kittens and puppies are charming
Though dogs hung in stockings I find quite alarming

Na na na na na na...

Song continues overleaf. Please turn the page as quietly as possible.

There are snow-covered houses and a snow-
covered steeple
A snow-covered snowman and snow-covered
people
There are snow-covered gentlemen in tight
lederhosen
It's really SNOW wonder they're clearly half-frozen

Thirty-two churches with bells that are ringing
Six Marys, five Josephs, four choirs loudly singing
And holly with berries and mistletoe for kissing
Three camels, two magi, no wait...
One is missing!

I am surrounded by cards, Christmas cards they
abound
Everywhere that I look Christmas cards can be found
And I'm really astounded and a little confounded
In knowing my friends, just knowing my friends,
My fabulous, marvellous, glorious, wonderful friends
really love me

Christmas cards, Christmas cards, Christmas cards!

Michael Praetorius (c.1571-1621)

Es ist ein Ros'
entsprungen (pub. 1609)
arranged by Jan Sandström
Anonymous

**A spotless rose is
growing**

Es ist ein Ros'
entsprungen aus einer
Wurzel zart,
Wie uns die Alten
sungen, von Jesse kam
die Art.
Und hat ein Blümlein
bracht mitten im
kalten Winter
Wohl zu der halben Nacht.

A spotless rose is
growing, sprung from a
tender root,
of ancient seers'
foretelling, of Jesse
promised fruit.
Its fairest bud unfolds to
light amid the cold, cold
winter,
and in the dark midnight.

Das Röslein, das ich
meine, davon Jesaia
sagt,
Hat uns gebracht
alleine Marie, die
reine Magd.
Aus Gottes ew'gem
Rat hat sie ein Kind
geboren,
Welches uns selig
macht.

The rose which I am
singing, whereof Isaiah
said,
is from its sweet root
springing in Mary,
purest maid;
through God's great love
and might the blessed
babe she bare us
in a cold, cold winter's
night.

O Jesu, bis zum Scheiden
aus diesem
Jammertal
Lass Dein Hilf uns
geleiten hin in den
Freudensaal,

O Saviour, child of Mary,
who felt our human
woe;
Saviour, king of glory,
who dost our weakness
know,

In Deines Vaters Reich, da
wir Dich ewig loben.
O Gott,
uns das
verleih.
bring us at length,
we pray,
to the bright courts of
heaven and to the
endless day.

Bob Chilcott (b.1955)

The Shepherd's Carol
Clive Sansom

We stood on the hills, Lady,
Our day's work done,

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reproduce the text of this song

We wish you a merry Christmas
arranged by Nigel Short
Traditional

We wish you a merry Christmas,
We wish you a merry Christmas,
We wish you a merry Christmas,
And a happy new year.

Good tidings we bring to you and your kin:
We wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new
year.

Now bring us some figgy pudding,
Now bring us some figgy pudding,
Now bring us some figgy pudding,
And bring some out here.

Good tidings we bring to you and your kin:
We wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new
year.

For we all like figgy pudding,
For we all like figgy pudding,
For we all like figgy pudding,
So bring some out here.

And we won't go until we've got some,
And we won't go until we've got some,
And we won't go until we've got some,
So bring some out here.

We wish you a merry Christmas,
We wish you a merry Christmas,
We wish you a merry Christmas,
And a happy new year.

Good tidings we bring to you and your kin
We wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new
year!

Jonathan Rathbone (b.1957)

The Oxen (1991)

Thomas Hardy

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
'Now they are all on their knees,'
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
'Come; see the oxen kneel,

In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,'
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.

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