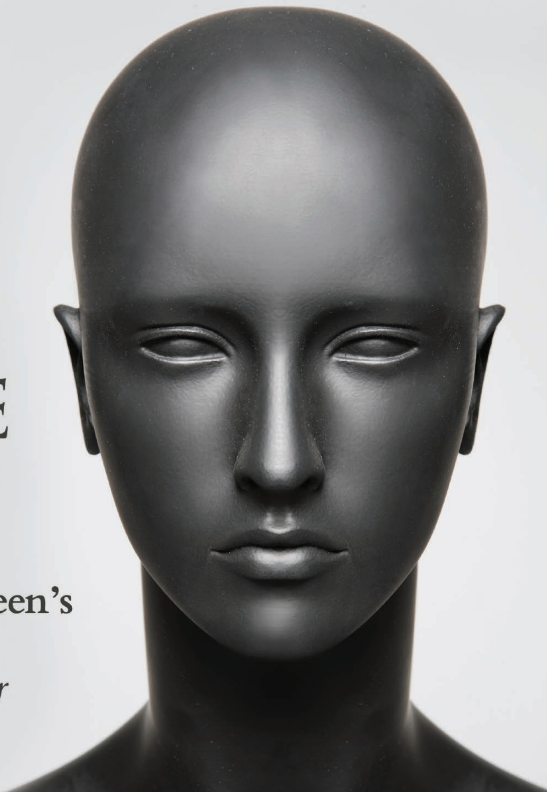


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CLASSICS

# THE HOUSE OF THE MIND

Choir of The Queen's  
College, Oxford  
Owen Rees *director*



HOWELLS · STANFORD · VAUGHAN WILLIAMS · BEDNALL · MUHLY

## THE HOUSE OF THE MIND

|                |                                   |                           |         |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|---------|
| 1              | <b>Behold, O God our defender</b> | Herbert Howells           | [4.08]  |
| 2              | <b>A Hymn for St Cecilia</b>      | Herbert Howells           | [3.17]  |
| 3              | <b>O Lord I am not haughty</b>    | David Bednall             | [5.25]  |
| 4              | <b>God be in my head</b>          | Herbert Howells           | [1.34]  |
| 5              | <b>The souls of the righteous</b> | Ralph Vaughan Williams    | [3.13]  |
| 6              | <b>The House of the Mind</b>      | Herbert Howells           | [9.22]  |
| 7              | <b>Lighten our darkness</b>       | Charles Villiers Stanford | [3.55]  |
| 8              | <b>Like as the hart</b>           | Herbert Howells           | [5.58]  |
| 9              | <b>Like as the hart</b>           | Nico Muhly                | [5.37]  |
| 10             | <b>Behold, O God our defender</b> | John Scott                | [2.28]  |
| 11             | <b>My beloved spake</b>           | Patrick Hadley            | [3.28]  |
| 12             | <b>Regina cæli</b>                | Herbert Howells           | [3.14]  |
| 13             | <b>Alma redemptoris mater</b>     | David Bednall             | [5.20]  |
| 14             | <b>Salve regina</b>               | Herbert Howells           | [4.31]  |
| 15             | <b>Ave regina cælorum</b>         | David Bednall             | [4.20]  |
| Total timings: |                                   |                           | [66.01] |

CHOIR OF THE QUEEN'S COLLEGE, OXFORD  
OWEN REES DIRECTOR

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Herbert Howells developed an instantly recognisable and distinctive voice in his choral music. That voice became and remains inextricably linked with Anglican liturgy, churches, and choirs, but rather than evoking formality or traditionalism it is marked by striking sensuality and apparent freedom. There is, as David Maw has put it, an essential paradox about Howells's compositional output and reputation: 'on one level, Howells successfully and self-consciously allied himself with the British musical establishment; on another level, everything about him – his background, psychology and musicality – resisted this.' The current recording presents seven of Howells's choral works within the context of music by composers who taught and/or influenced him (Stanford, Vaughan Williams) and worked alongside him (Patrick Hadley), and composers who have responded to his music in particular pieces (John Scott, Nico Muhly, David Bednall). These juxtapositions reveal some striking similarities and echoes, but they also serve to highlight contrasts of compositional language and ideals as much as proximity. For example, the piece on this recording which is at the greatest distance from Howells's sound-world – Muhly's *Like as the hart* – is the one which is most directly an *hommage* to Howells and

a reflection upon Howells's own setting of that text and his compositional methods more widely. The programme of the recording spans a century, from two Howells works composed during the Great War (*Regina cæli* and *Salve regina*) to pieces by David Bednall commissioned for this project and completed – as a complement to the two Howells items just mentioned – in 2016.

Born in Lydney, Gloucestershire, in 1892, Howells studied with Herbert Brewer, Organist of Gloucester Cathedral, before gaining a place at the Royal College of Music in 1912. His composition teacher there, Charles Villiers Stanford, described Howells as his 'son in music' and strongly supported his early career, but the influences upon Howells during this early period in London and before it were diverse, including Vaughan Williams, Elgar, and Ravel, and reflected also the revival of interest in Tudor (and other Renaissance) sacred music manifest famously in the work of Richard Terry with the Choir of Westminster Cathedral. It was Stanford who encouraged Howells to work with Terry, and in 1916 Howells wrote within the space of one week a set of *Four Anthems to the Blessed Virgin Mary* for Westminster Cathedral. Only two of these four anthems

survive: *Salve regina* and the Eastertide anthem *Regina cæli*. In their rich and imposing textures – achieved with six voice-parts in *Salve regina* and two antiphonal choirs in *Regina cæli* – they provide early examples of Howells's skill in exploiting the grandeur and atmospherically reverberant acoustics of such great ecclesiastical spaces as Westminster Cathedral. Despite the context for which they were written, neither setting draws upon the plainchant associated with its text, but Howells periodically and freely evokes chant through the shaping of lines and by having groups of voices declaim the text in unison or octaves, as at the start of *Regina cæli* and at the subdued plea for Mary to pray to Jesus for us ('et Jesum benedictum...') towards the end of *Salve regina*. He dramatises the most crucial word in the text of *Regina cæli* – the triumphant 'Resurrexit' ('he has arisen') – by bringing the two choirs together in monumental chordal declamation for the first time, and by employing a particular type of striking harmonic shift (related to a device found in certain Tudor works by Tallis and others) which reveals the influence of Vaughan Williams on the young composer.

In October 2016 I invited David Bednall, who describes Howells's music as a particularly strong and enduring influence on his own, to compose settings of the other two Marian antiphon texts – *Alma redemptoris mater* and *Ave regina cælorum* – which had been included in Howells's set of *Four Anthems* for Westminster Cathedral. Bednall conceived his responses not as pastiche but as inhabiting a 'similar sound world' to Howells's settings, while also engaging with features of other and earlier repertoire. *Ave regina cælorum* – like Howells's *Regina cæli* – is bound together by the reappearances of material, the most important in this case being the celebratory opening acclamation, which recurs periodically, both to the opening words and to set 'Gaude Virgo gloriosa'. These chordal fanfares act as pillars of the structure, alternating with sections of energetic melismatic and contrapuntal writing. Gabriel's word of salutation to Mary, 'Ave', ecstatically repeated by a solo soprano in what the composer describes as the central 'oasis' of this motet, is likewise given special emphasis in Bednall's *Alma redemptoris mater*, where it summons an extended passage of polyrhythmic counterpoint between the voices, expanding on the triplet figures heard sporadically in the piece up to this point. *Alma redemptoris*, like

*Ave regina*, reuses its opening idea as a 'ritornello', one which (as the composer notes) recalls 'something of the atmosphere of Bax's *Mater ora filium*' and which 'is intended to summon something of the chill of a cold chapel, and also the sense of mystery of Advent', the season in which this Marian antiphon is sung.

Howells's music for the heart of Catholic devotion in England – the new Westminster Cathedral, and the four evening antiphons of the Blessed Virgin Mary – contrasts with Stanford's near-contemporary *Lighten our darkness*, one of the texts which most powerfully evokes Anglican Evensong, where it is the final collect. Stanford's setting was composed three years after Howells's motets for Westminster Cathedral, in March 1918, a few months before the end of the First World War. The text of Thomas Cranmer's famous collect 'against all perils' carried particular weight in this context: Stanford had moved temporarily from London to Windsor to avoid the air raids on the capital, and wrote this piece for the Choir of St George's Chapel, Windsor. The music simply but powerfully juxtaposes the 'dangers of this night' with the sure comforts of faith in Christ.

Howells spent the bulk of his career teaching in London, at his alma mater the Royal College of Music and as Professor of Music at London University. Early in 1941 he wrote a set of Four Anthems (originally titled 'in the time of war') on psalm texts, of which two have attained enduring popularity, *O pray for the peace of Jerusalem* and (third in the set) *Like as the hart*, the text of which is the opening verses of Psalm 42. The modal and jazz- and blues-influenced language of the piece creates an atmosphere of longing and even melancholy that emphasises the yearning of the text and the bitterness of its central section ('My tears have been my meat day and night...'). Howells was friends with Patrick Hadley, a colleague of Howells's at the Royal College of Music and also Fellow and Director of Music at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge: Howells was acting Organist at nearby St John's College from the autumn of 1941 until 1945. Hadley's anthem *My beloved spake*, written for the wedding of one of his RCM students in 1936, is an equally evocative and sensuous setting of words from the great love-poem of the Old Testament, the Song of Songs. In the passage of text chosen by Hadley, the opening exhortation – 'Rise up, my love, and come away' – is

repeated at the end of the passage – ‘Arise, my love, and come away’ – and Hadley’s setting duly has an ABA structure reflecting that of the text, with a hushed middle section between opening and closing passages of great majesty and power. Howells likewise produced an ABA structure in *Like as the hart* (and in other anthems from the 1941 set, *O pray for the peace of Jerusalem* and *Let God arise*), but here the composer himself inserted the textual repetition of the opening text. For this repetition, the ‘free’ declamation of the tenors and basses is intensified by means of a soprano descant.

Nico Muhly writes that his own setting of *Like as the hart*, for choir, solo violin, and percussion, ‘is my response to Herbert Howells’s more famous setting of this Psalm paraphrase. I have always been obsessed with the length of Howells’s melodies and the way that the harmonies trail behind the tunes like halos. In my version, I invert this relationship, with massive elongated harmonies dragging melodic fragments behind them. I arranged the harmonies in a large arch form with shrinking and expanding rhythms on either side of the central point (on the word “God”).’ Muhly sets just the first two verses

of the Psalm, marking the division in the first verse by the appearance of a solo soprano at ‘so longeth my soul’. Although the choir emerges dramatically at the central point (‘God’), for much of the piece the foreground character is a solo violinist (on this recording, Elizabeth Nurse, a student at Queen’s and Choral Scholar), accompanied by percussion (triangle and tam-tam at the opening): the effect suggests improvisation on a melodic fragment until the choir enters voice by voice, its slowly evolving harmonies counterpointed with the rhythmic impetus of the instruments.

In his collection of musical cameos, *Howells’ Clavichord*, of the 1950s, Howells included one musical gift to Patrick Hadley (‘Patrick’s Siciliano’) and two to Ralph Vaughan Williams (‘Ralph’s Pavane’ and ‘Ralph’s Galliard’). Vaughan Williams’s music had been one of the most important early influences on Howells, as is apparent in the latter’s *Regina cæli*. The seventeen-year-old Howells had been deeply struck by the premiere of Vaughan Williams’s *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* in Gloucester Cathedral in 1910: ‘I was moved deeply. I think if I had to isolate from the rest any one impression of a purely musical sort that mattered most to me in the whole of my

life as a musician, it would be the hearing of that work.’ Howells was also to comment that ‘Ralph and I felt and reacted to things musically in a very similar way, and if some of our works are alike in any respect, it’s not, I think, merely a question of influence but also of intuitive affinity.’ As Howells notes, part of that affinity lay in both composers’ fascination with the modes, and modal writing strongly characterises the chant-like soloists’ lines in Vaughan Williams’s motet *The souls of the righteous*, composed for the dedication service of the Battle of Britain Chapel in Westminster Abbey in 1947. After a chant-like opening sung by soprano soloist and then choir, the repeated words ‘but they are in peace’ are quietly highlighted through telling harmonic shifts, while the Lydian mode is used to give brightness to the triumphant cascading peals opening the final section at ‘For God proved them’.

From the mid 1940s onwards Howells produced the body of Anglican liturgical music for which he is most remembered, and for the Queen’s coronation service at the Abbey in 1953 he composed the Introit *Behold, O God our defender*. Half a century later John Scott (then Organist of St Paul’s Cathedral)

set the same text for the service held at St Paul’s in June 2002 to mark the Queen’s Golden Jubilee. Scott wrote: ‘In a service characterized by pageantry, rejoicing and high celebration, the opportunity was taken to contribute something of a more gentle and reflective nature. As a devotee of the music of Herbert Howells, I was drawn to set these beautiful words from Psalm 84, which shamelessly evokes Howells’s choral palette. Howells set these words for the Coronation Service in 1953, and I’ve always felt his little masterpiece has been unduly neglected. My Royal tribute also ends in homage to Howells; the final tenor phrase, with its Lydian inflection, draws directly on Howells’s setting.’ Scott’s treatment of the text evokes Howells’s also in some of its ecstatic and melismatic prolongations of words, but Howells’s setting is on a much larger scale, each of its three sections capped by a dramatic climax: at the third statement of ‘behold’; at ‘thine anointed’, with striking chordal shifts of the Vaughan-Williams variety once again; and finally at ‘is better than a thousand’.

The largest-scale work by Howells on this recording is his motet *The House of the Mind* of 1954, a meditation on a seventeenth-century

poem by Joseph Beaumont concerned with the mind as a place of inward refuge in which God can dwell. Howells contrasts the quiet introspection advocated in the poem's opening stanza with a stirring evocation of the unconquerable power of the mind ('a close immured tower') to withstand 'all hostile power' in the second stanza. The third stanza opens with an evocative sample of the ethereal manner of writing for upper voices and organ which Howells had exploited in the famous openings of his Magnificat settings for King's College, Cambridge, and Gloucester Cathedral. To represent the mystery of God inhabiting the human mind at the beginning of the final stanza ('Th'infinite Creator can dwell in it'), Howells employs unaccompanied chordal declamation possessing an exquisite harmonic intensity and density suggestive of the sound-worlds of parts of his Requiem and *Take him, earth, for cherishing*. The theme of Beaumont's poem chimes with that of Howells' setting of ***God be in my head***, a beautiful miniature which – as the owner of the manuscript copy, Christopher Eaton Smith, revealed – was 'written by Dr Howells in some spare minutes before the end of a theory lesson at the Royal College of Music in June 1966, following a "rather fair" attempt at

the same words by me!' The psalm text set in David Bednall's ***O Lord, I am not haughty***, likewise echoes this theme of the interior life of quietude and faith. This work was commissioned by Lady Susan Budd to celebrate the seventieth birthday of Sir Alan Budd (then Provost of The Queen's College) in 2007, and was premiered by the Choir in that year.

The latest Howells piece on the disc – ***A Hymn for St Cecilia*** – shows a very different side of Howells' style. This setting of a poem by Vaughan Williams' wife Ursula in praise of the patron saint of Music was commissioned by the Worshipful Company of Musicians (of which Howells was Master in 1959–60), and was first sung on St Cecilia's Day 1961 in St Paul's Cathedral. All three verses are sung to the same exultant melody. Howells evokes celebration particularly in the first verse (sung by all voices in unison or octaves) and the last, where a soprano countermelody rings out above the ensemble, suggesting the joining of earthly and heavenly music which the poem here describes.

This recording has been made with generous support from Sir Alan Budd.

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## TEXTS & TRANSLATIONS

### 1 & 10 Behold, O God our defender

Herbert Howells / John Scott

Behold, O God our defender, and look upon the face  
of thine anointed.

For one day in thy courts is better than a thousand.

Psalm 84:9–10

### 2 A Hymn for St Cecilia

Herbert Howells

Sing for the morning's joy, Cecilia, sing,  
In words of youth and phrases of the Spring,  
Walk the bright colonnades by fountains' spray,  
And sing as sunlight fills the waking day;  
Till angels, voyaging in upper air,  
Pause on a wing and gather the clear sound  
Into celestial joy, wound and unwound  
A silver chain, or golden as your hair.

Sing for your loves of heaven and of earth,  
In words of music, and each word a truth;  
Marriage of heart and longings that aspire,  
A bond of roses, and a ring of fire.  
Your summertime grows short and fades away,  
Terror must gather to a martyr's death;

But never tremble, the last indrawn breath  
Remembers music as an echo may.

Through the cold aftermath of centuries,  
Cecilia's music dances in the skies;  
Lend us a fragment of the immortal air,  
That with your choiring angels we may share,  
A word to light us thro' time-fettered night,  
Water of life, or rose of paradise,  
So from the earth another song shall rise  
To meet your own in heaven's long delight.

Ursula Vaughan Williams (1911–2007)

### 3 O Lord, I am not haughty

David Bednall

O Lord I am not haughty; I have no proud looks.  
I do not exercise myself in great matters, or with  
things that are too hard for me.  
For I have stilled and quieted my soul, as a weaned  
child upon his mother's breast;  
so is my soul quieted within me.  
O Israel, trust in the Lord for evermore.

Psalm 131

**4 God be in my head**

Herbert Howells

God be in my head, and in my understanding;  
God be in mine eyes, and in my looking;  
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking;  
God be in my heart, and in my thinking;  
God be at mine end, and at my departing.

Sarum Primer, 1558

**5 The souls of the righteous**

Ralph Vaughan Williams

The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die, and their departure is taken for misery, and their going from us to be utter destruction, but they are in peace. For though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality, and having been a little chastised, they shall be greatly rewarded. For God proved them and found them worthy for Himself.

Wisdom 3:1–5

**6 The House of the Mind**

Herbert Howells

As earth's pageant passes by,  
Let reflection turn thine eye  
Inward, and observe thy breast;  
There alone dwells solid rest.

That's a close immured tower  
Which can mock all hostile power:  
To thyself a tenant be,  
And inhabit safe and free.

Say not that this house is small,  
Girt up in a narrow wall;  
In a cleanly sober mind  
Heaven itself full room doth find.

Th' infinite Creator can  
Dwell in it, and may not man?  
Here content make thy abode  
With thyself and with thy God.

Joseph Beaumont (1616–1699)

**7 Lighten our darkness**

Charles Villiers Stanford

Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O God; and of thy great mercy, defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thine only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer

**8 & 9 Like as the hart**

Herbert Howells / Nico Muhly

Like as the hart desireth the waterbrooks,  
so longeth my soul after thee, O God.  
My soul is athirst for God, yea even for the living God.  
When shall I come to appear before the presence of God?  
My tears have been my meat day and night, while they daily say unto me, 'Where is now thy God?'

Psalms 42:1–3

**11 My beloved spake**

Patrick Hadley

My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise my love, my fair one, and come away.

Song of Songs 2:10–13

**12 Regina cæli**

Herbert Howells

Regina cæli lætare, alleluia;  
Quia quem meruisti portare, alleluia;  
Resurrexit sicut dixit, alleluia;  
Ora pro nobis Deum, alleluia.

*Queen of heaven, rejoice, alleluia;  
for He whom you were worthy to bear, alleluia,  
has risen, as He said, alleluia;  
pray for us to God. Alleluia.*

Antiphon of the Blessed Virgin Mary from Easter Sunday until the Friday after Pentecost

**13 Alma redemptoris mater**

David Bednall

Alma redemptoris mater, quæ pervia cæli  
porta manes, et stella maris, succurre cadenti  
surgere qui curat populo. Tu quæ genuisti, natura  
mirante, tuum sanctum genitorem, virgo prius  
ac posterius, Gabrielis ab ore sumens illud 'Ave',  
peccatorum miserere.

*Nourishing mother of the redeemer, you who are  
the open door to heaven, and star of the sea, help  
the falling people who strive to rise. You who gave  
birth, with nature wondering, to your Holy Creator,  
virgin before and after, receiving that 'Hail' from  
the mouth of Gabriel, have mercy on sinners.*

Antiphon of the Blessed Virgin Mary from Advent until the Purification

**14 Salve regina**

Herbert Howells

Salve Regina, mater misericordiæ,  
vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, Salve!  
Ad te clamamus, exsules filii Hevæ;

*Hail, Queen, Mother of mercy,  
Hail, our life, our sweetness and our hope!  
To thee do we cry, banished children of Eve,*

ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes  
in hac lacrimarum valle.  
Eia ergo, advocata nostra,  
illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte,  
et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui,  
nobis post hoc exilium ostende,  
O clemens, O pia, O dulcis virgo Maria.

*to thee do we sigh, mourning  
and weeping in this valley of tears.  
Turn, then, most gracious advocate,  
thine eyes of mercy toward us,  
and after this exile, show us  
the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.  
O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.*

Antiphon of the Blessed Virgin Mary between Trinity and Advent

**15 Ave regina cælorum**

David Bednall

Ave regina cælorum,  
ave, domina angelorum:  
salve radix, salve porta  
ex qua mundo lux est orta:

*Hail, Queen of the heavens,  
Hail, ruler of the angels:  
Hail, root, hail, harbour  
from whom light has shone to the world.*

Gaude virgo gloriosa,  
super omnes speciosa,  
Vale, o valde decora,  
et pro nobis Christum exora.

*Rejoice, glorious virgin,  
beautiful above all,  
farewell, O most comely,  
and pray to Christ for us.*

Antiphon of the Blessed Virgin Mary from the Purification until Wednesday of Holy Week

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Dirk Verloop

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David Bednall (tracks 1, 3, 6, 7)  
Matthew Gibson (tracks 2, 8, 11)

### Violin

Elizabeth Nurse (track 9)

### Percussion

John Warner (track 9)

\* Solo on tracks 5, 9

† Solo on track 14

# Solo on track 15

§ Solo on track 5



The Choir of the Queen's College, Oxford is among the finest and most active university choirs in the UK. Its extensive concert schedule involves appearances across the UK and abroad, including work with such professional ensembles as the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, the Brook Street Band, and the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra. It regularly tours abroad, and recent concert tours have included Taiwan, China, the USA, Sri Lanka, Italy, Sardinia, Portugal, Spain, France, the Low Countries, and Germany.

The choir's wide-ranging repertory, on recordings and in concerts and services, includes a rich array of Renaissance and Baroque music and contemporary works. The group broadcasts regularly on BBC Radio, and during the academic year it provides the music for regular services in the splendid Baroque chapel of The Queen's College. Queen's Choir's recent CD releases are on the Signum and Avie labels. 2013 saw the release of a CD of *Dixit Dominus* settings by Handel and Alessandro Scarlatti, which was hailed as 'a disc of unusually high calibre' by *Early Music Review* and awarded



5 stars by *Choir and Organ. Carols from Queen's* enjoyed nine weeks in the Specialist Classical Charts, was 'Drive Featured Album of the Week' on Classic FM, and was a *Telegraph* Christmas pick. The choir's last disc, *A New Heaven*, released 2017, went straight to No. 1 in its first week of sales, and *BBC Music Magazine* commented that the recording shows 'the singers at their radiant best'. Queen's Choir has also recorded for film at the famous Abbey Road Studios, and appears on the Grammy-nominated soundtrack of the Warner-Brothers film *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*.

## OWEN REES

Owen Rees is Professor of Music at the University of Oxford, and Fellow in Music and Organist (Director of Music) at The Queen's College. He directs the Chapel Choir of The Queen's College and also conducts the professional early-music choir Contrapunctus. His work as a conductor has taken him to many parts of the world, including the USA, China, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, France, Norway, and the Netherlands, and he is much in demand internationally as a leader of choral workshops.



His recordings have three times been shortlisted for the *Gramophone* Early Music Award, have been selected as Editor's Choice in *Gramophone* and Choral and Song Choice in *BBC Music Magazine*, and featured in the

'20 Classical Recordings of the Year' 2015 in *The Sunday Times*. His CDs with Queen's and other choirs, on the Signum, Hyperion, and Avie labels, encompass a remarkably wide variety of choral repertory from the Renaissance to contemporary works. *BBC Music Magazine* recently hailed his interpretations of choral music as 'revelatory and even visionary'. He has brought to the concert hall and recording studio substantial repertoires of magnificent Renaissance music, particularly from Portugal, Spain, and England, including many previously unknown or little-known works which he himself has discovered and edited. His interpretations of these repertoires have been acclaimed as 'rare examples of scholarship and musicianship combining to result in performances that are both impressive and immediately attractive to the listener', and he has been described as 'one of the most energetic and persuasive voices' in this field.

As a scholar, Owen Rees has published widely on many of the foremost Renaissance composers, including Josquin, Morales, Guerrero, Victoria, and Byrd. He is renowned as one of the world's foremost authorities on Portuguese Renaissance music, and appears regularly on BBC Radio 3 in discussions of early music.

His next major book, to be published by Cambridge University Press, is a study of Victoria's famous Requiem of 1603 and of the whole genre of polyphonic Requiem music in the late Renaissance and early Baroque.



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