A detailed view of an angel from Raphael's fresco 'The School of Athens'. The angel is shown in profile, facing right, with curly golden hair and a halo. He wears a pinkish-red tunic with a gold-embroidered collar and cuffs. His right hand is raised in a gesture, with the index finger pointing upwards. The background is a textured gold leaf with faint architectural lines.

DELPHIAN

# O HOLY NIGHT

A MERTON CHRISTMAS  
CHOIR OF MERTON COLLEGE, OXFORD  
OXFORD PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA  
BENJAMIN NICHOLAS

# O HOLY NIGHT

## A MERTON CHRISTMAS

1	<b>All bells in paradise</b>	John Rutter (b. 1945)	[4:59]
2	<b>Shepherd's Pipe Carol</b>	John Rutter	[2:52]
3	<b>Jesus Christ the apple tree</b>	Elizabeth Poston (1905–1987)	[3:20]
4	<b>Hark! the herald-angels sing</b> <i>Alexander Little organ</i>	Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847) Descant: David Willcocks (1919–2015)	[3:28]
5	<b>The Shepherds' Farewell</b>	Hector Berlioz (1803–1869)	[4:50]
6	<b>Unto us is born a son</b> <i>Peter Shepherd organ</i>	trad., arr. David Willcocks	[2:17]
7	<b>In the bleak mid-winter</b> <i>Oliver Kelham tenor</i>	Harold Darke (1888–1976)	[4:25]
8	<b>The Shepherd's Carol</b>	Bob Chilcott (b. 1955)	[3:32]
9	<b>I sing of a maiden</b> <i>Peter Shepherd organ</i>	Patrick Hadley (1899–1973)	[2:25]
10	<b>Silent night</b>	Franz Xaver Gruber (1787–1863), arr. John Rutter	[3:20]

Recorded on 27-29 June 2016  
in the Chapel of Merton  
College, Oxford  
Producer/Engineer: Paul Baxter  
24-bit digital editing: Paul Baxter  
24-bit digital mastering: Paul Baxter  
Design: John Christ  
Booklet editor: Henry Howard

Cover image: Fra Angelico (c.1387–1455),  
*Annunciatory Angel* (detail), 1450–1455,  
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Detroit Institute of Arts/Bequest of Eleanor  
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## CHOIR OF MERTON COLLEGE, OXFORD OXFORD PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA BENJAMIN NICHOLAS

11	<b>O holy night</b>	Adolphe Adam (1803–1856), arr. John Rutter	[5:20]
12	<b>It came upon the midnight clear</b> <i>Alexander Little organ</i>	trad. English, arr. Arthur Sullivan (1842–1900) Descant: David Willcocks	[2:53]
13	<b>The Bird of Dawning*</b> <i>Clare Webb soprano</i>	Bob Chilcott	[3:22]
14	<b>Away in a manger</b>	W. J. Kirkpatrick (1838–1921), arr. David Willcocks	[2:27]
15	<b>In dulci jubilo</b>	trad. German, arr. Robert Lucas de Pearsall (1795–1856)	[3:13]
16	<b>What child is this?</b> <i>Eleanor Hicks soprano</i>	Thomas Hewitt Jones (b. 1984)	[4:21]
17	<b>O come, all ye faithful</b> <i>Peter Shepherd organ</i>	J. F. Wade (c.1711–1786), arr. David Willcocks	[4:59]
18	<b>O magnum mysterium</b>	Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943)	[6:06]
Total playing time			[68:19]

\**premiere recording*

Merton College, Oxford gratefully acknowledges the generous support of David Ure towards making this recording.

With thanks to the Warden and Fellows of the House of Scholars of Merton College, Oxford

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## Notes on the music

At once sacred and secular, pagan and Christian, a solemn song and a lively dance, the Christmas carol is a mongrel musical form, a paradox of conflicting origins and ideas. The first carol might have been composed by the angels themselves, sung to the shepherds on a hillside outside Bethlehem, but it was a genre that had a long, rough journey through field and street, court and even alehouse, before it would return to its sacred roots and take up formal residence in church.

But return it did, yielding us some of the loveliest and best-known tunes of the repertoire, starting a musical tradition that continues and thrives today, even as other musical genres fade and falter. The carols recorded here span almost 700 years, beginning in the thirteenth century and continuing right up to the present day. Their musical styles may vary, but what unites them is a shared spirit, that sense of 'joy and wonder' that first drew the nineteenth-century carol collector William Wallace Fyfe and so many like him to their task.

It's joy that is uppermost in **In dulci júbilo** – a piece that epitomises the duality of the medieval carol. The lilting, triple-time rhythm glances back to the Christmas carol's origins as a *carole* – an Old French dance – while the words redirect the music's celebratory energy towards a spiritual subject. Legend has it that Heinrich

Seuse, a Dominican monk, first heard the carol one night in 1328. Sitting alone in his cell, an angel appeared and invited the monk to join in a heavenly song: 'In dulci júbilo / Nun singet und seid froh!' The arrangement recorded here dates from the nineteenth century. Robert Lucas de Pearsall takes the simple carol and weaves it into a work of sophisticated grace, setting it for five solo voices and four choral parts. Melody, rhythm, harmony are all substantially altered, yet the strength of the carol is such that it remains at all times itself, despite Pearsall's most artful manipulations.

That 'In dulci júbilo' is still so popular across Europe today is largely thanks to its inclusion in the *Piae Cantiones* – a sixteenth-century Finnish publication that gathered together a number of medieval Latin hymns and songs, including 'In dulci júbilo' and 'Puer nobis nascitur', best known to us today in Britain as **Unto us is born a son**. Unlike 'In dulci júbilo' however, this hearty carol with its soaring chant melody was not reworked for an English-speaking public in the nineteenth century, and had to wait until 1902 for its first publication in the timeless translation of George Ratcliffe Woodward that we hear here.

Its stately melody might sound as ancient as 'Unto us' or 'In dulci júbilo', but **O come, all ye faithful** is in fact a much later addition to the carol repertoire. Surprisingly though for such

a well-loved carol, its origins are still the source of much debate and uncertainty. The music has been attributed variously to the composers Arne, Handel, Gluck and even John IV, King of Portugal, while the original Latin text ('Adeste fideles') may or may not have been written by St Bonaventure. Most probable, however, is that the carol was written in the 1740s by one John Francis Wade, a Catholic exile from England living in France. One thing we do know for certain though is the origin of David Willcocks's inspired descant – composed one evening on the train home to Cambridge after a Bach Choir rehearsal in London. Borrowing the chorus from 'Ding, dong, merrily on high', it has become as much a fixture of a contemporary British Christmas as the original carol itself.

**Hark! the herald-angels sing** is another carol with a surprisingly complicated history. Hymn books tend to attribute the text to the Methodist author Charles Wesley and the music to Mendelssohn, but the reality is rather more complicated. Wesley, so the story goes, inspired by the glorious pealing of bells of Christmas day, composed verses beginning 'Hark how all the welkin rings'. The archaic 'welkin' (meaning heavens) and theological complexities of the original text troubled his fellow preachers, two of whom had a hand in editing the carol to the version we know today. Originally sung to the tune 'Easter Hymn' (best known now as the melody for Wesley's 'Jesus

Christ is risen today'), it was only in 1855 that the English organist William Cummings had the idea of fitting the words to Mendelssohn's *Festgesang* – a melody originally composed to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Gutenberg's invention of moveable type. Finally, text and melody were in tune, forming the enduring partnership we know today; the well-loved descant was again supplied by David Willcocks.

If 'Hark! the herald' represents one side of the nineteenth-century carol tradition – triumphant, solemn, formal – then **Silent night** reflects the other. Intimate and lovely, this cradle song is a musical nativity scene, a delicate portrait of mother and child that spoke emotively to the Victorian values of home and family. Many legends surround its composition, including a charming tale of mice chewing through a church organ, forcing schoolmaster Franz Xaver Gruber and priest Joseph Mohr to compose a carol that could be sung to the accompaniment of a guitar. Though sadly untrue, it points to the essence of the carol's appeal – its simplicity – a quality John Rutter's light-touch arrangement skilfully preserves.

But if amateurs are responsible for many of the carols of this period, others have their origins in the professional musical world. Berlioz's **The Shepherds' Farewell** actually forms part of a much larger oratorio *L'enfance du Christ* (1854) about the childhood of Jesus, but

## Notes on the music

this charmingly naive chorus was originally composed with no such grand context in mind. A musical joke between friends, the melody first appeared as Berlioz's contribution to a friend's autograph album. Subsequently performed under a pseudonym it proved a hit, inspiring the composer to extend it into a concert work. But even here Berlioz's shepherds retained their rusticity, reflected in the carol's uncomplicated homophony and short introduction with its echo of bagpipes or similar folk instruments.

Best known as the composer of the ballets *Giselle* and *Le corsaire*, the Frenchman Adolphe Adam was also the author of **O holy night**, or 'Cantique de Noël' as it was originally titled. The subject may have been sacred, but the musical language of the carol, all soaring climaxes and long-breathed melody lines, is the stuff of the stage – it's no coincidence that it has been sung by almost every major opera singer at one time or another. The words too, though unimpeachably devotional, were originally the work of a wine-merchant, Placide Cappeau, subsequently translated and reworked into the version we know today.

The nineteenth century's love of carols was by no means limited to Europe. America, still a young country and keen to establish its own festival traditions, was the source for a number of classics of the period including both **It came upon the midnight clear** and 'Away in a

manger'. Written in 1849 by the Revd Edmund Hamilton Sears, the former is a poignant statement of both hope and fear – hope for the redemption offered by the 'love-song' of the angels, but fear that the brewing tensions that would eventually erupt into the Civil War would deafen mankind to its sound. While Americans favour a lilting 6/8 setting, in England the words are most often sung to Arthur Sullivan's stately melody, whose shifts between the major and minor perfectly capture the tensions of the text.

Children became an important new focus for carols during the nineteenth century, as collections such as Mrs C.F. Alexander's *Hymns For Little Children* (1848) demonstrate. Along with 'O little town of Bethlehem', **Away in a manger** is one of the most enduring of these children's carols, but one that has faced more than its fair share of controversies. Originally published in 1884 as 'Luther's Cradle Song' it took over 50 years to debunk the notion that Martin Luther was its author. And then there's the seemingly innocent line, 'But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes'. Some scholars have taken this to suggest that the infant Jesus was not fully human, a heresy others have hotly contested.

The twentieth century saw a tremendous surge in carol writing and arranging among Britain's classical composers, a phenomenon partly driven by the folk music revival

championed by Vaughan Williams, Holst and others, and partly also perhaps by the newly popularised service of Nine Lessons and Carols pioneered at Truro Cathedral and then at King's College, Cambridge. Composed in 1909 by Harold Darke (later acting Director of Music at King's), **In the bleak mid-winter** remains a favourite today, displacing Holst's simpler setting of Christina Rossetti's text in popularity. The beauty of the carol is the variety – both textural and emotional – it achieves within the confines of its strophic structure, opening with such infinite delicacy and fragility and closing with confident affirmation.

Many contemporary carols look to the past for their inspiration. Patrick Hadley's **I sing of a maiden** (1936) takes a fifteenth-century text – a tender portrait of the Virgin Mary – and bridges the gap of centuries in a two-part, upper-voices setting that opens with stark medieval directness before growing into a more extrovert, contemporary climax. A miracle of compressed invention, its musical concision, however, is as nothing compared to Elizabeth Poston's **Jesus Christ the apple tree**.

Poston, an English composer best known for her work for radio and television, here sets an eighteenth-century hymn-text from New Hampshire, mirroring the symbolism of its lovely text – Christ as the Tree of Life – in music that blossoms outwards from a single line of

unaccompanied melody into an exquisite strophic carol for upper voices. Built around a simple C major triad, the melody is designed to work in many textures including a round. The effect of these staggered entries is of joyous, spontaneous creation – music that, like the God it portrays, has no beginning and no end.

The golden age of carol-writing that began with Holst and Vaughan Williams continues among today's living composers – none more successfully than Bob Chilcott and John Rutter. Laden with memorable melodies and generous harmonies, Rutter's music has become synonymous with Christmas. The two carols featured here span the gamut of the composer's career – **The Shepherd's Pipe Carol** written in 1963 while he was still an undergraduate, and **All bells in paradise** commissioned for the 2012 service of Nine Lessons and Carols at King's. They showcase two contrasting moods, both typical of Rutter's work.

While 'All bells in paradise' takes a contemplative approach to its text, catching the 'awe and wonder' of the season in its long, arching lines and unaffected unison texture, 'The Shepherd's Pipe Carol' is a setting that bursts with joyful energy. Rhythms pulse with syncopation, setting up an infectious dance no listener can refuse to join. The innocence, the delight of Christmas is distilled here in this irrepressible carol.

## Notes on the music

Bob Chilcott is another composer with a pop musician's instinct for melody – an instinct demonstrated nowhere more clearly than **The Shepherd's Carol**. Another King's commission, the carol puts words and music into the mouths of the shepherds who seek the infant Jesus. Just as Berlioz found a rustic sincerity for his shepherds over 100 years earlier, so Chilcott gives his a wistfulness, a simplicity, that is hard to resist. Commissioned by Merton College for the Merton Choirbook, Chilcott's **The Bird of Dawning**, unusually for a carol, sets words from *Hamlet*. They speak of Jesus's birth – a time when 'No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,' a time that is 'hallow'd'. The simple opening phrase becomes a musical mantra, returning again and again through the carol almost as a talisman – a musical hope of things to come. The choir cling to it, embellishing it ever more richly with counter-melodies and jazz-infused harmonies, as though to repeat it is to affirm it, to make it so.

Best known as the Christmas text for the melody 'Greensleeves', William Chatterton Dix's poem **What child is this?** was originally written with no particular tune in mind, and has since been used by a number of composers. Thomas Hewitt Jones's setting takes up the questioning spirit of the verse, its uncertainty, and pairs it with a melody whose distinctive rising sixth seems almost like a musical question mark. The minor key at first seems

out of place, but prefigures the speaker's later realisation that 'Nails, spear shall pierce him through,' cutting to the bittersweet essence of the Nativity.

One of the most performed and recorded of all contemporary classical works, Morten Lauridsen's **O magnum mysterium** uses a musical language of guileless simplicity to tell the most momentous of spiritual tales. Described by the composer himself as 'a quiet song of profound inner joy', the anthem seeks to capture the mystery of the incarnation, the 'great mystery' of the title, speaking both to its joys but also its pains. Lauridsen has described the unexpected G sharp on the word 'Virgo' – the work's sole accidental – as 'the most important note in the piece', leading the ear to contemplate the sorrows to come even at this moment of deepest joy. Joy and wonder remain, but added to them is a sense of fragility, of loss, that pierces through all the mistletoe and starlight to the true meaning of Christmas.

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*Alexandra Coghlan is a music journalist and critic who has contributed to publications including The Spectator, Prospect, Opera, the New Statesman and The Independent. She is the author of Carols from King's (Ebury Press, 2016).*

## Texts

### 1 All bells in paradise

Deep in the cold of winter,  
Darkness and silence were ev'rywhere;  
Softly and clearly, there came through  
the stillness

A wonderful sound to hear:

All bells in paradise I heard them ring,  
Sounding in majesty the news that they bring;  
All bells in paradise I heard them ring,  
Welcoming our Saviour, born on earth a  
heavenly King.

*All bells in paradise I heard them ring:  
'Glory to God on high' the angel voices sing.*

Lost in awe and wonder,  
Doubting, I asked what this sign might be:  
Christ our Messiah revealed in a stable,  
A marvellous sight to see.  
All bells in paradise ...

He comes down in peace, a child in humility,  
The keys to his kingdom belong to the poor;  
Before him shall kneel the kings with  
their treasures,  
Gold, incense and myrrh.  
All bells in paradise ...

*All bells in paradise I heard them ring:  
'Glory to God on high' the angel voices  
sweetly sing.*

John Rutter (b. 1945)

### 2 Shepherd's Pipe Carol

Going through the hills on a night all starry  
On the way to Bethlehem,  
Far away I heard a shepherd boy piping  
On the way to Bethlehem.

*Angels in the sky brought this message nigh:  
'Dance and sing for joy that Christ the newborn  
King is come to bring us peace on earth, and  
he's lying cradled there at Bethlehem.'*

'Tell me, shepherd boy piping tunes so merrily  
On the way to Bethlehem,  
Who will hear your tunes on these hills so lonely  
On the way to Bethlehem?'  
*Angels in the sky brought ...*

'None may hear my pipes on these hills so lonely  
On the way to Bethlehem;  
But a King will hear me play sweet lullabies  
When I get to Bethlehem.'  
*Angels in the sky came down from on high,  
Hovered o'er the manger where the babe was  
lying cradled in the arms of his mother Mary,  
sleeping now at Bethlehem.*

'Where is this new King, shepherd boy  
piping merrily,  
Is he there at Bethlehem?'  
'I will find him soon by the star shining brightly  
In the sky o'er Bethlehem.'  
*Angels in the sky brought ...*

## Texts

'May I come with you, shepherd boy  
piping merrily,  
Come with you to Bethlehem?  
Pay my homage too at the new King's cradle,  
Is it far to Bethlehem?'

*Angels in the sky brought this message nigh:  
'Dance and sing for joy that Christ the infant  
King is born this night in lowly stable yonder,  
born for you at Bethlehem.'*

John Rutter

### 3 Jesus Christ the apple tree

The tree of life my soul hath seen,  
Laden with fruit and always green:  
The trees of nature fruitless be  
Compared with Christ the apple tree.

His beauty doth all things excel:  
By faith I know, but ne'er can tell  
The glory which I now can see  
In Jesus Christ the apple tree.

For happiness I long have sought,  
And pleasure dearly I have bought:  
I missed of all; but now I see  
'Tis found in Christ the apple tree.

I'm weary with my former toil,  
Here I will sit and rest awhile:  
Under the shadow I will be,  
Of Jesus Christ the apple tree.

This fruit doth make my soul to thrive,  
It keeps my dying faith alive;  
Which makes my soul in haste to be  
With Jesus Christ the apple tree.

anon., 18th c.

### 4 Hark! the herald-angels sing

Hark! the herald-angels sing  
Glory to the newborn King;  
Peace on earth and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled.  
Joyful all ye nations rise,  
Join the triumph of the skies  
With th'angelic host proclaim,  
Christ is born in Bethlehem.  
*Hark! the herald-angels sing  
Glory to the newborn King.*

Christ, by highest heaven adored,  
Christ, the everlasting Lord,  
Late in time behold him come  
Offspring of a Virgin's womb:  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,  
Hail th'incarnate Deity  
Pleased as man with man to dwell  
Jesus, our Emmanuel.

*Hark! ...*

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!  
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all he brings,  
Ris'n with healing in his wings;  
Mild he lays his glory by,  
Born that man no more may die,  
Born to raise the sons of earth,  
Born to give them second birth.  
*Hark! ...*

Charles Wesley (1707–1788), with alterations

### 5 The Shepherds' Farewell

Thou must leave thy lowly dwelling,  
The humble crib, the stable bare.  
Babe, all mortal babes excelling,  
Content our earthly lot to share.  
Loving father, loving mother,  
Shelter thee with tender care!

Blessed Jesus, we implore thee  
With humble love and holy fear,  
In the land that lies before thee,  
Forget not us who linger here!  
May the shepherd's lowly calling,  
Ever to thy heart be dear!

Blest are ye beyond all measure,  
Thou happy father, mother mild!  
Guard ye well your heav'nly treasure,  
The Prince of Peace, The Holy Child!  
God go with you, God protect you,  
Guide you safely through the wild!

Hector Berlioz (1803–1869), tr. Paul England (d. 1932)

### 6 Unto us is born a son

Unto us is born a son,  
King of quires supernal:  
See on earth his life begun,  
Of lords the Lord eternal.

Christ, from heav'n descending low,  
Comes on earth a stranger;  
Ox and ass their owner know,  
Becradled in the manger.

This did Herod sore affray,  
And grievously bewilder,  
So he gave the word to slay,  
And slew the little childer.

Of his love and mercy mild  
This the Christmas story;  
And O that Mary's gentle Child  
Might lead us up to glory!

O and A and A and O,  
Cum cantibus in choro,<sup>1</sup>  
Let our merry organ go,  
Benedicamus Domino.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *With songs in the choir*

<sup>2</sup> *Let us bless the Lord*

*Piae Cantiones*, 1582,  
tr. George Ratcliffe Woodward (1848–1934)

## Texts

### 7 In the bleak mid-winter

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;  
Heaven 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.

Christina Rossetti (1830–1894)

### 8 The Shepherd's Carol

We stood on the hills, Lady,  
Our day's work done,  
Watching the frosted meadows  
That winter had won.

The evening was calm, Lady,  
The air so still,  
Silence more lovely than music  
Folded the hill.

There was a star, Lady,  
Shone in the night,  
Larger than Venus it was  
And bright, so bright.

Oh, a voice from the sky, Lady,  
It seemed to us then  
Telling of God being born  
In the world of men.

And so we have come, Lady,  
Our day's work done,  
Our love, our hopes, ourselves,  
We give to your son.

Clive Sansom (1910–1981)

### 9 I sing of a maiden

I sing of a maiden  
That is makeless:  
King of all kings  
To her son she ches.

He came all so still  
Where his mother was,  
As dew in April  
That falleth on the grass.

He came all so still  
To his mother's bower,  
As dew in April  
That falleth on the flower.

He came all so still  
Where his mother lay,  
As dew in April  
That falleth on the spray.

Mother and maiden was  
Never none but she:  
Well may such a lady  
God's mother be.

anon., c.1400

*makeless* – virginal  
*ches* – chose

### 10 Silent night

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.

Silent night! holy night!  
Shepherds quake at the sight.  
Glories stream from heaven afar,  
Heav'nly hosts sing Alleluia!  
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.

Joseph Mohr (1792–1848), tr. John F. Young (1820–1885)

11 **O holy night**

O Holy Night! The stars are brightly shining,  
It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth.  
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,  
Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.  
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.  
Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices!  
O night divine, O night when Christ was born.

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming,  
With glowing hearts by his cradle we stand.  
So, led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,  
Here came the wise men from the Orient land.  
The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger;  
In all our trials born to be our friend.  
He knows our need, to our weakness  
no stranger,  
Behold your King! Before him lowly bend!

Truly he taught us to love one another,  
His law is love and his Gospel is peace.  
Chains shall he break, for the slave is  
our brother,  
And in his name all oppression shall cease.  
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus  
raise we,  
Let all within us praise his holy name.  
Christ is the Lord! Then ever, ever praise we,  
His power and glory ever more proclaim!

Placide Cappeau (1808–1877),  
tr. John Sullivan Dwight (1813–1893)

12 **It came upon the midnight clear**

It came upon the midnight clear,  
That glorious song of old,  
From angels bending near the earth,  
To touch their harps of gold:  
'Peace on the earth, goodwill to men,  
From heav'n's all-gracious King.'  
The world in solemn stillness lay  
To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come,  
With peaceful wings unfurled,  
And still their heav'nly music floats  
O'er all the weary world;  
Above its sad and lowly plains,  
They bend on hovering wing,  
And ever o'er its Babel sounds  
The blessed angels sing.

Yet with the woes of sin and strife  
The world has suffered long;  
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled  
Two thousand years of wrong;  
And man, at war with man, hears not  
The love-song which they bring;  
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,  
And hear the angels sing.

For lo! the days are hastening on,  
By prophet-bards foretold,  
When with the ever-circling years  
Comes round the age of gold;  
When peace shall over all the earth  
Its ancient splendours fling,  
And the whole world give back the song  
Which now the angels sing.

Edmund Sears (1810–1876)

13 **The Bird of Dawning**

Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes  
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,  
The bird of dawning singeth all night long:  
And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad;  
The nights are wholesome, then no  
planets strike,  
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,  
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) from *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene I

14 **Away in a manger**

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,  
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;  
The stars in the bright sky looked down  
where he lay,  
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing; the baby awakes,  
But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.  
I love thee, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky  
And stay by my side until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask thee to stay  
Close by me for ever, and love me, I pray.  
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,  
And fit us for heaven to live with thee there.

anon. American, first printed 1884 (verses 1-2)  
and 1892 (verse 3)

Texts

15 **In dulci jubilo**

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!  
I yearn for thee alway!  
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!  
Deeply were we stained  
Per nostra crimina;  
But thou hast for us hast 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!

*In sweet rejoicing*

*In the crib;*

*In the mother's lap.  
You are Alpha and Omega.*

*O little one, Jesus!*

*Best of boys!*

*Prince of glory!  
Carry me in your wake!*

*O love of the Father,  
O gentleness of the Son!*

*By our sins;*

*The joys of heaven,*

*Where are joys to be found,*

*New songs,*

*In the courts of the King.*

16 **What child is this?**

What child is this who, laid to rest,  
On Mary's lap is sleeping?  
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,  
While shepherds watch are keeping?  
This, this is Christ the King,  
Whom shepherds worship and angels sing:  
Haste, haste to bring him praise,  
The babe, the son of Mary!

Why lies he in such mean estate,  
Where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christians, fear: for sinners here  
The silent Word is pleading.  
Nails, spear shall pierce him through,  
The Cross be borne for me, for you;  
Hail! hail the Word made flesh,  
The babe, the son of Mary!

So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh:  
Come, peasant, king, to own him!  
The King of Kings salvation brings:  
Let loving hearts enthrone him!  
Raise, raise the song on high!  
The Virgin sings her lullaby.  
Joy! joy! for Christ is born,  
The babe, the son of Mary!

William Chatterton Dix (1837–1898)

17 **O come, all ye faithful**

O come, all ye faithful,  
Joyful and triumphant!  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;  
Come and behold him  
Born the King of Angels:  
*O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.*

God of God,  
Light of light,  
Lo, he abhors not the Virgin's womb;  
Very God,  
Begotten, not created:  
*O come ...*

Child, for us sinners  
Poor and in the manger,  
Fain we embrace thee, with awe and love;  
Who would not love Thee,  
Loving us so dearly?  
*O come ...*

## Texts

Sing, choirs of angels,  
Sing in exultation,  
Sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above!  
Glory to God,  
In the highest:  
*O come ...*

Yea, Lord, we greet thee,  
Born this happy morning;  
Jesu, to thee be glory given!  
Word of the Father,  
Now in flesh appearing!

John Frederick Wade (c.1711–1786) et al.,  
tr. Frederick Oakeley (1802–1880, verses 1, 2, 4 & 5)  
& William Thomas Brooke (1848–1917, verse 3),  
with alterations

## 18 O magnum mysterium

O magnum mysterium et admirabile  
sacramentum, ut animalia viderent  
Dominum natum iacentem in praesepio!  
Beata virgo, cuius viscera meruerunt  
portare Dominum Christum. Alleluia.

*O great mystery and wonderful  
sacrament, that the animals beheld  
the newborn Lord lying in the crib!  
Blessed Virgin, whose womb was worthy  
to carry the Lord Christ. Alleluia.*

Matins responsory for the feast of the Nativity

## Biographies

The **Choir of Merton College** is one of Oxford's leading mixed-voice choirs. During term-time it sings the services in the college's thirteenth-century chapel. Outside term, the choir tours regularly, most recently visiting Sweden, France and the USA. Concert performances have included Duruflé's *Requiem* in Gloucester Cathedral as part of the Cheltenham Music Festival, Tallis's *Spem in alium* at the Beaujolais Festival and Mozart's *Requiem* in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Paris. The choir appears often in London, at St John's Smith Square and Cadogan Hall, and makes frequent broadcasts on BBC Radio 3.

The choir's debut CD, *In the Beginning* (Delphian DCD34072), features music by Gombert, Weelkes, Holst, Copland and Gabriel Jackson and was named Editor's Choice in the December 2011 edition of *Gramophone* magazine. *Advent at Merton* (DCD34122) was released in 2012 and spent six weeks in the Specialist Classical Chart. Two further recordings – *The Merton Collection* (DCD34134) and *The Marian Collection* (DCD34144) – combine medieval and Renaissance music with new works from the Merton Choirbook, a major commissioning project undertaken to mark the College's 750th anniversary in 2014, while last year's *Viri Galilaei: Favourite Anthems from Merton* (DCD34174) maintained the run of glowing reviews.

In recent years the choir's impressive commitment to new music, centred on the Merton Choirbook commissioning project, has seen it give first performances of new choral works by Harrison Birtwistle, Judith Weir, John Tavener, James MacMillan, Jonathan Dove and many more. In April 2014 the Choir of Merton College gave the world premiere performances of Gabriel Jackson's *The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ* in Oxford and New York.



**Benjamin Nicholas** is Director of Music at Merton College, Oxford. As a conductor he has appeared with the City of London Sinfonia, Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra, the Trondheim Soloists and The Holst Singers, in works such as Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, Holst's *Savitri* and Duruflé's *Requiem*. His most recent organ recording, of Elgar's organ works (Delphian DCD34162), was described by the *Sunday Times* as 'a musical and technical achievement alike'.

He was heavily involved in the design and installation of the new Dobson organ at Merton, and also directs the annual *Passiontide at Merton* festival. In September 2016 he conducted the first rehearsals of the new Merton College Girls' Choir.

## Biographies

A former pupil of David Sanger for organ and Denise Ham for conducting, Benjamin Nicholas held the organ scholarships at Chichester Cathedral, at Lincoln College, Oxford and at St Paul's Cathedral before moving to Tewkesbury Abbey, where he directed the Schola Cantorum – itself the focus of seven Delphian recordings – until 2012.

Established in 1998, the **Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra** occupies a unique position within the UK's orchestral landscape. Formerly known as Oxford Philomusica and hailed as 'thoroughly impressive' by *BBC Music Magazine*, its reputation is based on the uncompromising artistic standards of its founder and Music Director Marios Papadopoulos and maintained by some of the finest musicians in the UK. As an orchestra of the highest quality, the Oxford Philharmonic attracts some of the world's greatest artists

to appear in its series at Sir Christopher Wren's Sheldonian Theatre. Following his remarkable Oxford debut with the Orchestra in 2013, world-renowned violinist Maxim Vengerov became its first Artist in Residence. Since then, Vengerov and the Oxford Philharmonic have undertaken tours in the UK and have recorded the violin concerti of Brahms and Sibelius, for the latter gaining special permission from the Sibelius family to record the original 1904 version. In recognition of the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra's contribution to education and performance in Oxford, the Orchestra and its Music Director were awarded the City of Oxford's Certificate of Honour in 2013. The continual search for excellence underpins the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra's reputation and is reflected in an ensemble that strives to create bold musical statements with every concert it presents.

## Choir of Merton College, Oxford

*Reed Rubin Organist  
& Director of Music*  
Benjamin Nicholas

*Organ Scholars*  
Peter Shepherd  
Alexander Little

*Sopranos*  
Amelia Brown  
Roseanna Cawthray Stern  
Elizabeth Curtis  
Polly Gamble  
Naomi Gardom  
Anna Gatrell  
Emma Hall  
Eleanor Hicks  
Bridget McNulty  
Phoebe Pexton  
Alexandra Powell  
Jemimah Taylor  
Clare Webb

*Altos*  
Frances Buist  
Lila Chrisp  
Patrick Dunachie  
Jeremy Kenyon  
Alice Walker  
Olivia Williams

*Tenors*  
Matthew Bannatyne  
Clement Collins-Rice  
Thomas Dyer  
Jack Evans  
Harry George  
Oliver Kelham

*Basses*  
Alistair Clark  
Frederick Crowley  
Thomas Herring  
Alexander Ho  
Jonathan Hobbs  
Patrick Keefe  
Edward Mair

## Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra

*Violin 1*  
Yuri Zhislin  
Charlotte Scott  
Anna Harpham  
Shlomy Dobrinsky

*Violin 2*  
Colin Callow  
Greta Mutlu  
Nemanja Ljubinkovic  
Erzsebet Racz

*Viola*  
Jon Thorne  
Karin Norlen

*Cello*  
Peter Adams  
Martin Thomas

*Double Bass*  
Tom Martin

*Flute*  
Tony Robb (doubling piccolo)  
Robert Manasse

*Oboe*  
Daniel Finney  
Jessica Mogridge

*Clarinet*  
David Rix  
Lorraine Schulman

*Bassoon*  
John Orford

*Trumpet*  
Joe Atkins  
Stuart Essenhig

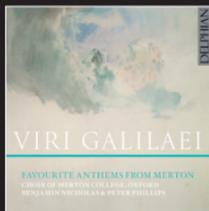
*Horn*  
Richard Dillely  
Jon Bareham

*Trombone*  
Danny Scott

*Tuba*  
David Gordon Shute

*Harp*  
Sally Pryce

Also available on Delphian

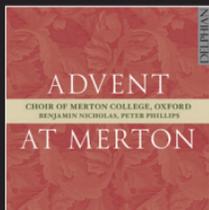


### Viri Galilaei: Favourite Anthems from Merton

Choir of Merton College, Oxford / Benjamin Nicholas & Peter Phillips  
DCD34174

The choir's fifth Delphian recording in five years again showcases the talents of its joint directors, with Peter Phillips' love of polyphony complemented by Benjamin Nicholas's flair and commitment in some of the twentieth century's major choral works. Bookending these 'favourites' are Patrick Gowers' now iconic Ascension Day anthem *Viri Galilaei* and Jonathan Dove's newly minted *Te Deum*.

'captivating ... deliciously expansive ... The choir's singing is notable for its clarity, and [Nicholas and Phillips] bring to these performances a warm-hearted fondness which is as indefinable as it is apparent'  
— Gramophone, April 2016

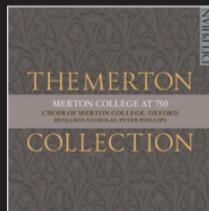


### Advent at Merton

Choir of Merton College, Oxford / Benjamin Nicholas & Peter Phillips  
DCD34122

The beginning of Advent is celebrated with a particular solemnity at Merton. For its second recording, the choir explores the musical riches that adorn this most special time in the church's year, centring on a newly commissioned sequence of Magnificat antiphons from seven leading composers including Howard Skempton, Ēriks Ešņvalds and Sir John Tavener. The mingled hopes, fears and expectations of the season are beautifully articulated by this fervent body of young singers.

'an immensely accomplished and responsive mixed-voice choir ... Delphian's recorded sound is beautiful'  
— International Record Review, December 2012

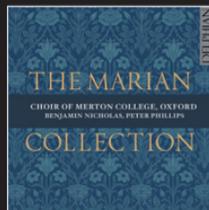


### The Merton Collection: Merton College at 750

Choir of Merton College, Oxford / Benjamin Nicholas & Peter Phillips  
DCD34134

In 2014, the University of Oxford's Merton College celebrates its 750th year. Benjamin Nicholas and Peter Phillips' specially conceived journey through seven centuries of choral repertoire provides a bird's-eye view of some important moments in musical history, and features two composers personally associated with the College – John Dunstaple and Lennox Berkeley – as well as three new works commissioned for the anniversary celebrations. The choir, a relatively recent addition to this illustrious college's complement of treasures, gives stylish and committed performances in the famous acoustic of Merton's thirteenth-century chapel.

'fine musicianship, commitment and versatility'  
— Choir & Organ, January/February 2014



### The Marian Collection

Choir of Merton College, Oxford / Benjamin Nicholas & Peter Phillips  
DCD34144

Benjamin Nicholas again draws from the landmark collection of more than fifty-five works written in celebration of the College's 750th anniversary. Here, a new work by Judith Weir (newly appointed Master of the Queen's Music) heads a set of the four Marian antiphons, all specially commissioned from female composers, while two further premiere recordings represent the work of regular Merton collaborators Gabriel Jackson and Matthew Martin. At the other end of the chronological spectrum, Peter Phillips' expert direction of Byrd's rarely performed *Salve Regina*, a bold statement of Catholic faith from Reformation England, and of John Nesbett's late 15th-century *Magnificat*, a piece whose neglect on disc is astonishing, completes this portrait in sound of a woman who is at once virgin and mother, human and God-bearer, suppliant and Queen of Heaven.

'astonishing versatility' — Gramophone, December 2014

