

Christopher WRIGHT

SACRED CHORAL MUSIC – KYRIE ELEISON A PENITENTIAL PRAYER THE CROWN OF ROSES HYMN OF SALVATION THE BREAD OF LIFE IN MEMORIAM MISSA BREVIS AND OTHER WORKS

> Canticum Julian Thomas, organ Mark Forkgen, conductor

FIRST RECORDINGS

MY SACRED CHORAL MUSIC – KYRIE ELEISON by Christopher Wright

A few words of introduction first, if you will allow me. I was born in 1954 and am a native of Suffolk, where I also live now. My earliest compositions, composed when I was still at school, were *Four Short Piano Preludes* and a quartet, *Kyson Point* (named after a local Woodbridge beauty spot), scored for flute, oboe, violin and cello and premiered at an East Anglian New Music Society concert in Ipswich in 1971 – my first public performance. On leaving school, I went on to study music at The Colchester Institute, where I received composition lessons from Richard Arnell. After graduating, I took up various teaching posts in class music, as a peripatetic brass teacher, in both state and independent establishments. I also studied composition with Stanley Glasser at Goldsmiths College (part of London University) and with Nicholas Sackman at Nottingham University.

During my years as a schoolteacher, little time was available for composing and only a handful of works materialised, among them *Patterns* for brass band (1978), String Quartet No. 1 (1980), *Armageddon* for large orchestra and tape (1980) and a brass quintet subtitled *Music for Youth* (1977). My first commission came in 1985 from the Cheltenham International Violin Course – my Concertino for Violin Orchestra and Piano. When I left teaching in 1993, the invaluable asset of time gave me space to think, compose and organise performances. The first piece to emerge, in 1994, was a wind quintet with the subtitle '...the ceremony of innocence is drowned' (a line from W. B. Yeats' 1919 poem 'The Second Coming'), which was heard both locally and in London, at the British Music Information Centre. It was quickly followed by String Quartet No. 2 (1995), again with both local and BMIC performances.

The three decades since then have produced over sixty works in various genres, including four major concertos with orchestra, for oboe (2009), violin (2010),

horn (2011) and cello (2011), four more string quartets and, more recently, a Symphony (2015). There are also several shorter orchestral works, many of them recorded, as well as a plethora of chamber pieces. My music has been commissioned by and performed at both the English Music and Alwyn Festivals, and there have been broadcasts on BBC Radio Three and on Australian, Canadian and New Zealand radio. During these years I have had the privilege of working with many leading soloists, orchestras, conductors and other musicians.

Much of my music has been composed not as the result of commission or financial inducement but rather because I need to communicate ideas and comment on the world and life in the way that I see it. I am not fettered by fashion, style, ideology or gimmickry or some insatiable desire to be original; I compose what I hear, to the best of my ability.

I should like to make a dual dedication of this recording: first, to Ruth, my late wife, who was always a source of support and who longed to hear my choral music; and, second, to Mark Forkgen and his wonderful choir, Canticum, for all their hard work and commitment to this project; without them I should not have experienced the joy and satisfaction of hearing my choral music in the flesh. Thank you.

My earliest attempts at composing – from about the age of thirteen – were short choral or hymn-like pieces. None was ever performed, but the desire to compose choral music has remained with me ever since. Over the proceeding fifty or more years, I have continued to write, generating a body of choral music sufficient in size to make this album. The opportunity arose when the London-based choir Canticum, with their conductor Mark Forkgen, gave a concert – the standard of which impressed me enormously – at my local parish church in Woodbridge, Suffolk. I initially inquired of Mark whether he would be interested in performing some of my music. Because only a handful of pieces had ever been sung, I then asked if he would like to make a recording. I need not spell out what his answer was.

Composing, for me, is not primarily an intellectual activity, and a score is not in itself music: performance must always be both the primary and ultimate purpose. Unlike visual art or poetry, where the finished article can be appreciated as complete,

music requires performance for its life, and only then can it be considered music. I am therefore indebted to Canticum and Mark Forkgen for, quite literally, making music.

The works presented here are largely reflective and represent for me a spiritual journey along life's path and are, in a sense, personal prayers. The texts are drawn from the Bible, the liturgy and a few other sources, and I have supplied my own texts where suitable words could not be found. The order is loosely based on the Church calendar; and the works here have a collective meaning found in the words 'Kyrie eleison', expressing God's merciful love.

Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis (1993, rev. 1993)

This dramatic and joyous setting of the Magnificat 1 has Purcellian references on the word 'rejoiced', and syncopated rhythm on the phrases 'He hath shewed strength' and 'scattered the proud'. The Nunc Dimittis 2 is sparsely set, doubling voices at the octave and with poignant use of major ninths on the words 'salvation' and 'prepared'.

Three Carols (1975, 1996 and 1998)

These three carols were composed independently, over a period of more than two decades. The first, *Qui natus est* (1996) ③, with a text taken from *The Oxford Book of Carols*, consists of two verses sandwiched between three refrains, and deals specifically with Christmas.

The Eternal Star (1998) [4] is a mystical setting of words from 'Our Bethlehem', by the missionary and clergyman George Appleton (1902–93), from the book *One Man's Prayers*, published by SPCK, London, in 1967 (and set, and the text reproduced on p. 12, below, with their kind permission). The writing is sparse, in that it relies on simple adjacent movement of individual vocal lines, creating, I hope, a feeling of mysticism.

The Crown of Roses (1975) 5 consists of four strophic verses, with slight variation, with words that combine references to both Christmas and Easter. This text has a rather unusual history. A poem, 'Roses and Thorns', by the American poet Richard Henry Stoddard (1825–1903), that was first published in May 1856 in

Graham's Magazine, a periodical based in Philadelphia,¹ was then translated into Russian by the radical Russian poet Aleksey Pleshcheyev (1825–93),² whereupon it was set to music by Tchaikovsky as 'Legend', No. 4 of his *Sixteen Songs for Children*, Op. 54 (all but two of which set Pleshcheyev texts) – in which form it became a choral favourite. In 1913 the English poet Geoffrey Dearmer (1893–1996)³ then translated Stoddard's poem back into English as No. 21 in *The English Carol Book*, an anthology he edited with Martin Shaw.⁴ My own setting reflects in particular the wildness of the text, especially through the use of astringent harmonies.

A Penitential Prayer (2005)

This short, simple homophonic incantation of pleading 6 was composed in 2005, to a text of my own. It is intended for use in Lent. A particular feature is the unresolved harmonies, creating a sense of pleading, to be resolved only at the very end.

Hymn of Salvation (1999, rev. 2010)

This anthem [7] starts with the refrain sung three times before each verse, requesting first, forgiveness, then repentance and, lastly, new life. Each verse is different and consists of Jesus' answers to the requests posed in the refrains. The music widely uses *musica ficta*⁵ to convey a tortuous state and eventually final resolution – Amen.

In Memoriam (2001)

This piece (3) was composed in memory of my mother and was originally composed with an accompaniment of brass, timpani and strings. The text is selected from the Requiem

¹ Its editor, for a brief period from 1841, was Edgar Allan Poe.

² The Wikipedia entry https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleksey_Pleshcheyev details Pleshcheyev's stormy life.

³ Dearmer, who lived to be 103, had a considerable influence on British public life, but from behind the scenes: from 1936 until 1958 he was Examiner of Plays for the Lord Chamberlain's Office, during which time he was also editor of *Children's Hour* for BBC Radio (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geoffrey_Dearmer).

⁴ This 'First Series' of *The English Carol Book*, as well as a 'Second Series' in 1919 and a 'Complete Edition' in 1938, were published by A. R. Mowbray & Co., London.

⁵ *Musica ficta* was a method used in mediaeval and Renaissance music to avoid the interval of the augmented fourth by raising or lowering one of the notes, making it a perfect interval – although doing so often created harsh dissonances elsewhere. I have taken the principle and applied it liberally and often in my music to create a sense of unease.

Mass and this setting with organ was made in 2016. The form is ABA', climaxing in the central section on 'Exaudi orationem meam'. A soprano solo joins the final Kyrie. (Two other versions exist: a shortened version for unaccompanied choir, and the other with organ and string accompaniment setting the full text.)

Missa brevis (2009)

Although contemporary in style, my *Missa brevis* looks backwards in essence to the fourteenth century for its texture and soundworld. The intervals of the perfect fourth and fifth feature frequently, as does the sparse sound of voice/octave doubling. Following a rather austere Kyrie [9], a lively Gloria ensues [10], with frequent changes in time-signature $(\frac{3}{4}, \frac{7}{8}, \frac{5}{8}, \frac{2}{4})$ and adopts a quid-pro-quo style of writing between soprano/ tenor and alto/bass. A solo quartet sings 'Thou that takest away the sins of the world', which is followed by full-choir imitative entries on 'O Lord God Lamb of God', answered by solo soprano/alto with 'Thou that takest away the sins of the world', ending with a *tutti* choral statement 'For thou only art holy', finishing on a cadence of a bare fourth. The Sanctus begins [11] in a subdued tone with an ambiguous B flat minor/major tonality (unresolved) and a return to the earlier quid-pro-quo 'Glory be to thee'. There follows a final quartet of solos/*tutti* on 'Blessed is he', ending with Hosanna (more quid-pro-quo) and a D major chord. The Agnus Dei [12] begins with a solo quartet in subdued tone reinforced by the more melancholy *tutti* choir, ending in unison on 'have mercy upon us'.

The Bread of Life (2004)

This short communion anthem 13 sets text variously selected from St John's Gospel and 1 Corinthians. Once again I have chosen to combine biblical text with the words 'Kyrie eleison' that interject the main subject – the Communion: (i) the bread of life, light of the world; (ii) the Blood of Christ; and (iii) eternal life, which embodies the climax of the music and reminds the listener that, along with God's mercy, the point is remembrance.

Thy Perfect Grace (2016)

Originally composed for single voice/piano or organ with optional second part, this music is here adapted for SATB chorus 14. Setting beautiful words of Charles Wesley, I have endeavoured to capture the symbolism of blood into wine and bread into body using a simple repetitive unifying organ accompaniment.

I am come into deep waters (2016)

The Psalms document the gamut of human feeling. This one – Psalm 69 –plumbs the depths of despair; but as often is the case by the end of the psalm the Psalmist puts on a brave, optimistic tone. I have set only the first two verses, which I felt contained enough angst to focus on. But I have not forgotten that there is hope, as the final pleas of 'Save me, O God' demonstrates.

Prayer for Peace (1983)

In a spare moment from teaching, I spent a few minutes exploring, on the piano, a series of chords shifting in tonality by altering a single note; what started as a doodle became the basis of this vignette [16]. It was the time of year near to Remembrance Sunday, and so I wrote this short prayer. I feel that there may be more to this piece than that, but listeners will make up their own minds.

Rejoice in the Lord Alway (2004)

With the hope that peace might now be found, the final work 17 is a setting of probably one of the best known and most uplifting passages in the Bible. Philippians 4: 4–7. The music is based on the opening organ flourish. Once again, I have adopted a harmonic style based around the movement of adjacent notes. The repeated text 'and again I say rejoice' lends itself to varied unexpected harmonies, and the opening 'Rejoice' naturally feels at home set to a falling motif. The role of the organ is largely one of commenting on the vocal line and setting the various changes of scene. The final, unaccompanied 'peace' is the point of arrival – or, perhaps, departure, depending on your perspective.



Photograph: Susan Porter-Thoma

Canticum is one of the most musically versatile chamber choirs in the country. Now in its 29th season, it has been praised for accomplished performances of major works and for exploring contemporary repertoire. The choir has also commissioned new writing and gives regular first performances.

Recently the choir has performed innovative programmes combining the polyphony of Victoria with the modern contemplative music of Tavener and Pärt and an exploration the tradition of cori spezzati.

Last season's highlights included a St Martin-in-the-Fields premiere of Stephen McNeff's Armistice-inspired Walking Shadows, combined with a performance of Mozart's Requiem. There were Christmas carol concerts in Southwark Cathedral in aid of Marie Curie Cancer Care and at St Martin-in-the-Fields for Livability.

In recent times the choir has staged Poulenc's *La figure humaine* and a new work by Hywel Davies at the Cheltenham Music Festival and took the semi-chorus part in Vaughan Williams' *A Sea Symphony* at the Barbican. Canticum has also performed for the Christmas Morning Service on BBC Radio 4, Bach's Mass in B minor with the Orchestra of The Age of Enlightenment at St John's, Smith Square, and the premiere of the late Sir Peter Maxwell Davies' *Step by Circle*, which is dedicated to Mark Forkgen and the choir. By way of contrast, the choir opened the 2008 Chelsea Festival, providing choral voices for Pink Floyd's *Atom Heart Mother* alongside soloist David Gilmour.

The choir stages regular trips abroad, with Italy a favourite destination. Canticum has toured with works including Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and Handel's *Messiah* and *Israel in Egypt*, a performance which opened the Viterbo Early Music Festival to a packed audience. It toured Bulgaria in May 2013, performing in Sofia and Plovdiv for Bulgarian TV and radio.

Recording, too, has an important place in the Canticum schedule. The existing catalogue includes *A Hymn to the Virgin*, with works by Victoria, Poulenc and Panufnik, and two Christmas discs: *A Christmas Carol* and *The Christmas Story*. Another disc, *In the Gloom of Whiteness* with Craft Music, features work by Colin Riley, Fraser Trainer and Keith Roberts.

Mark Forkgen has been Music Director of Canticum since 1995. He is also Music Director of London Concert Choir and Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor of Kokoro (the contemporary-music group of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra). He has worked with many leading orchestras, including the Royal Philharmonic, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, the City of London Sinfonia, the English Chamber Orchestra, the Northern Philharmonia and the Composers' Ensemble, appearing at all the major venues, including the Royal Festival Hall, the Barbican, the Royal Albert Hall and Covent Garden.

A specialist in the field of choral and contemporary music, he has given first performances of over one hundred works, while also acting as conductor and artistic advisor for festivals that have included Sir Peter Maxwell



Davies' 70th birthday, 'Stravinsky Rite On', 'A Festival of Britten', 'Music of the Americas', 'Britain after Britten' and 'East meets West'. His wide range of conducting also includes performances with Deep Purple, leading a project for the Chelsea Festival based on Pink Floyd's *Atom Heart Mother*. He has also conducted a number of theatrical productions in the last few years including *Sweeney Todd, Cabaret, The Threepenny Opera, Oh What a Lovely War* and *The Boyfriend*.

His recordings with Canticum and Kokoro have been recommended on BBC Radio 3 and in both musical and national press. Outside the UK he has given performances of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* in Denmark, Handel's *Messiah* in Siena and Handel's *Israel in Egypt* at the Viterbo Early Music Festival in Italy, Schubert and Bach in Hong Kong and Haydn's *The Seasons* in Assisi.

He is also a champion of youth music. He is currently Director of Music at Tonbridge School, having been the conductor of the Scottish Schools' Orchestra for ten years and Music Director of the Ealing Youth Orchestra and Dorset Youth Orchestra for eight years.

Julian Thomas, organ, joined Tonbridge School in September 2007 as Choirmaster, and has subsequently also become Head of Academic Music. He began his musical training as a chorister at Salisbury Cathedral and then as a music and academic scholar at Charterhouse, before going up to Cambridge as Organ Scholar at Jesus College. After graduating, he moved to Lincoln Cathedral as Second Assistant Organist, becoming a prize-winning Fellow of the Royal College of Organists in 2000.

For the next six years, he was the Assistant Organist and Director of the Girls' Choir at Norwich Cathedral, during which time he regularly appeared on both radio and television, accompanying and conducting choirs. In addition, he also directed the Edington Music Festival, including overseeing the 50th festival and a number of important choral commissions.

Alongside his primary roles at the school, he maintains an active career as a freelance organist,



deputising at a number of London churches, recently including the Chapel Royal, St Bride's, Fleet Street, and the Temple Church. His recent solo recitals have been given in venues that include Westminster Abbey and Gloucester, Portsmouth, Southwark and Westminster Cathedrals. His first solo disc, *Élévation*, was released on Regent Records in November 2017. He is also a published composer (with Encore Publications).

Texts and Translation

1 Magnificat

Luke 1: 46–55

- My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden.
- For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath magnified me and holy is his Name.
- And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout generations. He hath shewed strength with his arm, he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
- He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble and meek. He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent empty away.
- He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed forever.

Lesser Doxology

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be world without end. Amen.

2 Nunc dimittis

Luke 2: 29-32

- Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation; Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
- To be a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of thy people Israel.

Lesser Doxology

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be world without end. Amen. 3 Qui natus est The Oxford Book of Carols Refrain: Qui natus est de virgine, Salvum me fac, Domine.

Father and Son and Holy Ghost, Great God of Trinity, As thou art Lord of myth most, Salvum me fac Domine.

Refrain

As thou art wise and ryth wel most This world is but a vanite, When I shall die and yeld my ghost,

Salvum me fac Domine.

Wher I sleep, wher I wake, Onn land or water wer I be, As thou did die for man sake, Salvum me fac, Domine.

Refrain

4 The Eternal Star

George Appleton

O God, we need a star by which to set our journey through the world. Help us to see in the babe born at Bethlehem the eternal star which will lead us to the place where truth and love and mercy meet, so that we may kneel with shepherds and kings and find heart's joy and peace in Jesus Christ. Amen. 5 *The Crown of Roses The English Carol Book, 1913* When Jesus Christ was yet a child He had a garden small and wild, Where in he cherished roses fair And wove them into garlands there.

Now once as summer-time drew nigh There came a troop of children by, And seeing roses on a tree, With shouts they plucked them merrily.

'Do you bind roses in your hair?' They cried to Jesus there. The boy said humbly, 'Take I pray All but the naked thorns away.'

Then of the thorns they made a crown, And with rough fingers pressed it down, Till on his fore-head fair and young Red drops of blood like roses sprung.

6 A Penitential Prayer

Christopher Wright

We call upon you, Lord, to hear us when we pray, we call upon you, Lord, to hear us when we pray, to you our God. O Listen to our cry, and help us in our need, forgive us, O God. We call upon you, Lord, to hear us when we pray to you our God. O listen to our cry, and help us in our need, forgive us, O God.

7 Hymn of Salvation

- Selected and adapted from St John's Gospel and Christopher Wright
- *Refrain*: Grant us forgiveness, Lord, we do pray thee, for you are gracious, loving and kind. Help us in our time of need, to be more Christ-like.
- Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe also in me. I will not leave you desolate: I come unto you.
- *Refrain*: Grant us repentance, Lord, we do pray thee, for you are gracious, loving and kind. Help us in our time of need, to be more Christ-like.
- I say unto you If ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name. I am the vine, and you are the branches, He that abideth in me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for apart from me ye can do nothing.
- Grant us a new life, Lord we do pray thee, for you are gracious, loving and kind. Help us in our time of need, to be more Christ-like. Amen.

8 In Memoriam

Requiem Mass

Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison.

- Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis Requiem aeternam. Te decet hymnus, Deus in Sion, et tibi redetur votum in Jerusalem Exaudi oratiionem meam. Ad te omnis caro veniet. Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.
- Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy. Lord, grant them eternal rest, and let perpetual light shine upon them. You shall have praise in Zion, O God, and homage shall be paid to you in Jerusalem. Hear my prayer. All flesh shall come before you. Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.

Missa Brevis

9 Kyrie

Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison

10 Gloria

Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, good-will towards men. We praise thee, we bless thee, we worship thee, we glorify thee, we give thanks to thee for thy great glory, Heavenly King, God the Father Almighty. O Lord, the only begotten Son Jesus Christ; O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Thou that takest away the sins of the world, receive our prayer. Thou that sittest upon the right hand of the Father, have mercy upon us. For thou only art holy, thou only art the Lord; thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost, most high in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

11 Sanctus

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory. Glory be to thee, O Lord most high. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.

12 Agnus Dei

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.

13 The Bread of Life

Selected and adapted from St John's Gospel and 1 Corinthians

The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the light of the world. I am the Bread of life. Kyrie eleison.

The cup that I will give is my blood. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; Kyrie eleison. Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink the blood ye have no life in you. This do in remembrance of me. Kyrie eleison.

14 Thy Perfect Grace

Charles Wesley Author of life divine, Who has a table spread, Furnished with mystic wine And everlasting bread, Preserve the life Thy self has given, And feed and train us up for heaven.

Our needy souls sustain With fresh supplies of love, Till all Thy life we gain, And all Thy fullness prove, And strengthened with Thy perfect grace, Behold without a veil Thy face. Thy perfect grace.

15 I am come into deep waters

Psalm 69, *vv.* 1−2

Save me O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul, I sink into deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters where the floods overflow me. 16 Prayer for Peace Christopher Wright Lord, grant me thy peace, that I may serve you completely and love you for evermore, Amen.

17 Rejoice in the Lord Alway

Philippians 4: 4-7
Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say,
Rejoice. Let your moderation be known
unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful

for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.



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CHRISTOPHER WRIGHT Sacred Choral Music

Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis (1993, rev. 1993)	9:44
Magnificat	6:42
In Nunc Dimittis	3:02
Three Carols	
3 Qui natus est de virgine (1996)	4:07
In the Eternal Star (1998)	2:30
In the Crown of Roses (1975)	2:17
A Penitential Prayer (2005)	1:52
Image: Hymn of Salvation (1999, rev. 2010)	4:16
In Memoriam (2001)	11:55
Missa brevis (2009)	13:40
Kyrie	1:57
🔟 Gloria	4:53
Sanctus 4:07	
II Agnus Dei	2:43
Image: The Bread of Life (2004)	4:05
Image: Thy Perfect Grace (2016)	3:48
I am come into deep waters (2016)	4:05
Prayer for Peace (1983)	1:53
Rejoice in the Lord Alway (2004)	6:36
Canticum	TT 70:48
Julian Thomas, organ 🗊 🖃 💷 💷	FIRST RECORDINGS
Mark Forkgen, conductor	