

signum  
CLASSICS

AN  
ELIZABETHAN CHRISTMAS

*Byrd, Gibbons, Holborne, Peerson, Weelkes*

FRETWORK

HELEN CHARLSTON *mezzo soprano*

# AN ELIZABETHAN CHRISTMAS

1	<b>Out of the Orient Crystal Skies</b>	William Byrd (1543-1623)	[3.37]
2	<b>Pavan</b>	Anthony Holborne (1545-1602)	[2.00]
3	<b>As it Fell on Holie Eve</b>	Anthony Holborne	[1.00]
4	<b>From Virgin's Womb – Rejoice, Rejoice</b> Additional Singers: Emma Walshe <i>soprano</i> , Lucy Cox <i>soprano</i> , Amy Lyddon <i>alto</i>	William Byrd	[6.49]
5	<b>The Cradle</b>	Anthony Holborne	[2.54]
6	<b>Lullabie</b>	Anthony Holborne	[1.33]
7	<b>Lullaby</b>	William Byrd	[12.40]
8	<b>Fantazy No. 1 a 4 'For Ye Great Dooble Bass'</b>	Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625)	[4.41]
9	<b>An Earthly Tree – Cast Off All Doubtful Care</b> Additional singers: Amy Lyddon <i>alto</i> , Emma Walshe <i>soprano</i> Guy Cutting <i>tenor</i> , Malachy Frame <i>baritone</i>	William Byrd	[6.19]
10	<b>Attendite</b>	Martin Peerson (1571-1650)	[4.34]
11	<b>Upon my Lap, my Sovereign Sits</b> Additional singers: Amy Lyddon <i>alto</i> Malachy Frame <i>baritone</i> , Edmund Saddington <i>bass-baritone</i>	Martin Peerson	[7.14]

12	<b>To Shorten Winter's Sadnesse</b>	Thomas Weelkes (1576-1623)	[2.34]
13	<b>Fantazy No. 2 a 4 'For Ye Great Dooble Bass'</b>	Orlando Gibbons	[4.56]
14	<b>Sweet was the Song the Virgin Sang</b>	Anonymous	[2.10]
15	<b>The New-Yeaes Gift</b>	Anthony Holborne	[1.21]
16	<b>Heigh Ho Holiday</b>	Anthony Holborne	[0.59]
17	<b>O God that Guides the Cheerful Sun</b> Additional Singers: Lucy Cox <i>soprano</i> , Amy Lyddon <i>alto</i> Guy Cutting <i>tenor</i> , Malachy Frame <i>baritone</i> , Edmund Saddington <i>bass-baritone</i>	William Byrd	[5.58]
Total timings:			[71.29]

FRETWORK  
 ASAKO MORIKAWA  
 EMILY ASHTON  
 JOANNA LEVINE  
 SAM STANDLEN  
 RICHARD BOOTHBY  
 with HELEN CHARLSTON MEZZO SOPRANO

## AN ELIZABETHAN CHRISTMAS

The Christmas season in Elizabethan times was so different to our current experience, despite some superficial similarities, that it's difficult for us to put our mind in a such an alien context. For a start, the 'season' was strictly twelve days from Christmas Eve to Epiphany, or Twelfth Night: 24th December to 6th January. The idea that we might start preparing for the festival in October would have seemed distinctly strange.

And the tawdry round of consumerism that presages our own mid-winter festival was nowhere to be seen: Advent was a time of fasting rather than feasting; holding back until the damn burst. But feasting there was once Christmas itself arrived. Presents were given, though few by comparison with today's gargantuan spend-fest.

Although there was much merry making, and plenty of eating and drinking, there was also a balancing attention to the religious event that was the centre of the festival. At court it was especially so during Elizabeth's reign, in contrast to the rather more hedonistic celebrations of her father. The protestant religion had embedded a more sober and thoughtful atmosphere, and Elizabeth's principal composer, though Catholic, caught the

mood in three works published in two collections a year apart: *Psalmes, Sonets, & songs of sadnes and pietie*, 1588 and *Songs of Sundrie Natures* of 1589; then again in a later manuscript collected by a Catholic friend.

The first proved to be his biggest hit: *Lulla, Lullaby*, listed as a 'song of sadnes and pietie' in the publication, became one of Byrd's most enduringly famous songs. Indeed, some 14 years after its publication, Lord Worcester wrote, somewhat wearily, that although Irish tunes had become all the rage at court, 'in winter Lullaby an owld song of Mr Birde wylbee more in request as I thinke'.

The 1588 publication was the first Byrd had essayed on his own, without his partner, friend and mentor, Thomas Tallis, who had died some three years previously. In it he aimed to please as many people as he could with a broad collection of music in 5 parts.

Here is his sales pitch from the 'Epistle to the reader':

*Benigne Reader, heere is offered unto thy courteous acceptation, Musicke of sundry sorts, and to content divers humours. If thou bee*

*disposed to pray, heere are Psalmes. If to bee merrie, heere are Sonets. If to lament for thy sins, heere are songs of sadnesse and Pietie. If thou delight in Musicke of great compass, heere are divers songs, which beeing originally made for Instruments to expresse the harmony, and one voyce to pronounce the dittie, are now framed in all parts for voyces to sing the same.*

He had taken consort songs – a form he virtually created, in which a single voice is accompanied by four viols – and fitted the instrumental lines out with words, such that five voices could perform the work.

A year later more came with *Songs of Sundrie Natures* and two more Christmas pieces. *From Virgin's Womb* in the form of a consort song with a chorus of four voices – '*Rejoice with heart and voice in Christ his birth this day*'; and then with *An Earthly Tree* in the form of a duet accompanied by four viols, followed again by a chorus, urging us to '*cast off all doubtful care. . . . To joyful news divine*'.

Much later – in fact, after Elizabeth had died, comes the delightful '*Out of the orient*', found in a collection of manuscripts by Edward Paston, fellow Catholic and friend of Byrd's, whose home, Appleton Hall, is mentioned in another consort

song in the same collection. The story of the appearance to the shepherds by the angel is told with fluid self-confidence and masterly control, leading up to the rustic bagpipes alluded to over the nonsense word '*Falantidingdido*'.

The Christmas festive season included the new year, so Byrd's *O God that guides the cheerful sun* is part of the festivities and its thoroughly energetic counterpoint belies a 70-year-old composer. It appeared in the 1611 publication *Psalmes, Songs & Sonnets*, which also contained two fantasias for viol consort, a genre that rarely made it into print.

Antony Holborne was thoroughly Elizabethan, being born probably shortly before she came to the throne and dying shortly before his Queen, in 1602. He described himself in both his publications as 'gentleman and servant to her most excellent Majestie'. His two published works were '*The Ciththarn Schoole*', published in 1597 and '*Pavans, Galliards and other short aeirs both Grave and Light, in five parts for Viols, Violins, or other Musically Winde Instruments*' in 1599. The dances on our disc are all Pavans, Galliards, Almains or Corantos given titles suggestive of the Christmas season.

Martin Peerson, while he was born in Elizabeth's reign, outlived her by many years, making it through into the Commonwealth, and his first musical activities appeared after her death. *Upon my lap my sovereign sits* is his most celebrated work, and appeared in his 1620 publication *Private Musicke, or The First Booke of Aryes*. His extensive body of consort music was never published – along with almost all viol consort music of the period – but was evidently popular among viol players of the time. Most are in six parts, except for this one five-part work, earlier than the six-part pieces and in some ways more serious and more daring harmonically.

Orlando Gibbons was of a similar generation to Peerson, though his life was cut short by a brain tumour when he was 52. He had been a chorister at King's College, Cambridge, joined the Chapel Royal in the year of the Queen's death and was to remain in royal service for the rest of his life. He was particularly associated with the young Prince Henry's musical establishment, together with Coprario, Ferrabosco and Lupo. Though he was famed as a keyboard virtuoso, he composed extensively for the viols and violins of the court, and the 'doble bass' referred to was an exceptionally large viol, tuned a fourth below the standard bass. The many tempo and

dynamic instructions – exceptional for the time – indicate it was more probably written for the professional musicians at court, rather than for aristocratic amateurs.

I think we would find an Elizabethan Christmas a rather austere season; certainly colder than we are used to and a shorter, more intense holiday period. But compensations were to be had in the beauty of the music, if we were lucky enough to be kicking our heels at the royal court. We are perhaps fortunate that these pieces have survived and so we can have the best of both worlds.

Richard Boothby

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## TEXTS

### **1 Out of the Orient Crystal Skies** William Byrd

Out of the orient, crystal skies  
A blazing star did shine,  
Showing the place where poorly lies  
A blessed Babe divine.

Born of a maid of royal blood  
Who Mary high by name,

A sacred rose which once did bud  
By grace of heavenly flame.

This shining star three kings did guide  
Even from the furthest East,  
To Bethlehem where it betide  
This blessed Babe did rest,

Laid in a silly manger poor,  
Betwixt an ox and ass,  
Whom these three kings did all adore  
As God's high pleasure was.

And for the joy of His great birth  
A thousand angels sing:  
"Glory and peace unto the earth  
Where born is this new King!"

The shepherds dwelling there about,  
When they this news did know,  
Came singing all even in a rout,  
"Falantidingdido, falantidingdido, falantidingdido!"

Words: Anonymous

### **4 From Virgin's Womb – Rejoice, Rejoice** William Byrd

From Virgin's womb this day, this day did spring  
The precious Seed that only saved man  
This day let man rejoice and sweetly sing,

Since on this day our Saviour first began  
This day did Christ man's soul from death remove  
With glorious saints to dwell in Heaven above.

This day to man came pledge of perfect peace,  
This day to man came love and unity,  
This day man's grief began for to surcease,  
This day did man receive a remedy  
For each offence and every deadly sin  
With guilty heart that erst he wandered in.

In Christ His flock let love be surely plac'd,  
From Christ His flock let concord hate expel,  
Of Christ His flock let love be so embrac'd  
As we in Christ and Christ in us may dwell.  
Christ is the author of sweet unity  
From whence proceedeth all felicity.

O sing unto this glittering, glorious King,  
O praise His name let every living thing;  
Let heart and voice like bells of silver ring  
The comfort that this day to man doth bring:  
Let lute, let shawm, with sound of sweet delight  
These joys of Christ His birth this day recite.

Rejoice, rejoice, with heart and voice,  
In Christ His birth this day rejoice.

Words: Francis Kinwelmersch, c. 1576

**7 Lullaby**  
William Byrd

Lulla, lullaby  
My sweet little Baby,  
What meanest Thou to cry?  
Lulla, lullaby

Be still, my blessed Babe,  
Though cause Thou hast to mourn,  
Whose blood most innocent  
To shed the cruel king has sworn;  
And lo, alas! behold  
What slaughter he doth make,  
Shedding the blood of infants all,  
Sweet Saviour, for Thy sake.  
A King is born, they say,  
Which King this king would kill.  
O woe and woeful heavy day  
When wretches have their will!

Lulla, lullaby  
My sweet little Baby,  
What meanest Thou to cry?  
Lulla, lullaby

Three kings this King of kings  
To see are come from far,  
To each unknown, with offerings great,

By guilding of a star;  
And shepherds heard the song  
Which angels bright did sing.  
Giving all glory unto God for coming of this King,  
Which must be made away  
– King Herod would Him kill.  
O woe and woeful heavy day  
When wretches have their will!

Lulla, lullaby  
My sweet little Baby,  
What meanest Thou to cry?  
Lulla, lullaby

But thou shalt live and reign,  
As sibyls hath foresaid,  
As all the prophets prophesy,  
Whose mother, yet a maid  
And perfect virgin pure,  
With her breasts shall upbraid  
Both God and man that all hath made,  
The Son of heavenly seed,  
Whom caitiffs none can 'tray,  
Whom tyrants none can kill.  
O joy and joyful happy day  
When wretches want their will!

Words: Anonymous

**9 An Earthly Tree – Cast off All Doubtful Care**  
William Byrd

An earthly tree a heavenly fruit it bear,  
A case of clay contained a crown immortal  
A crown of crowns, a King whose cost and care  
Redeemed poor man, whose race before was thrall  
To death, to doom, to pains of everlasting,  
By His sweet death, scorns, stripes, and often  
fasting.

A star above the stars, a sun of light,  
Whose blessed beams this wretched earth  
bespread  
With hope of heaven and of God's Son the sight,  
Which in our flesh and sinful soul lay dead.  
O faith, O hope, O joys renowned for ever,  
O lively life that deathless shall persever.

Then let us sing the lullabys of sleep  
To this sweet babe, born to awake us all  
From drowsy sin that made old Adam weep,  
And by his fault gave to mankind the fall.  
For lo! this day, the birth day, day of days,  
Summons our songs to give Him laud and praise.

Cast of all doubtful care, exile and banish tears,  
To joyful news divine, lend us your list'ning ears.

Words: Anonymous

**11 Upon my Lap, my Sovereign Sits**  
Martin Peerson

Upon my lap my sovereign sits  
And sucks upon my breast;  
Meantime his love maintains my life  
And gives my sense her rest.  
Sing lullaby, my little boy,  
Sing lullaby, mine only joy!

When thou hast taken thy repast,  
Repose, my babe, on me;  
So may thy mother and thy nurse  
Thy cradle also be.  
Sing lullaby, my little boy,  
Sing lullaby, mine only joy!

I grieve that duty doth not work  
All that my wishing would;  
Because I would not be to thee  
But in the best I should.  
Sing lullaby, my little boy,  
Sing lullaby, mine only joy!

Yet as I am, and as I may,  
I must and will be thine,  
Though all too little for thyself  
Vouchsafing to be mine.  
Sing lullaby, my little boy,  
Sing lullaby, mine only joy!

Words: Richard Rowlands (1565–c.1630)

**12 To Shorten Winter's Sadness**

Thomas Weelkes

To shorten winter's sadness,  
See where the nymphs with gladness:  
Fa la la.  
Disguised, all are coming,  
Right wantonly a-mumming:  
Fa la la.

Though masks encloud their beauty,  
yet give the eye her duty,  
Fa la la la...  
When Heav'n is dark it shineth,  
and unto love inclineth:  
Fa la la la.

**14 Sweet was the Song the Virgin Sang**

Anonymous

Sweet was the song the Virgin sung,  
When she, when she to Bethlem Juda came,  
And was deliver'd of a Son,  
That blessed Jesus hath to name.  
Lulla, lulla, lulla, lullaby,  
Lulla, lulla, lulla, lullaby, sweet Babe, sung she,  
My Son, and eke a Saviour born,  
Which hast vouchsafed from on high  
To visit us that were forlorn;  
Lalula, lalula, lalulaby, sweet babe, sang she,  
And rockt Him sweetly on her knee.

Words: Anonymous

**17 O God That Guides the Cheerful Sun**

William Byrd

O God that guides the cheerful sun  
By motions strange the year to frame,  
Which now return'd whence it begun  
From heav'n extols thy glorious name.  
This New-year's season sanctify  
With double blessings of thy store,  
That graces new may multiply  
And former follies reign no more.  
So shall our hearts with heav'n agree,  
And both give laud and praise to thee.  
Th'old year by course is past and gone,  
Old Adam Lord from us expel:  
New creatures make us ev'ry one,  
New life becomes the New-year well.  
As new-born babes from malice keep,  
New wedding garments O Christ we crave:  
That we thy face in heav'n may see  
With Angels bright our souls to save.  
So shall our hearts with heav'n agree,  
And both give laud and praise to thee.  
Amen.

Words: Anonymous

**FRETWORK**

In 2021, Fretwork celebrates its 35th anniversary. In the past three and a half decades they have explored the core repertory of great English consort music, from Taverner to Purcell, and made classic recordings against which others are judged.

In addition to this, Fretwork have become known as pioneers of contemporary music for viols, having commissioned over 40 new works. The list of composers is like the role call of the most prominent writers of our time: George Benjamin, Michael Nyman, Sir John Tavener, Gavin Bryars, Elvis Costello, Alexander Goehr, John Woolrich, Orlando Gough, Fabrice Fitch, Peter Sculthorpe, Sally Beamish, Tan Dun, Barry Guy, Andrew Keeling, Thea Musgrave, Simon Bainbridge, Poul Ruders, John Joubert, Duncan Druce and Nico Muhly. The group now frequently presents programmes consisting entirely of contemporary music.

They made their Carnegie Hall debut in February of 2010, and now tour the United States most years. In that year, they also curated a week-long concert series of concerts at Kings Place. The culmination of this week was the world

premier of *The World Encompassed* by Orlando Gough, a 70-minute piece describing in musical terms Drake's circumnavigation of the globe in 1577-80.

In 2011, The National Centre for Early Music, in collaboration with the BBC, hosted a competition for young composers to create a four-minute piece for Fretwork. They workshopped the shortlisted pieces at the NCEM in York in October, and then the winning entries were premiered in Kings Place in December 2011.

The following year, they premiered Nico Muhly's *My Days* for The Hilliard Ensemble and Fretwork in Wigmore Hall; while 2013 was their busiest year for a decade: they played no fewer than ten concerts in London's major chamber music halls: Wigmore Hall, Kings Place, Cadogan Hall and the Royal College of Music.

They celebrated their 30th anniversary with a star-studded concert at Kings Place in June of 2016; and recorded four new albums, including *The World Encompassed*, and later that year they made their longest tour of America, taking in the USA, Canada & Colombia.



In 2018 they performed and recorded a programme celebrating the music of Michael Nyman – who was 75 in 2019 – with the exceptional counter-tenor, Iestyn Davies; and in 2019 they toured North America with this programme. That year they also began a series of concerts at Wigmore Hall, called 'Musick's Monument', presenting the greatest English consort music from the Golden Age – six concerts ranging from Cornyshe to Purcell.

Their recordings with Signum Classics have resulted in several notable releases: *The World Encompassed*, *John Jenkins Four Part Fantasies, If* (with Iestyn Davies), *In Chains of Gold: Orlando Gibbons' consort anthems*, & *The Silken Tent*, with Clare Wilkinson, including the music of Debussy, Grieg, Byrd, Purcell, Nyman, Goehr, Wolf, Britten, Shostakovich and Stephen Wilkinson; and then *In Nomine II*, concluding a survey of English In Nomines started with their debut album in 1987, including Nico Muhly's *Slow* and music by Ferrabosco, Bull, Tye, Baldwin, Parsons and Purcell.

The 2020 pandemic curtailed most groups plans and activities, and Fretwork saw its fair share of cancellations; but it was fortunate to receive £30,000 from Arts Council England's

Emergency fund, and then to be able to present a live-streamed concert with Iestyn Davies from the National Centre for Early Music in York, a programme of Dowland's *Lachrimae* from Wigmore Hall and premier a new work by Led Zeppelin's John Paul Jones in the Early Music Festival in Blackheath. They also pressed ahead with more recording, once lockdown restrictions were eased.

In 2021, they have been at Wigmore Hall twice, including a performance on Good Friday, the first from Wigmore for many decades, of Johann Sebastiani's *St Matthew Passion*. They have also been awarded a substantial grant from Arts Council England to continue and maintain the continuity of their work.

In 2022 they will be celebrating the 400th anniversary of the birth of one of England's greatest composers for viols, Matthew Locke; and plans visits to Germany, Spain and France. There will also be a collaboration with The Kings Singers and new works from Sir James MacMillan and Roderick Williams.

## HELEN CHARLSTON

Acclaimed for her musical interpretation, presence and “warmly distinctive tone” (The Telegraph), Helen Charlston is quickly cementing herself as a key performer in the next generation of British singers. Helen won first prize in the 2018 Handel Singing Competition and was a finalist in the Hurn Court Opera Competition, and the Grange Festival International Singing Competition.

Concert highlights include Handel’s *Messiah* with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Mendelssohn’s *Lobgesang* with the Royal Northern Sinfonia and Paul McCreesh, her debut at the Palau de la Música in Barcelona for Bach’s *St Matthew Passion* with the Gabrieli Consort and Players, a worldwide tour of Handel’s *Messiah* with the Seattle Symphony, the Western Australian Symphony Orchestra and Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, performances as part of Barbican Sound Unbound 2019 and solo recitals at York Early Music Festival, London Handel Festival, Händel-festspiele Halle, Korčula Baroque Festival, Leicester International Music Festival and Fitzrovia Festival. In 2020, Helen premiered the full role of Anna in the newly completed opera *Blue Electric* by Tom Smail.



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Often heard on BBC Radio 3 in live concert relays, Helen features on recordings of Bach’s *B Minor Mass* with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and the Trinity College Choir, and Bach’s *Actus Tragicus & Himmelskönig, sei willkommen* with Amici Voices and Amici Baroque Players, both available from Hyperion. The “mesmerising delivery” of her aria in *BWV 182* on the Amici Voices CD was singled out by Gramophone Magazine as the highlight of the recording. In the 2020-21 season she will record John Eccles’ *Semele* in the role of Juno with the Cambridge Handel Opera Company and the Academy of Ancient Music.



**We are again very grateful for the continued support of Linda Hill, who made this recording possible.**

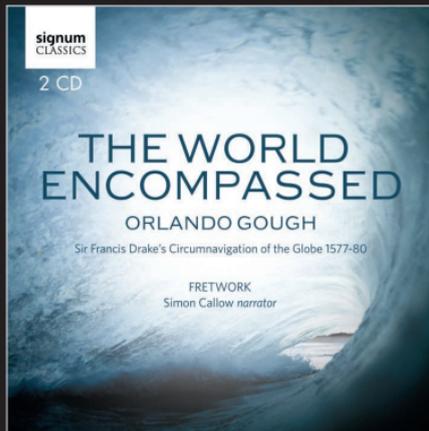
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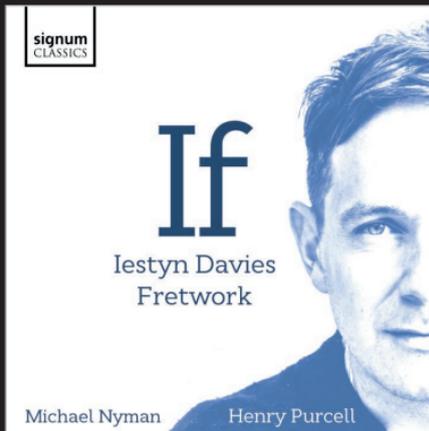


**Orlando Gough: The World Encompassed**

Fretwork  
Simon Callow

SIGCD453

*"Narrator Simon Callow is terrific, Fretwork mesmerising"*  
**BBC Music Magazine**



**If: Michael Nyman & Henry Purcell**

Iestyn Davies  
Fretwork

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**The Observer**