



Incarnation

MCCREESH

Incarnation



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In *Lullay, Lullay*, track 4, some manuscripts have up to 37 verses; a shorter version is performed here

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Incarnation

GABRIELI CONSORT

TREBLES OF COPENHAGEN ROYAL CHAPEL CHOIR

PAUL MCCREESH

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	2	VENI, VENI EMANUEL	3.30
		13th century	
	3	LONG, LONG AGO	6.00
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		Jonathan Dove (1959)	
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	9	A HYMN OF THE NATIVITY	6.54
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		Sarum chant – 12th / 13th century	
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Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

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TOTAL RUNNING TIME 77.25



ADAM LAY YBOUNDEN
Matthew Martin
(1976)
15th century

*Adam lay ybounden,
Bounden in a bond;
Four thousand winter
Thought he not too long.*

*And all was for an apple,
An apple that he took,
As clerkes finden
Written in their book.*

*Ne had the apple taken been,
The apple taken been,
Ne had never Our Lady
A been heav'né queen.*

*Blessed be the time
That apple taken was,
Therefore we moun singen,
Deo gracias!*

*Veni, veni, Emanuel:
Captivum solve Israel,
Qui gemit in exilio,
Privatus Dei Filio.
 Guade! gaude! Emanuel
 Nascetur pro te, Israel.*

*Veni, O Jesse Virgula;
Ex hostis tuos ungula,
De specu tuos tartari,
Educ, et antro barathri.*

*Veni, veni, O Oriens;
Solare nos adveniens;
Noctis depelle nebulas,
Dirasque noctis tenebras.*

*Veni, Clavis Davidica;
Regna reclude celica;
Fac iter tutum superum,
Et claude vias inferum.*

*Veni, veni, Adonai,
Qui populo in Sinai
Legem dedisti vertice
In maiestate glorie.*

*O come, o come, Emmanuel!
Redeem thy captive Israel
That into exile drear is gone,
Far from the face of God's dear Son.
 Rejoice! rejoice! Emmanuel
 Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*O come, thou Branch of Jesse! Draw
The quarry from the lion's claw;
From the dread caverns of the grave,
From nether hell, thy people save.*

*O come, O come, thou Dayspring bright!
Pour on our souls thy healing light;
Dispel the long night's lingering gloom,
And pierce the shadows of the tomb.*

*O come, thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Safeguard for us the heavenward road,
And bar the way to death's abode.*

*O come, O come, Adonai,
Who in thy glorious majesty
From Sinai's mountain, clothed in awe,
Gavest thy folk the elder Law.*

VENI, VENI EMANUEL
13th century

LONG, LONG AGO
Herbert Howells
(1892-1983)
John Buxton
(1912-1989)

*Long, long ago, oh! so long ago
Christ was born in Bethlehem
To heal the world's woe.*

*His Mother in the stable
Watched him where he lay
And knew for all his frailty
He was the world's stay.*

*While he lay there sleeping
In the quiet night
She listened to his breathing
And oh! her heart was light.*

*She tended him and nursed him,
Giving him her breast,
And knew that it was God's son
In her crook'd arm at rest.*

*Shepherds at the sheepfolds
Knew him for their King;
And gold and myrrh and frankincense
Three wise men did bring.*

*For he should be the Saviour,
Making wars to cease,
Who gives his joy to all men,
And brings to them peace.*

LULLAY, LULLAY:
ALS I LAY ON
YOOLIS NIGHT

14th century

*Lullay, lullay, lay, lay, lullay:
Mi deere moder, sing lullay.*

*Als I lay on Yoolis Night,
Alone in my longing,
Me thought I saw a well fair sight,
A may hir child rokking:*

*The maiden wold¹ withouten song
Hir child o sleep to bring:
The child him thought sche ded him wrong
And bad his moder sing.*

*'Sing nou, moder', said the child,
'Wat schal to me befall
Heerafter, wan I cum til eld²,
For so doon modres all.*

*Sweete moder, fair and free,
Be cause that it is so,
I pray thee that thou lulle me,
And sing sumwat therto.'*

*'Sweete sune', saide sche,
'Weroffe schuld I sing?
Ne wist I nere yet more of thee
But Gabriels greeting.*

*He grett me goodli on his knee,
And saide "Hail Marie! Hail, full of grace!
God is with thee;
Thou beren schalt Messie.*

*The Holi Gost schal doon al this,"
He said, withouten wun³,
That I schuld beren mannis blis,
And Godis owne Sun.*

*I answered blethely,
For that his word me paid⁴,
"Lo, Godis servant heer am I:
Be et as thou me said."*

¹ wanted

² am older

³ delay

⁴ pleased

*Ther, als he said, I thee bare
On midewenter night,
In maidenbede withouten kare⁵,
Be grace of God almighty.*

⁵ pain

*Ther schepperds waked in the wold,
Thei herd a wunder mirth
Of angles ther, as them thei told
The tidings of thi birth.*

*Sweete sune, sikirly⁶,
No more kan I say;
And, if I koude, fawn⁷ wold I
To doon al at thi pay⁸.'*

⁶ assuredly

⁷ gladly

⁸ pleasure

*Serteynly this sight I say,
This song I herde sing,
Als I me lay this Yoolis Day
Alone in my longing.*

*O my deare hert, young Jesu sweit,
Prepare thy creddil in my spreit,
And I sall rock thee to my hert,
And never mair from thee depart.*

*But I sall praise thee evermoir
With sanges sweit unto thy gloir.
The knees of my hert sall I bow,
And sing that richt Balulalow.*

BALULALOW
Francis Pott
(1957)

*Attrib James, John &
Robert Wedderburn
(c.1567)*

QUI CREAVIT CELUM
*Song of the
Nuns of Chester
13th / 14th century*

*Qui creavit celum,
lully, lully, lu,
Nascitur in stabulo,
by-by, by-by, by,
Rex qui regit seculum,
lully, lully, lu.*

*Joseph emit panniculum,
Mater involvit Puerum,
Et ponit in presebio.*

*Inter animalia,
Iacent mundi gaudia,
Dulcis super omnia.*

*Lactat mater Domini,
Osculatur parvulum,
Et adorat Dominum.*

*Roga, mater, Filium,
Ut det nobis gaudium,
In perenni Gloria.*

*In sempiterna secula,
In eternum et ultra,
Det nobis sua gaudia.*

*He who created the heavens
lully, lully, lu,
Is born in a stable,
by-by, by-by, by,
The king who rules forever.
lully, lully, lu.*

*Joseph brings a little swaddling cloth;
The mother wraps the boy
And places him in the manger.*

*Among the animals
Lies the joy of the world
Sweeter than all else.*

*The Mother of the Lord gives milk;
She kisses her infant
And worships the Lord.*

*Mother, ask your Son
To grant us joy
In eternal glory.*

*Forever and ever
To eternity and beyond,
May he give us his joys.*

O balow, balow lalay.

*The first king was very young,
With doleful ballads on his tongue
He came bearing a branch of myrrh
Than which no gall is bitterer,
Gifts for a baby King.*

*The second king was a man in prime,
The solemn priest of a solemn time,
With eyes downcast and rev'rent feet
He brought his incense sad and sweet,
Gifts for a baby King.*

*The third king was very old,
Both his hands were full of gold,
Many a gaud and a glittering toy,
Gifts for a baby King.*

THE THREE KINGS
Jonathan Dove
(1959)
Dorothy L. Sayers
(1893-1957)

THYS ENDERE NYGHTH
I SAW A SYGHTH
15th / 16th century

*Thys endere nyghth¹ I saw a syghth,
A sterre as bryghth as day,
And ever among A maydyn song:
'By, by, baby, lullay!'*

*Thys Vyrgyn clere²
Wythowtyn pere³
Unto hur Son gan say:
'My Son, my Lorde,
My Father dere,
Why lvest thou in hay?
Me thenke by right
Thow kyng and knyght
Shulde lye in ruche aray;
Yet, neverthelesse,
I wyll nott cesse
To syng: "By, by, lullay!"'*

*Thys Babe full bayne⁴
Aunsweryd agayne,
And thus me thought he sayd:*

¹ the other night

² pure

³ peer

⁴ disobedient

*'I am a Kyng
Above all thyng,
Yn hay yff⁵ I be layd;
For ye shall see
That kynges thre
Shall cum on Twelfe Day;
For thys behest
Geffe me thy brest,
And sing: "By, Baby, lullay!"'*

*'My Son, I say,
Wythowtyn nay⁶,
Thow art my derlyng der;
I shall the kepe
Whyle thou dost slepe
And make the goode chere;
And all thy whylle
I wyll fulfill,
Thow wotyst hyt well, yn fay⁷,
Yet more then thys,
I wyll the kys
And syng: "By, Baby, lullay!"'*

⁵ though

⁶ doubt

⁷ thou knowest it well,
in faith

*'My moder swete,
When I have slepe,
Then take me up at last,
Upon your kne
That ye sett me
And handell me full soft;
And yn your arme
Lap⁸ me ryght warme,
And kepe me nyght and day,
And, yff I wepe
And cannott slepe,
Syng: "By, Baby, lullay!" '*

*My Son, my Lorde,
My Father dere,
Syth all ys at thy wyll,
I pray the Son,
Graunte me a bone⁹,
Yff hyt be right and skylle¹⁰:
That chylde or man
That may or can
Be merry on thys day,*

⁸ wrap

⁹ boon

¹⁰ reasonable

*To blys them bryng,
And I shall syng:
"By, by, Baby, lullay." '*

*My mother shene¹¹,
Of hevyn quene,
Your askyng shall I spede,
So that the myrth
Dysplease me nott
Yn wordes nor in dede;
Syng what ye wyll,
So that ye fullfyll
My ten commaundementes ay;
Yow for to please
Let them nott sesse
To syng: "Baby, lullay!" '*

¹¹ bright

A HYMN OF THE
NATIVITY
Kenneth Leighton
(1929-1988)
Richard Crashaw
(1612-1649)

*We saw thee in thy balmy nest,
Young dawn of our eternal day;
We saw thine eyes break from the East,
And chase the trembling shades away:
We saw thee, and we blest the sight,
We saw thee by thine own sweet light.*

*I saw th' obsequious seraphim
Their rosy fleece of fire bestow,
For well they now can spare their wings,
Since Heaven itself lies here below.
Well done, said I: But are you sure
Your down, so warm, will pass for pure?*

*No, no your King's not yet to seek
Where to repose his royal head;
See, see how soon his new-bloom'd cheek
'Twixt mother's breasts is gone to bed!
Sweet choice, said we: no way but so,
Not to lie cold, yet sleep in snow!*

*Welcome, to our wond'ring sight
Eternity shut up in a span!
Summer in winter, day in night!
Heaven in earth! And God in man!
Great little one, whose glorious birth
Lifts earth to Heav'n, stoops Heaven to earth.*

*To thee, meek Majesty, soft King
Of simple graces and sweet loves!
Each of us his lamb will bring,
Each his pair of silver doves!
At last, in fire of thy fair eyes,
Ourselves become our own best sacrifice!*

LETABUNDUS *Letabundus*
Sarum chant *Exultet fidelis chorus:*
12th / 13th century *'Alleluia!'*

Regem regum,
Intacte profudit thorus:
Res miranda.

Angelus consilii
Natus est de virgine,
Sol de stella.

Sol occasum nesciens,
Stella semper rutilans,
Semper clara.

Sicut sidus radium
Profert Virgo Filium,
Pari forma.

Neque sidus radio,
Neque Mater Filio
Fit corrupta.

Cedrus alta Libani
Conformatur ysopo
Valle nostra.

Come rejoicing,
Faithful men, with rapture singing:
'Alleluia!'

King of Kings,
From a holy maiden springing:
Mighty wonder!

Angel of the Counsel,
Born of maiden,
Sun from star he doth appear.

He a sun who knows no night,
She a star whose paler light
Fadeth never.

As a star its kindred ray,
Mary doth her Child display,
Like in nature.

Still undimmed the star shines on,
And the Maiden bears a Son,
Pure as ever.

Lebanon his Cedar tall
To the hyssop on the wall
Lowly bendeth.

Verbum ens Altissimi
Corporari passum est
Carne sumpta.

Esaïas cecinit,
Synagoga meminit:
Nunquam tamen desinit
Esse ceca.

Si non suis vatibus,
Credat vel gentilibus
Sibilinis versibus
Hec predicta.

Infelix propera,
Crede vel vetera:
Cur damnaberis
Gens misera?

Quem docet littera,
Natum considera;
Ipsum genuit
Puerpera.

Amen.

From the Highest, him we name
Word of God to human frame
Now descendeth.

Yet the synagogue denied
What Isaiah had descried:
Blindness fell upon the guide,
Proud, unbending.

If her prophets speak in vain,
Let her heed the gentile strain,
And from mystic Sibyl gain
Light and leading.

No longer then delay:
Hear what the Scriptures say.
Why be cast away,
A race forlorn?

Turn, and this Child behold:
That very Son, of old
In God's writ foretold,
A maid hath borne.

Amen.

A BOY WAS BORN
Benjamin Britten
(1913-1976)
*A boy was born in Bethlehem;
Rejoice for that, Jerusalem!
Alleluya.*

THEME
A boy was born
German 16th century
*He let himself a servant be,
That all mankind he may set free:
Alleluya.*

*Then praise the Word of God who came
To dwell within a human frame:
Alleluya.*

VARIATION I
Lullay, Jesu
Before 1536
*Mine own dear mother, sing lullay!
Lullay, Jesu, lullay, lullay!
Mine own dear mother, sing lullay!*

*So blessed a sight was to see,
How Mary rocked her Son so free;
So fair she rocked and sing 'by-by'.*

*'Mine own dear Son,
why weapest Thou thus?
Is not Thy father King of bliss?
Have I not done that in me is?
Your grievance, tell me what it is.'*

*'Therefore, mother, weep I nought,
But for the woe that shall be wrought
To me, ere I mankind have bought.*

*'Ah, dear mother! Yet shall a spear
My heart in sunder all to-tear;
No wonder though I careful were.*

*'Now, dear mother, sing lullay,
And put away all heaviness;
Into this world I took the way,
Again to heaven I shall me dress,
Where joy is without end ay.'*

VARIATION II
Herod
15th century
*Noel!
Herod that was both wild and wode¹,
Full much he shed of Christian blood,
To slay the Child so meek of mood,
That Mary bare, that clean may².*

*Herod slew with pride and sin
Thousands of two year and within;
The body of Christ he thought to win
And to destroy the Christian fay³.*

¹ enraged

² maid

³ faith

Mary with Jesu forth yfraught⁴,
As the angel her taught,
To flee the land till it were sought,
To Egypt she took her way.

Now Jesus that didst die for us on the Rood,
And didst christen innocents in their blood,
By the prayer of Thy mother good,
Bring us to bliss that lasteth ay.

VARIATION III
Jesu, as Thou art
our Saviour
15th century

Jesu, Jesu, Jesu, Jesu
Save us all through Thy virtue.
Jesu, as Thou art our Saviour
That Thou save us fro dolour!
Jesu is mine paramour.
Blessed be Thy name, Jesu.

Jesu was born of a may,
Upon Christēmas Day,
She was may befor and ay,
Blessed be Thy name, Jesu.

⁴ laden

VARIATION IV
The Three Kings
15th century

There came three kings fro Galilee
Into Bethlehem, that fair city,
To seek him that should ever be by right-a,
Lord and king and knight-a.

They took their leave, both old and ying,
Of Herod, that moody king;
They went forth with their offering by light-a,
By the star that shone so bright-a.

Till they came into the place
Where Jesus and His mother was,
Offered they up with great solace in fere-a¹
Gold, incense, and myrrh-a.

Forth then went these kingēs three,
Till they came home to their country;
Glad and blithe they were all three
Of the sight that they had see bydene-a².

¹ together

² together

VARIATION V *In the bleak mid-winter*

*In the bleak
mid-winter*

*Christina Rossetti
(1830-1894)*

*Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter
Long ago.*

15th century

*Lully, lullay, lully, lullay,
The flacon hath borne my make¹ away.*

¹ mate

*He bare him up, he bare him down,
He bare him into an orchard brown.*

*In that orchard there was an hall
That was hanged with purple and pall.*

*An in that hall there was a bed,
It was hanged with gold so red.*

*In that bed there lieth a knight,
His woundës bleeding, day and night.*

*By that bedside kneeleth a may,
And she weepeth both night and day.*

*And by that bedside there standeth a stone,
Corpus Christi written thereon.*

VARIATION VI
(FINALE) *Noel!*

15th century

*Noel! Wassail!
Good day, good day,
My Lord Sir Christëmas, good day!*

*Good day, Sir Christëmas our King,
For every man, both old and ying
Is glad of your coming.*

*Godës Son so much of might
From heaven to earth down is light
And born is of a maid so bright.*

Noel! Our King! Sir Christëmas!

*Hosanna!
This night a Child is born.*

Thomas Tusser
(1524-1580)

*Get ivy and hull¹, woman, deck up thine house,
And take this same brawn for to seethe and to souse;
Provide us good cheer, for thou knowest the old guise,
Old customs that good be, let no man despise.
At Christmas be merry and thank God of all,
And feast thy poor neighbours, the great and the small.
Yea, all the year long have an eye to the poor,
And God shall send luck to keep open thy door.
Good fruit and good plenty do well in thy loft,
Then lay for an orchard and cherish it oft.
The profit is mickle, the pleasure is much;
At pleasure with profit few wise men will grutch.
For plants and for stocks lay aforehand to cast,
But set or remove them, while Twelve-tide do last.*

15th century

*Welcome be Thou, heaven-king,
Welcome born in one morning,
Welcome for whom we shall sing
Welcome Yule.*

¹ *holly*

*Welcome be ye that are here,
Welcome all, and make good cheer,
Welcome all another year!
Welcome Yule.*

Francis Quarles
(1592-1644)

*Glory to God on high, and jolly mirth
’Twixt man and man, and peace on earth!*

*(Wassail, Wassail! Lully, lulley, lully, lulley...
Noel! Noel! Herod that was so wild and wode...
Mine own dear mother... Jesu, Jesu)*

*This night a Child is born;
This night a Son is given;
This Son, this Child
Hath reconciled
Poor man that was forlorn,
And the angry God of heaven.
Hosanna, sing Hosanna!*

*Now, now that joyful day,
That blessed hour is come,
That was foretold
In days of old,
Wherein all nations may
Bless, bless the virgin's womb
Hosanna, sing Hosanna!*

*Let heaven triumph above,
Let earth rejoice below;
Let heaven and earth
Be filled with mirth,
For peace and lasting love
Atones your God and you.
Hosanna, sing Hosanna!
Sing Noel!*

Incarnation



INTERVIEW
PAUL MCCREESH &
JEREMY SUMMERLY

Jeremy Summerly is conductor of Oxford Camerata and the Choir of St Luke's Chelsea, a reviewer for BBC Radio 3's CD Review, and the author of *A Cause for Carolling: The History of Christmas Carols* published by Profile Books.

This is a Christmas disc, there is no doubt about that – but it's cast in an unusual mould. I can't think of a less 'commercial' Christmas recording than this.

That will come as no great surprise to those who know my musical tastes, I'm no Scrooge – on Christmas Eve, the turkey is stuffed, the tree is decked and at least a bottle or two are opened in the McCreesh household! Of course I understand that, for many, the traditional carols are an important part of the Christmas ritual. However, there is something quintessentially wonderful about the story of the Incarnation – *verbum caro factum est*, the son of God becoming man: it seems to me that the greatest Christmas music captures a sense of awe-struck wonder at this miracle. I find it frustrating that so much of the repertoire has moved away from the central truth of this message, often becoming saccharine and sentimental – all tinsel and glitter, and very little else.

I find it particularly interesting that the programme you have devised moves straight from medieval repertoire to that of the 20th and 21st centuries. There is nothing renaissance, baroque, classical or romantic: you have indeed cut out much of the core Christmas repertoire!

I think there is something that unites these seemingly disparate periods – certainly, all the music expresses beautifully a sense of wonder and simplicity. So much of the British carol repertoire draws heavily on the heritage of Tudor texts

and imagery: Britten's *A Boy Was Born* is clearly in this mould, setting poetry that is almost exclusively from the 15th and 16th centuries. This piece is not just the most substantial on the recording, but was also the starting point from which I built the programme. Britten's new settings of old texts suggested the idea of combining new and old music – 'Carols Ancient and Modern', if you will. From there a programme started to emerge. It is perhaps slightly unusual for a conductor to place such emphasis on text, but it is the natural starting point for any composer of choral music and for me it's an equally instinctive way to begin programming.

I think the inspired part of this programme is that the repertoire is all interesting and very different, yet it is linked in this one essential way, by the texts.

The programme also follows an intrinsic progression; there is a strong connection between the pieces as we move inevitably through prophecy, to the crib scene and the meetings of the shepherds and kings. Across the different centuries, composers of course paint these scenes in very different colours, but nevertheless they often reflect the same emotional world. In fact, all Gabrieli's recent a cappella recordings tend to explore the connection between the vocal repertoire of today and that of earlier centuries. The great canon of music inspired by the religious tradition has, at its core, an essence of emotion that unites all humans of any time; it transcends the centuries in a quite extraordinary way.

I should add that I'm always very concerned that these programmes should have a carefully designed shape and musical logic. The richness of 20th and 21st

century English choral music, with its beautifully written polyphony and often richly astringent harmony, sometimes needs a 'palette cleanser'. I'm not for a moment suggesting that the medieval music here – beautiful and worthwhile in its own right – only serves that function, but it does provide necessary relief before the next onslaught of glorious lush harmony.

There are five loosely 'medieval' works here. People can have a very fixed idea about how this music should sound, but equally performers make very varied choices because there is so much that is unknown about performance practice of the period. How do you approach this music?

The early repertoire here is very simple, almost entirely monophonic. I've chosen music which would probably have been performed in a domestic setting, or possibly in small chapels. This more intimate music – chants, lullabies and crib songs – precedes the elaborate liturgical repertoire of the late medieval and renaissance periods. The wonderful monodic lullaby *Lullay, lullay* or the Epiphany carol *This Endere Nygth* have a haunting, almost hypnotic simplicity. In these performances they are distilled down to their barest components. Nothing is added to the notes on the page, no particular expression or emotion is sought, save the delivery of the text. The beauty for me is in the simple rise and fall of unadorned melody and the old English, sung by a single singer or by unison voices. I have never understood the necessity of adding drones, percussion and improvised 'world music' elements to this repertoire, much as nowadays it seems to be *de rigueur* all too often.

You are passionate about using 'authentic' pronunciation.

I'm not sure passionate is quite the word! Nevertheless, to find an intelligent way through the huge spectrum of the musical canon, and to gain an understanding of the continuum that runs through it, it is essential to allow each particular kind of music to have its own colour. For me, the natural way to approach this is from a historical perspective (no surprise there!) and I think this has to include language too. I can't see why this should be regarded as unexpressive or academic: for me, pronunciation is an intrinsic part of the historical sound-world. As you might expect of someone who has recorded Berlioz in french Latin, I think it would be a pity to hear medieval song performed in modern English. There is of course the valid argument that modern pronunciation aids communication, but to me it compromises the beauty of the unique sound-world. In any case, a few footnotes quickly explain the idiosyncrasies of the older language.

I'm interested to know what drove your choice of medieval works.

I am no medievalist and my knowledge of this repertoire is extremely slim. I can say with honesty that I went no further than the *New Oxford Book of Carols* – this extraordinary collection of 'original' carols of so many periods, put together by Hugh Keyte, Andrew Parrott and Clifford Bartlett. Sadly, 20 years after its publication, much of the music therein is still rarely heard, especially the very early pieces. That's partly because choirs want to perform choral music, of course, and so much of the medieval repertoire is solo or consort music, but

there is much wonderful music here. So I was happy to choose from this erudite collection, with grateful acknowledgement to the editors. I hope that we might encourage more people to delve into this extraordinary resource which, for me, is the perfect counter-balance to the tired, hackneyed favourites.

The three 20th century composers here – Howells, Leighton and Britten – weren't exact contemporaries, but they are certainly a triumvirate representing the English choral tradition. You'll find their works on any Anglican Cathedral music list.

Indeed, and yet all three had an uneasy relationship with religion. Take Howells, for instance, whose canticles are some of the most well-crafted pieces of liturgical music; yet I feel that the greatest Howells tends to be found in his settings of more demanding texts, such as *Take him earth for cherishing*, or his *Requiem*. *Long, Long Ago* is not so well known, but it is a brilliant illustration of Howells' subtle response to expressive words. The poem, written by John Buxton in 1940 in a Prisoner of War camp, responds to the idea of Christ the Peace-Bringer, a theme which Howells had earlier explored in the last of his *Three Carol-Anthems*, written during the First World War.

There is also much wonderful Christmas music by Leighton – music of evident sincerity and great beauty, often set for solo soprano and choir – and I particularly liked *A Hymn of the Nativity*. There is something in the tenderness of Leighton's response to the text – a very long and convoluted 17th century dialogue between two shepherds from which he selected specific verses – that obviously touches the romantic in me.

In addition to the 20th century repertoire you have chosen three works from this century. Is it difficult to select contemporary music to stand alongside acclaimed masterpieces of earlier periods?

Perhaps it is, but these are unashamedly personal choices; I would justify them only by saying that all three works speak to me and move me. In putting these programmes together, I go through an agonizing process of listening to probably 200-plus pieces and select just 10. It drives my choral manager to drink because I am obsessed with finding well-written music that is serious and connects in a deep way. Needless to say, calypso versions of *Ding Dong Merrily on High* get dismissed before the end of the first verse... However, despite huge amounts of research and time, there is a certain element of chance to it.

I'll let you into a secret – the opening track of this recording, Matthew Martin's *Adam lay ybounden* was added to this programme only a few days before the first rehearsals. I had just discovered it and, on first listening, this young composer's setting of a familiar text knocked me sideways! It is beautiful, exquisitely written music that somehow completely encapsulates the emotional world of the poetry. So although we had a fully formed programme I just had to include it, announcing to our audience that they would have to accept us performing an encore at the start of the programme!

Francis Pott's Balulalow is the newest piece on the recording, written in 2009 and cast, like Leighton's work, in the recognised frame of soprano solo and choir.

This is another text that has been set many, many times, but I felt that Pott

captured the sweetness of the text without sentimentality: a very difficult path to tread... especially at Christmas time. I love the fact that this composer writes real polyphony. There is a reason that Mozart, Handel, Bruckner, Mahler – indeed all the ‘greats’ studied polyphony: it is the essence of all western music. Pott doesn’t write misty ‘mood-music’, however fashionable that seems to be amongst choral composers today. His writing is not particularly difficult – it’s largely tonal – but it is incredibly well crafted.

Jonathan Dove’s The Three Kings was written in 2000 and is also beautifully written. The title suggests a very traditional carol, but his choice of a text by Dorothy L. Sayers completely contradicts any pre-suppositions one might have!

Yes, it’s an interesting juxtaposition of ideas, isn’t it? The Epiphany story seen through the prism of the three ages of man. Perhaps it’s just a wonderful illustration of how the Christian tradition can be reflected and developed in such a vast variety of ways.

So is that what you are looking for – a new composer, able to set a very old text in a meaningful way that speaks to us now?

I guess that’s most of it – there is something about the human voice and the choral sound that can encapsulate certain human emotions in the most sincere and natural way. A great piece of choral music should have the same emotional impact as a symphony, albeit on a smaller scale. I think it’s important that great choral music is heard in challenging programmes such as this. There is always the danger that it just becomes fodder for Evensong, or for quaint Victorian-

style carol services. I think the repertoire deserves so much more than that. I dream of commissioning a truly ‘major’ a cappella work, one of significant duration; I am sure this would challenge many composers of choral music more used to writing short pieces. But maybe such a challenge might stimulate one of these wonderful composers to create something extraordinary?

The culmination of this programme is most certainly a ‘major a cappella work of significant duration’ – Britten’s early masterpiece A Boy Was Born. It’s almost unbelievable that this extraordinary piece was written when he was still a student at the Royal College of Music.

Yes... it is astonishing that any student – even a burgeoning genius such as Britten – should write a work such as this, arresting on so many levels. It is breathtakingly virtuosic, very challenging to sing and yet, crucially, never unvocal. It is also, at around half an hour, one of the longest *a cappella* works in the repertoire. It is both a compositional tour de force and, as so often with Britten, an exquisite response to a wide range of cleverly selected poetry.

Britten seems to have been aware of the audacity and ambition of the work. He’s young, he knows that he can’t do or know everything, he knows that he is pushing boundaries. Yet, at the same time, he grounds himself by writing a set of variations on a theme of four notes. It’s as if he’s well aware that whilst challenging every aspect of the idiom, this structural conceit will prevent him straying too far off course!

Exactly so. It is extraordinary what he achieves with those four notes – not just breathtaking imagination but an ability to manipulate structural form that is so

common amongst symphonic composers and yet relatively rare in choral music. Here Britten's response to word settings is as refined and subtle as anywhere but, in adopting the symphonic form of theme and variations, he does something incredibly innovative.

The sound that you draw from the choir, and the way it has been recorded, is incredibly intimate and intense. Many recordings capture the choral sound from a distance, putting an aural halo around it, but it feels to me that you place the microphones relatively closely to the singers: you can feel the emotion in the singing, which you certainly don't shy away from.

I'm not so sure it's just a matter of recording technique; I have long been obsessive about conveying text, and in particular I work hard to persuade the singers to place consonants very brightly at the front of the mouth. But I hope that this sense of increased emotional commitment is something of a hallmark of the Gabrieli sound – I'm certainly pleased that, as a choral conductor yourself, it's something you immediately noticed. I constantly plead with my singers to think deeply about the words which they sing. I know that I challenge them as I have a different set of priorities from many other British conductors. Beauty of sound, clarity, precision – for me these are the starting points, not the whole *raison d'être*. Conveying feeling, moving the audience, drawing them in to the deeper meanings of text: these things mark out truly great singers and are equally applicable to choral and solo singing. I know I push my singers very hard and that they may not always feel loved, but they are an amazing group of

hugely talented people and it's an honour to work with them. It's good to be able to put that on record!

So, let me review the record for you in advance. "Contrary, evangelical, but always sympathetic." Are you happy with that?

Well, maybe all three adjectives describe something of my personality and might not be entirely inappropriate, even on my tombstone! I think it is good to try to offer a different perspective and I believe that there should be a reason to commit more music to CD. Certainly, the music presented here is, of its kind, peerless, and it is for me to ensure that it is programmed and performed in a way that reflects, enhances and celebrates that. This is just one musician's response to a most wonderful and profound story at the centre of the Christian tradition, one that has been at the heart of western culture for centuries. No more, no less.



BIOGRAPHIES

GABRIELI CONSORT

Gabrieli are world-renowned interpreters of great vocal and instrumental repertoire spanning from the renaissance to the present day. Formed as an early music ensemble by Paul McCreesh in 1982, Gabrieli has both outgrown and remained true to its original identity. Over thirty years, the ensemble's repertoire has expanded beyond any expectation, but McCreesh's ever-questioning spirit, expressive musicianship and a healthy degree of iconoclasm remain constant features and continue to be reflected in the ensemble's dynamic performances. Its repertoire includes major works of the oratorio tradition, virtuosic a cappella programmes of music from many centuries and mould-breaking reconstructions of music for historical events. Above all, Gabrieli aims to create inspirational and thought-provoking performances which stand out from the crowd.

Today, at the heart of Gabrieli's activities is the development of a pioneering education initiative in the Gabrieli Young Singers Scheme. This partnership with leading UK youth choirs has enabled Gabrieli to work extensively with teenagers from across the UK in intensive training programmes focused on recording major works of the oratorio repertoire and performances for such prestigious promoters as the BBC Proms.

Gabrieli has long been renowned for its many award-winning recordings created during a 15 year association with Deutsche Grammophon. In 2010, Paul McCreesh established his own record label Winged Lion, which in less than three years has released five extremely diverse recordings, underlining Gabrieli's versatility and McCreesh's breadth of vision: *A Song of Farewell*

(English choral repertoire from Morley and Sheppard to Howells and MacMillan), *A New Venetian Coronation 1595* (revisiting their famed 1990 recording of music by Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli); and three spectacular large-scale oratorio recordings made in conjunction with the Wrocław Philharmonic Choir with the support of the National Forum of Music, Wrocław: Berlioz *Grande Messe des Morts*, Mendelssohn *Elijah* and Britten *War Requiem*.

PAUL MCCREESH

Paul McCreesh has established himself at the highest levels in both the period instrument and modern orchestral fields and is recognised for his authoritative and innovative performances on the concert platform and in the opera house. Together with the Gabrieli Consort & Players, of which he is the founder and Artistic Director, he has performed in major concert halls and festivals across the world and built a large and distinguished discography both for Deutsche Grammophon and more recently for his own label, Winged Lion.

McCreesh works regularly with major orchestras and choirs, and the larger choral repertoire, such as Britten *War Requiem*, Brahms *German Requiem* and Haydn *The Creation* and *The Seasons*, feature increasingly in his work. He has established a strong reputation in the field of opera conducting productions of Handel, Gluck and Mozart at leading European opera houses.

McCreesh is passionate about working with young musicians and enjoys established collaborations with Chetham's School of Music and many youth orchestras and choirs, both in the UK and internationally. He was Artistic Director of the Wratislavia Cantans Festival from 2006 to 2012 and was Director of Brinkburn Music (in Northumberland, UK) from 1993 to 2013. In 2013 he assumed the position of Principal Conductor and Artistic Adviser at the Gulbenkian Orchestra, Lisbon.

Founded in 1924, Copenhagen Royal Chapel Choir has been the resident choir at Copenhagen Cathedral since 1959. As early as 1962 Benjamin Britten conducted the choir in the new work written for them, the now ubiquitous *Ceremony of Carols*. The choir has sung for conductors such as Giuseppe Sinopoli, Sir Andrew Davis, Sir Charles Mackerras, Christopher Hogwood, Paul McCreesh and Vladimir Ashkenazy and have had works written for them by prominent composers, including Poul Ruders. Under the direction of Ebbe Munk, the choir has toured to countries including South America, China and Australia and, closer to home, work regularly with the Danish National Radio Choir. Their numerous royal appointments include performing at the wedding of Prince Frederik of Denmark to Crown Princess Mary in Copenhagen Cathedral in 2004 and also at the baptism of their first child.

The choir is widely recorded, including discs for EMI, Chandos and Decca. In November 2003 CRCC was honoured in Paris by l'Institut de France-Académie des Beaux-Arts with the Prix Chant choral Liliane Bettencourt 2003.

COPENHAGEN
ROYAL CHAPEL
CHOIR

GABRIELI CONSORT**SOPRANO**

Susan Gilmour Bailey
 Susan Hemington Jones
 Alexandra Kidgell
 Charlotte Mobbs
 Amy Moore
 Philippa Murray
 Ruth Provost
 Emma Walshe

ALTO

Lucy Ballard
 David Clegg
 Daniel Collins
 Ruth Gibbins
 Polly Jeffries
 Kim Porter
 Benjamin Turner
 Matthew Venner

TENOR

Robin Bailey
 Gwilym Bowen
 Guy Cutting
 Richard Dowling
 Nicholas Madden
 Christopher Watson

BASS

Gabriel Crouch
 Jimmy Holliday
 Stephen Kennedy
 Greg Skidmore
 William Townend
 Giles Underwood

**COPENHAGEN
 ROYAL CHAPEL
 CHOIR**

Charles Chuyuan Chen
 William Rosford Kjærulf
 Frederik Rove Krog
 Bjarki Matras Nielsen
 David Miilman Orłowicz
 August Rose Rechnagel
 Thomas Viren Riise
 Sixten Berenth Schunk
 Nicholas Algot Swensen
 Mads Agerbæk Trandum

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This recording is dedicated to Ron Haylock, Gabrieli's Chairman until 2010, who died suddenly in May 2013. His great love of music and his interest in sharing this with young people made him a natural supporter of Gabrieli and he will be much missed by all of us.

Paul McCreesh

MCCRESH

Berlioz 1837

SIGCD
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MCCRESH

A Song of Farewell

SIGCD
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MCCRESH

A New Venetian Coronation 1595

SIGCD
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MCCRESH

Mendelssohn 1846

SIGCD
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MCCRESH

Britten 1962

SIGCD
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MCCRESH

Incarnation

SIGCD
346

A Song of Farewell
*Music of Mourning
& Consolation*

A beautifully poignant a cappella recording of music for mourning and consolation featuring British composers as diverse as Morley and Dove, Sheppard and Walton and including Howells' sublime *Requiem*.

"This is a superlative, unmissable issue."
BBC Music Magazine

"This album... serves as a vital reminder that there is more depth of feeling, emotional power and intellectual stimulation to the art of music-making than we can ever hope to truly understand."

Classic FM Magazine

Incarnation

Berlioz
Grande Messe des Morts
1837

*Winner BBC Music Magazine Award,
April 2012*

The first release in the Wratislavia Cantans Oratorio Series, this is a daring and exciting recording of Berlioz's monumental *Grande Messe des Morts*, recorded at the International Festival Wratislavia Cantans 2010 in Wrocław, Poland. The recording features over 400 musicians, drawn from the Gabrieli Consort & Players, Wrocław Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir, Chetham's School of Music, tenor Robert Murray and Paul McCreesh.

"Certainly not for the faint-hearted either in terms of its enormous scale or its spectrum of powerful, visionary expression. The impact is overwhelming... McCreesh has achieved something quite out of the ordinary in this performance of the Requiem..."

The Gramophone

*A New Venetian
Coronation*
1595

*Winner Diapason d'Or
May 2013*

A sumptuous new recording of Gabrieli Consort & Players' first, award-winning CD, *A Venetian Coronation 1595*, featuring music by Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli. Nearly a quarter of a century later, Paul McCreesh has reworked his imaginative reconstruction of a glorious late 16th century Coronation Mass at St Mark's, Venice. This is an exciting new version of one of Gabrieli's most influential and enduringly popular programmes.

"a marvellous achievement... never less than enthralling"
The Independent

WINGED LION



Mendelssohn
Elijah
1846

*Winner Diapason d'Or
June 2013*

Paul McCreesh has again assembled a vast international ensemble of over 400 artists including leading British soloists – Rosemary Joshua, Sarah Connolly, Robert Murray and Simon Keenlyside – to recreate the spectacular original performances of this great 19th century oratorio.

"...this is a triumph..."
The Gramophone
"...an Elijah of spirit and intelligence..."
BBC Music Magazine
"Was this the best tenor section ever...?"
Early Music Review
"...spectacularly successful..."
The Observer
"A thrilling performance..."
BBC Radio 3

GABRIELI





