

THE CHOIR OF



ST JOHN'S  
CAMBRIDGE

**MAGNIFICAT 2**  
NETHSINGHA

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# MAGNIFICAT 2

## Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis  
*Collegium Regale*

[1]	Magnificat	[5.25]
[2]	Nunc Dimittis	[4.09]

## Giles Swayne (b. 1946)

[3]	Magnificat I	[4.09]
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## Sydney Watson (1903-1991)

Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis in E

[4]	Magnificat	[3.34]
[5]	Nunc Dimittis	[2.43]

## William Walton (1902-1983)

Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis  
*Chichester Service*

[6]	Magnificat	[4.03]
[7]	Nunc Dimittis	[2.21]

## Lennox Berkeley (1903-1989)

Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis  
*Chichester Service*

[8]	Magnificat	[7.20]
[9]	Nunc Dimittis	[3.53]

## Herbert Sumsion (1899-1995)

Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis in G

[10]	Magnificat	[4.41]
[11]	Nunc Dimittis	[2.40]

## Francis Jackson (b. 1917)

Evening Service in G

[12]	Magnificat	[6.26]
[13]	Nunc Dimittis	[3.57]

## Arvo Pärt (b. 1935)

Magnificat

[14]	Magnificat	[8.22]
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## Julian Anderson (b. 1967)

Evening Canticles

*St John's Service\**

[15]	Magnificat	[5.29]
[16]	Nunc Dimittis	[4.59]

Total timings: [74.22]

\* Commissioned for the College Choir

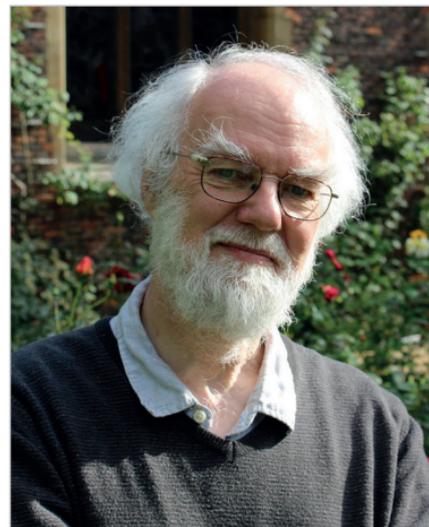
THE CHOIR OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE  
GLEN DEMPSEY ORGAN  
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## NEW TESTAMENT CANTICLES

The texts known by their Latin opening words as *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* are among the most frequently sung words in Christian worship. In the Western Catholic Church, they are associated respectively with the evening services of Vespers and Compline, the last two of the seven daily 'offices' that mark the different stages of the day in the monastic timetable; in the Orthodox churches of the East, the Nunc Dimittis is sung towards the end of Vespers. When the sixteenth-century Church of England simplified the structure of daily prayer, both texts were included in the order of Evening Prayer, usually called 'Evensong'. Despite reforms in the last few decades which have sought to restore the older pattern of having the Magnificat alone at Evening Prayer, with the Nunc Dimittis reserved for a late evening service, the pairing of the two hymns in the classical Anglican shape of Evensong has remained the norm for most musically minded worshippers.

This is largely because the form and feeling of the two texts lend themselves so well to contrastive musical approaches. The Magnificat is a naturally exuberant piece, with ample



Dr Rowan Williams

opportunity for dramatic light and shade. 'Holy is his name' invites a moment of intensity and relative quiet, 'He hath put down the mighty from their seat' often prompts a bit of robust quasi-military display. The Nunc Dimittis, on the other hand, is more of a single steady movement - a subdued or resigned beginning, swelling towards the vision of universal light and glory. While the Magnificat calls out for variations in forces and tempo, the Nunc

suggests a gentler and more consistent tone; there are some good examples of the bulk of the text being set for solo voice - often in the lower register. And while elaborate settings of the Magnificat are familiar in the repertoire of continental European music as part of the festal music for Vespers on special occasions, the tradition of setting the Nunc Dimittis is, in Western Christendom, unique to the Anglican world (it is of course included in Russian choral music for Vespers, most famously in Rachmaninov's sumptuous version).

Contrasting tone and colouring, the tension between the celebratory and the reflective, and even the fact that one hymn is, in the biblical context, uttered by a female voice and one by a male - all of this makes the combination of the two great texts an irresistible musical challenge, which has produced a rich and distinctive legacy from Anglophone composers. But why these texts in these positions in the liturgy? Like the Benedictus at Morning Prayer, the two hymns come from the opening chapters of St Luke's gospel; together they form what could claim to be the oldest body of Christian hymnody - the songs sung by the characters we encounter at the very beginning of the story of Jesus. Singing these as a Christian community is a means of

identifying with those first biblical witnesses to the mission of Jesus; we become contemporary with the events of Christ's life, more particularly the events at the *beginning* of that life. When we worship in these words, we affirm that we witness to the beginning of Christ's life in us. In our prayer the story told by St Luke starts up all over again.

But there is another aspect to the texts as they appear in the gospel. In his account of the events around the birth of Jesus, Luke very deliberately uses all sorts of phrases and idioms that are meant to remind the reader of the Hebrew Scriptures - indeed, the Magnificat is closely modelled on the Song of Hannah in the First Book of Samuel, which itself is probably an older song of praise adapted to the story of the birth of the prophet Samuel. The canticles are full of these 'Hebraisms' - the use of a word like 'magnify', expressions like 'the imagination of their hearts', or 'before the face of all people'. Luke is telling his readers that the story of Christ's coming, the story of the Incarnation, is part of a longer story that began with 'Abraham and his seed', the ancient promise to the Jewish people, called to show to the world the nature of God's justice and compassion. In witnessing to the new event of Christ coming to birth,

the worshipping Church also announces that this newness is really the manifesting of an unchanging faithfulness and commitment on the part of God - 'as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever.'

One further theme, though, needs to be drawn out from the story as Luke records it. Those who sing the three canticles, the Benedictus, the Magnificat and the Nunc Dimittis, who so confidently declare how God is at work in the world, are not leaders or sages but obscure figures on the margins of the great world - an obscure country clergyman, an unmarried peasant girl, an aged eccentric who haunts the courts of the Temple. 'He... hath exalted the humble and meek': if there is a consistency in the pattern of God's working, it is a consistent presence among those who are readily sidelined or forgotten. And so we are invited to ask ourselves where we expect to see great and world-changing events, whom we associate with such significant happenings, who we think are the agents of history - because the changes that God brings about don't happen in the centres of human power. God acts with and for those who are vulnerable, those who *don't* think that the answer to the world's problems lies in their skill or their genius.

As many have noted, these are messages that can seem a very long way from the privileged life of an established church; plenty of people would see Choral Evensong as quintessentially a bit of background music for middle-class cultural nostalgia. But the words have not changed, and the story is what it always was. The irony of having a disruptive message embodied in a setting of beauty and order is potentially a powerful tool of understanding. Beauty and order are built on justice and compassion, otherwise they are empty: the canticles prod us to ask how far we let these things drift apart - and to ask who it is in our own context that we unthinkingly forget, demean or exclude. And at the same time, the struggle for justice and compassion is the struggle for a world of harmony and joy, not just for an abstract fairness. Caring for justice is caring for the kind of world in which the realities of intense celebratory joy and of the quiet contemplating and absorbing of an unveiled truth are shared possibilities for everyone.

These are texts of extraordinary resonance and richness. However much or little we consciously take in of their meaning, we are bound to take in something of the sense of a strange new world, something of the human need both



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*The Choir recording Anderson St John's Service*

to give thanks and to be still, something of the bewildering vision of a world that is not organised around our own getting and spending, struggling and manipulating. It is surely this sense of an inexhaustible gift that continues to draw musicians, congregations, casual listeners

back to these ancient hymns, so redolent of continuities yet so full of radical surprise.

**Dr Rowan Williams**

Archbishop of Canterbury (2002-2012)

Master, Magdalene College, Cambridge (2013-2020)

## CONDUCTOR'S REFLECTIONS



If you wish to enlarge the manuscript images, you can view the booklet online using this QR Code or the link [Lead.me/mag2](https://lead.me/mag2)

I've chosen nine settings of the Evening Canticles for this volume of our *Magnificats* series. They fall into two groups of four, with a contemporary finale. There are four works by Organist-Composers, written between 1932 and 1952, and four works by non-church musicians from 1974-1989. Two of these set only the first of the two canticles, as stand-alone *Magnificats*. I have mixed up the two groups of four, so as to create a pleasing musical sequence. The recording ends with the setting which Julian Anderson composed for our Chapel's 150th anniversary in 2019, just as our first *Magnificat* album concluded with the canticles which Michael Tippett wrote for the College's 450th anniversary.

As well as the long tradition of Organist-Composers, which dates back to Purcell and beyond, various other threads link certain pieces on the disc. These include notable clergymen-commissioners of the mid-twentieth century. Christ Church, Oxford features as the place where Walton was a chorister, Watson was Organist and for which Swayne composed *Magnificat I*. The works by Berkeley and Anderson share a French influence. The aim of the recording is to compare the varied ways in which composers have created musical form out of these timeless texts, and I am grateful to the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, for writing so beautifully about the *Magnificat* and the *Nunc Dimittis*.

These first volumes are designed to complement one another. *Magnificat I* started earlier, with Stanford in the 1880s; Volume Two brings us briefly up to the present day. The first release contained celebrated works by Tippett and Leighton from 1961 and 1972 respectively, in between the two main periods represented on this disc. Both albums contain iconic works by Howells, written a year apart. We hear composers creating different orders of priority for the parameters of composition. Rhythm is supreme for Swayne, with *legato* almost entirely



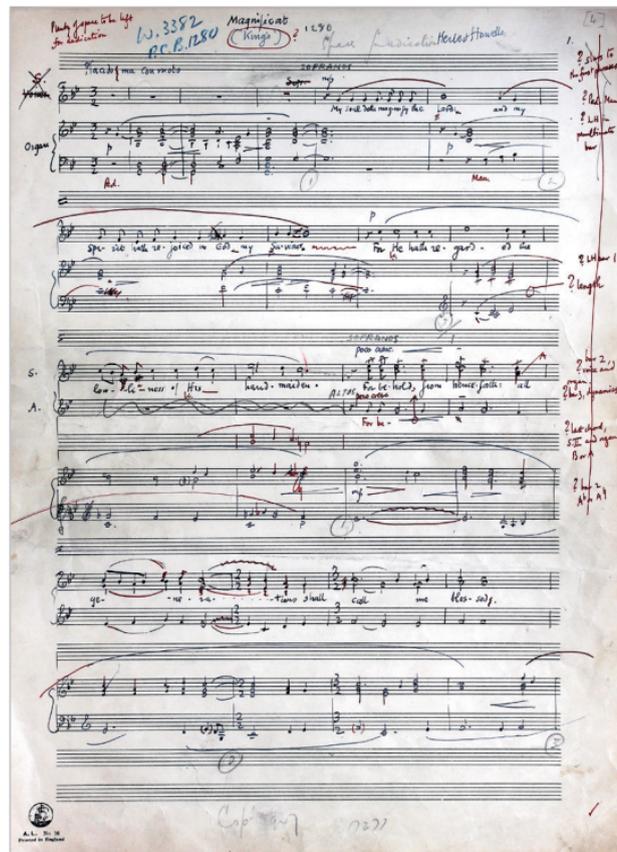
to name canticles after specific institutions, rather than labelling them by key or number, though the *Collegium Regale* setting by Charles Wood (1915) is a precedent. Our photographs of autograph manuscripts give glimpses into the compositional process; it is fascinating to see that Howells's initial conception was a work for (four-part!) treble voices alone.

Howells was Assistant Organist at Salisbury Cathedral in 1917, but he only remained in post for a few months due to illness. In 1941 he was invited to be Acting Organist at St John's, while Robin Orr (my predecessor but three) was away on active service. He held this post until the end of the War in 1945. Howells loved both St John's and King's. Eric Milner-White, Dean of King's, asked Howells to write a *Te Deum* for King's College Choir, known as *Collegium Regale*. This was followed by the Evening Canticles and, some time later, by the *Collegium Regale* Communion Service. Milner-White's commission was the catalyst for an extraordinarily fertile and imaginative period of composition for the Anglican Church.

The opening has an intimate, protective quality, as Mary contemplates the child deep within her womb. The organ introduction envelops you in

an extraordinary way, right from the first chord. There is a nervous excitement to the opening treble phrase, combining introspection with a hint of agitation. One thinks of a Russian melody with just a few pitches circling around, like the opening of Rachmaninoff's *Third Piano Concerto*. What a contrast with the opening of the *Magnificat* his great friend Sumson had written a decade earlier, joyously spanning an octave and a half within the first three syllables!

Howells is unusual in giving a clearly defined ternary (A-B-A) structure to the *Magnificat*. The outer sections employ only the upper voices and the organ manuals, creating a sense of weightlessness whilst demanding virtuosic control of soft dynamics. *He hath shew'd strength* adds the tenors and basses, whilst reintroducing the organ pedals last heard in the introduction. There is an added urgency to the writing as Howells describes the revolution which Mary's child will unleash. *And hath exalted the humble and meek* alludes to the humility portrayed in the textures of the A sections. Howells tellingly deploys a 32' organ stop (sounding two octaves below printed pitch) for *and the rich he hath sent empty away*. This is especially effective following manuals-only organ writing; the bass line instantly descends by three octaves. There is



First page of Howells *Collegium Regale* (see online at [lead.me/mag2](http://lead.me/mag2))

no word repetition in either canticle, apart from the final *Amen*. This succinctness is enhanced by Howells's ability to set a scene with the most economical means. Three beats on the organ are sufficient to transport us back to the delicate sound-world of the opening for *He remembering*. Painting images of eternity is one Howells's many gifts; as in the *Gloucester Service*, Howells saves some of his most alluring harmony for *Abraham and his seed for ever*.

We can pause for a moment to contemplate the composer's relatively unusual choice of a minor mode for the *Magnificat*. Mary muses about her unborn child; might the deeply personal music of the opening also suggest Howells somehow wishing to protect his own child, who had recently died tragically young? Perhaps the background of the Second World War was another reason for the choice of G minor. Both canticles end on the dominant of this key. The first two notes of the *Magnificat* (G – B-flat) are a kernel for the harmonic shape of the whole work; the *Gloria* is a blaze of iridescent B-flat major. An astringent false relation in the organ part during *Ghost* (F-natural and F-sharp simultaneously) gives us a brief clash of the two principal keys.

What a contrast the start of the *Gloria* provides, after the *ppp* that precedes it. Private becomes public, candle-lit darkness is replaced by the brilliance of the Chapel's stained glass on a summer day, Mary's nervous humility gives way to the whole of creation rejoicing. The surging first bar was written with the particularly effective swell box on the King's organ in mind; it is as though a giant elastic band were pulled back and then released! The ecstatic first syllable of *Glory* foreshadows the spine-tingling *As it was* in the following year's *Gloucester Service*. The conclusion makes full use of the King's acoustic - it is no coincidence that the three best-loved sets of canticles by Howells, of which *St Paul's Service* is the third, were all written for reverberant buildings.

The organ introduces the *Nunc Dimittis*; you look up, the clouds open, and Jesus descends from heaven to meet Simeon. Here is music of the utmost simplicity, yet exquisitely evocative. As described above, the *Magnificat* made a sudden transition from private to public. The *Nunc Dimittis*, on the other hand, seems to make this transition very gradually. We start with a solo voice. When the full choir creeps in it is accompanimental - another family of orchestral instruments alongside the organ.

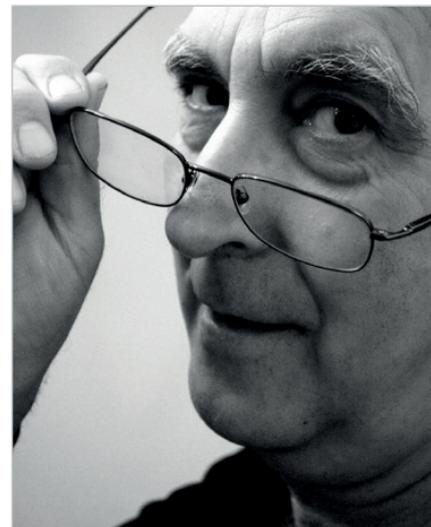
In time the choir takes over the primary role, and an inexorable crescendo leads us towards a final unison; the single vocal line of *thy servant* becomes a single vocal line for *all people*. The organ's false relation during the last syllable ratchets up the tension yet further, whilst also reminding us of the G minor/B-flat major axis.

A few years after Howells had completed both this work and the *Gloucester Service*, Milner-White wrote to him as follows:

"By these last two services of yours, I personally feel that you have opened a wholly new chapter in Service, perhaps in Church, music. Of spiritual moment rather than liturgical. It is so much more than music-making; it is experiencing deep things in the only medium that can do it."

### SWAYNE – MAGNIFICAT I (1982)

From King's we travel west to the far drier acoustic of Christ Church, Oxford. The brilliant young Francis Grier took over the choir there after Simon Preston's scintillating decade at the helm. What an era! One year into his tenure Grier commissioned Giles Swayne's



Giles Swayne © Alice Williamson

highly original *Magnificat I*, the first of his four settings. Legato is almost obsolete; voices become percussion instruments.

In 1979 Swayne had heard a record of African music which led to a turning point in his compositions. A seminal BBC Singers commission, CRY, followed the next year; it is scored for 28 amplified voices and dedicated to Messiaen. At this time Swayne was also



First page of Swayne Magnificat I, showing the thought given to the vertical alignment of vowel sounds (see online at [Lead.me/mag2](http://Lead.me/mag2))

appointed Composer-in-Residence to the London Borough of Hounslow. Meirion Bowen has written that “dealing with the untapped and untutored talents of school-children and writing music for many local groups led Swayne to make an urgent reappraisal of his approach to music-making.” (As a child himself, Swayne had been much encouraged by his cousin, the composer Elizabeth Maconchy.) In 1981 Swayne made a field trip to Southern Senegal and Gambia to research and record music of the Jola people. *Magnificat I* begins with the

opening call of *O Lulum*, a ploughing song recorded in a village called Badem Karantaba. When he returned from the field trip Swayne advertised for untrained musicians in *Time Out* magazine, forming a rhythm group called *Square Root* which employed both African and Western-style instruments. *Magnificat I* followed in 1982 while, in the composer’s words, “I was still reeling from the impact of my belated encounter with African music and the composition of CRY.” There are parallels with the music and experiences of Steve Reich,

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An early sketch of Swayne Magnificat I. Refrains, including the *O Lulum* song, formed an important structural element from the outset of composition (see online at [Lead.me/mag2](http://Lead.me/mag2))

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who had travelled to Ghana in 1970. Reich's *Drumming*, described as minimalism's first masterpiece, was written after observing and studying the music of the Ewe people.

Swayne set the *Magnificat* in Latin, as did Pärt, though Swayne used a slightly different spelling to ensure he got the exact pronunciation he wanted. The composer has explained to me that "the canons were carefully planned so that at key points the consonants in different lines chimed so as to keep the texture clear & uncluttered". In its rhythmic construction Swayne's work frequently superimposes *ostinati* of different lengths in a manner reminiscent of Olivier

Messiaen, whose classes he had attended. The music is "built up in polyrhythmic layers which owe a great deal to the choral songs of the Ba-Benzele pygmies of the Congo region." The final Amens provide one example. The men sing an antiphonal figure which repeats every five beats. Above this two treble parts sing a rhythmic pattern which repeats every thirteen beats. Two other treble parts appear to copy in canon, but in fact their ostinato repeats every fifteen beats. The patterns move in and out of focus with one another. Swayne's sketch books, now in the British Library, show that he began by writing out the Latin text and noting down the number of syllables in each phrase. *Quia respexit*

*humilitatem* is another example of polyrhythms. Mary's lowliness is portrayed by the low basses in a pattern which repeats every five crotchets. The altos are on a loop which repeats every three quavers (whilst being made to sound like the car horns in Gershwin's *American in Paris!*). The trebles have the most conventional music, singing the tune of *Three blind mice* at six-beat intervals. And then the tenors turn up, exuberantly oblivious to everything else! The Church of England needs a good shake-up now and again.

Harmonically, Swayne's *Magnificat* is static - most sections have only 4, 5 or 6 pitch classes. There are no modulations and the music is entirely diatonic. There are no accidentals except that every C in the piece is altered to a C-sharp. One wonders why the composer didn't add a second sharp to the key signature; I suspect the unorthodox Swayne would have hated to give anyone a chance to call the piece *Swayne in D!* The one solitary C-natural occurs just before *Fesit potensiam*. This unique note serves as an aural signpost heralding a new section in which Choir 2 sings canonic versions of Choir 1's parts in augmentation. One thinks of the canonic ingenuity of fifteenth-century composers like Mouton and Ockeghem, predating even Christ

Church! This passage gives a rare example of some more sustained lines, but eventually Choir 2 also breaks up into glittering fragments. Out of this we gradually become aware of a unison phrase emerging at the start of the *Gloria*. There are now only two pitches - B and A - right in the middle of the choral texture. All eight voice parts join in turn, in another rare use of *legato*. This is a wonderful choral texture; the voices are all in the same octave - the boys low and chesty coloured by fairly high men's voices at a pitch which can deliver an overwhelming crescendo. If a manual of choral orchestration existed this would be one of my favourite entries. A similar texture was used by Britten at the start of *Rejoice in the Lamb*, but the effect is amplified here by Swayne's canonic use of different words simultaneously. New parts join every seven beats, each voice being four syllables behind the previous one. We hear not only the varied colours of different voice parts singing the same pitch, but also a range of vowel sounds, adding up to a bell-like effect. It is a choral version of *Klangfarbenmelodie*, with each note having a subtly different timbre. Swayne then uses the words *Sicut erat in principio* - *As it was in the beginning* - to reprise the opening material. It's strange to find the sketch books revealing that Swayne initially envisaged ending the work on a



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A page of Swayne Magnificat I, showing the texture from which the unison Gloria emerges (see online at [Lead.me/mag2](http://Lead.me/mag2))

conventional E major chord! His voices traverse a wide tessitura of almost four octaves from top to bottom, in fact concluding with Mary's words floating up to heaven - her soul, *anima mea*, at one with God. After so much almost mechanised, robotic music, with normal means of expressiveness excised, this final texture is very moving; a lone treble voice seems to be suspended for ever, as so much expectation rests on the child in Mary's womb.

## WATSON IN E (Published 1937)

Sydney Watson was Organist at Christ Church, Oxford, retiring in 1970 just a decade or so before the Swayne was commissioned for the choir there. Five years before retirement he conducted the first performance of Walton's *The Twelve*, a link to the next work on the disc. Indeed Walton himself had been a chorister at Christ Church. Two years after premiering *The Twelve*, Watson famously conducted *Missa Corona Spinea*, one of the high points of English sacred music, written by his early-sixteenth-century predecessor John Taverner. Taverner had been the first Organist and Master of the Choristers at Thomas Wolsey's newly founded Cardinal College, Oxford (as Christ Church



Sydney Watson

© Senior Common Room, Christ Church, Oxford

was originally known.) Watson is thought to have given the first liturgical performance of the mass for over 400 years. Christopher Robinson, who was one of his organ scholars in Oxford, has described Watson as “one of the most gifted people I ever came across.” He was very amusing, very tall and very generous.

Earlier in his career Watson had directed the music at New College, Oxford, and then at Winchester College and Eton in turn. He used to joke that he had “only ever worked in

small places!” The present work was composed during his time at New College. Watson was also Professor of Organ at the Royal College of Music. When my father arrived from Sri Lanka in 1954 to audition at the R.C.M., Watson was an examiner and kindly page-turned for him. Later when my father was having Harmony and Counterpoint lessons there with Howells, Watson taught in the room next door, often wandering in for a chat if his own pupil hadn't turned up.

Watson in E is one of the gems of the repertoire; concise, exquisitely crafted, perfectly scaled for the liturgy, full of melodic charm and harmonic sophistication. One can compare the way different composers set the first phrase of the *Magnificat*. Stanford's famous setting in G emphasises *soul*. Later on this disc Sumsion and Jackson give prominence to *magnify*, while Watson makes *Lord* the focus of his phrase. Walton highlights all three words. Watson later creates a particularly beautiful, melting modulation at *and the rich he hath sent empty away*. It's also interesting to compare composers at this point in the text: in Howells and Jackson the colour drains from one's face; Berkeley's phrase seems to distill contorted harmony down to a simple essence; Walton mourns

lugubriously the loss of wealth. The close-knit parallel chords in Watson's lower voices are well-suited to a Collegiate or Cathedral Choir with only six men. *He remembering his mercy* is one example - it's almost close-harmony writing, with a twinkle in the eye but never trivial. This moment in the text is coloured with a sense of hushed nostalgia.

Watson's *Nunc Dimittis* follows the tradition of Short Services from the sixteenth century, although he adds a minimal organ part. Compare the *Short Service* by Thomas Tallis, for example. In both cases the music is simple, syllabic and almost entirely homophonic, with just a little initial imitation between the trebles and the lower voices.

There are some settings of the *Gloria* where I feel that Simeon has already died; the music floats ethereally as the *Gloria* is sung by him in heaven not on earth. Stanford in G, Dyson in D and Watson in E are examples. The Watson makes me think of some words from an interview with the pianist Jean-Efflam Bavouzet:

“I'd like to compare Debussy's music to a fantastic dream, after which you wake up feeling and knowing you have had a

wonderfully beautiful dream, but if someone asked you what it was about you'd have to say you don't remember. At the end, Debussy's music should evaporate."

Watson's *Gloria* takes us to another realm, and it too evaporates at the end. This is internal music - it draws you in. It evokes the particular intimacy you can experience at a mid-week Evensong, with a small number of people standing close to the choir; it is the antithesis of a big public statement.

## WALTON – CHICHESTER SERVICE (1974)

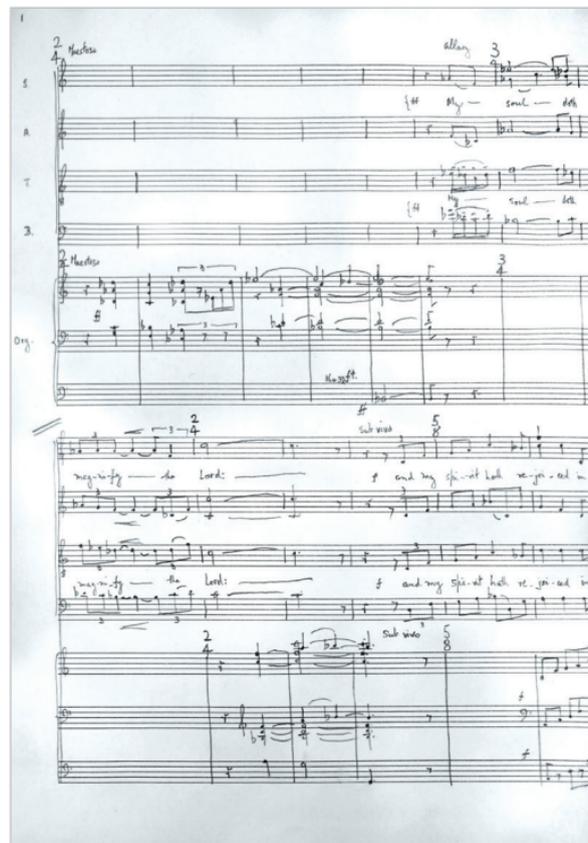
The Rev'd Walter Hussey was one of the twentieth century's great patrons of the arts. He served as Vicar of St Matthew's Northampton and as Dean of Chichester Cathedral. His commissions included painting, stained glass and tapestry by Graham Sutherland, Marc Chagall and John Piper. His numerous musical commissions were wide ranging, from Finzi's *Lo, the full, final sacrifice* to Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*. Peter Webster writes that Hussey was only interested in those artists, composers and performers whom he considered the very finest. At the same time



© William Walton Archive

William Walton

as Howells was working on his *Te Deum* for Milner-White, Hussey approached Walton to write a work for the Golden Jubilee of St Matthew's Church in 1943. Walton politely turned him down not once but twice. Hussey then approached Britten for the anniversary commission, and *Rejoice in the Lamb* was the result. Not a bad second choice! Hussey famously commissioned Henry Moore's *Madonna* to be unveiled on the same occasion.



First page of the original performance version of Walton Chichester Service. The setting of 'the Lord' was subsequently made more emphatic (see online at [lead.me/mag2](http://lead.me/mag2))

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The Moore sculpture was in fact not completed until the following year, whereupon Hussey asked Milner-White to devise a special order of service for the dedication. Walton attended the Moore unveiling and acquired a maquette of the *Madonna*, which he was to treasure. Hussey eventually persuaded Walton to write for him some thirty years later for the 900th anniversary of Chichester Cathedral in 1975. By this stage, Walton and his wife had been living on the idyllic Italian island of Ischia for quarter of a century.

Walton was a perfectionistic composer, carefully weighing every note, much like his exact contemporary Maurice Duruflé - though their approaches to liturgical writing could scarcely have been more different. Walton made many revisions after the first performance of the *Chichester Service*. Oxford University Press had already printed the work, but the composer persuaded them not to put it on sale. When the revised version was printed and published, Walton himself paid some of the extra costs.

The organ launches us into an ecstatic choral declamation, recalling similar *a capella* writing in *Belshazzar's Feast*. The high doubling of tenors and basses produces stunning impact at

the start of the phrase, *magnify* manages to be the biggest moment, and *the Lord* is heard in bold-type through the use of unison. The chord on soul contains five intervals of a third piled on top of each other. This is a nucleus which permeates much of the rest of the work, both harmonically and melodically, with rising thirds providing many melodic outlines (e.g. *For he that is mighty* and *And his mercy*.)

*And my spirit* initiates a punchy rhythmic vitality, fuelled by frequently changing time signatures. *For he hath regarded* portrays *lowliness* with a trio of lower voices. As a chorister he would have become used to such textures from mid/late seventeenth-century repertoire; they were much used as people sought to rebuild choirs during the Restoration. *For behold from henceforth* embodies the youthful eagerness of the text. The choir seems to genuflect at *And holy is his name*. Walton includes three iterations of *holy* as in the Communion text *Sanctus*. The number three is traditionally associated with this word - think of Bach's *Sanctus* in the *Mass in B minor* with its triplets, three oboes and three trumpets. Walton gives us mystical chords made up of notes piled up in thirds again; each chord has one more pitch than the previous one, with the bass line descending in thirds to

add intensity, so that the final *holy* contains all seven notes of a diatonic scale. This is a favourite Walton chord, recurring at *glory* in the *Nunc Dimittis*, and in other works such as *The Twelve* at *starry heavens*.

As in his *Coronation Te Deum* (1953), Walton includes many types of antiphonal writing in the work. *And his mercy* is reminiscent of plainsong psalm singing in its alternation of two solo voices. Often the organ provides pithy interjections between phrases - in dialogue with the choir, rather than accompanying it. Is Walton again looking back through his chorister eyes when he sets *and hath exalted the humble and meek* for a treble solo? He contrasts this with the adult voices for putting down the mighty and leaving the rich empty-handed. Only a handful of words is repeated, and the homophonic writing contributes to the work's concision. Despite these self-imposed constraints, Walton continually creates variety. A new dialogue of textures occurs at *He remembering* before the organ introduces the *Gloria*. *Magnificat* ends in a different key from that which is expected, intensifying the unbridled sense of joy.

*Nunc Dimittis* opens with a funereal organ *ostinato*, with emphasis on the second of each bar's three beats in the manner of an early eighteenth-century French *Sarabande*. Simeon's text is mostly given to *Bass solo* or *tutti* before the full choir enters exuberantly to depict the *light to lighten the Gentiles*. Again Walton revels in the theatricality of pitting choir against full organ - one thinks of the conductor Thomas Beecham saying "why don't you throw in two brass bands?!" before the premiere of *Belshazzar's Feast*.

In my notes for *Magnificat I* I compared different ways that composers treat the two *Glorias* of each set of canticles. The Howells on the present recording reuses the same *Gloria*, but each canticle prepares for it very differently - his *Magnificat* ends *ppp* but the *Nunc Dimittis* has a huge crescendo which surges on into the *Gloria*. The Walton *Nunc Dimittis*, however, appears to be using an exact repeat of the *Magnificat Gloria*; then - just at the end - the composer takes an opposite turning with a soft murmuring conclusion. Most of the second *Gloria* reflects the glorious mood of the end of the canticle, but Walton suddenly reminds us of the dying Simeon's rapidly diminishing strength.



Lennox Berkeley (right) with Maurice Ravel, London, 1925

## BERKELEY – CHICHESTER SERVICE (1980)

When Maurice Ravel came to London in 1925, he met Lennox Berkeley and encouraged him to go to Paris to study with Nadia Boulanger. Berkeley did so for six years, of which Roger Nichols has written: “If his studies with Boulanger taught him to be at ease with counterpoint, they also inculcated a love of ‘la grande ligne’, which Boulanger had inherited

from Gabriel Fauré.” It was whilst in Paris that Berkeley became a Roman Catholic. He spoke of “wanting to write music that would merge into the liturgy, and not create a violent contrast or cause too much distraction.” Like Duruflé in his *Requiem*, Berkeley writes liturgical music of intrinsic prayerfulness; the shared influence of plainsong and French Catholicism is no coincidence. Berkeley’s language is unique and highly original, despite being tonal and in no way *avant-garde*. Both melody and harmony are exquisitely crafted.

It was Benjamin Britten who introduced Berkeley to Walter Hussey. Hussey commissioned Berkeley’s *Festival Anthem* for St Matthew’s in 1945. Three times he tried to persuade Berkeley to write for him again, but - as with Walton - it took him 30 years to succeed! Berkeley’s *The Lord is my shepherd* was one of three musical compositions for Chichester Cathedral’s 900th anniversary, alongside the Walton canticles and a work by William Albright. Three years earlier Berkeley had written his *Three Latin Motets* for St John’s College Choir. In due course, George Guest was quick to incorporate the new canticles of both Walton and Berkeley into the St John’s repertoire.

First page of Berkeley Chichester Service (see online at [Lead.me/mag2](http://Lead.me/mag2))

John Birch had been appointed Organist of Chichester Cathedral in 1958, three years after Hussey moved there as Dean. The two men collaborated for nineteen years until Hussey's retirement. Three years later Berkeley's *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* were written for the Southern Cathedrals Festival (S.C.F.) - one of the last commissions that John Birch was to conduct there - and they are commonly known as the Chichester Service. They are challenging to perform, but not quite as difficult as the Harvey *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* written for the S.C.F. two years earlier; what an adventurous and creative period for the festival!

Walton and Swayne, writing just a few years before and after, focussed on concision and rhythmic energy. In Berkeley's work, however, the central concern is creating a timeless, meditative atmosphere. Aesthetically it has more in common with Arvo Pärt's *Magnificat* or the religious music of Berkeley's pupil, John Tavener.

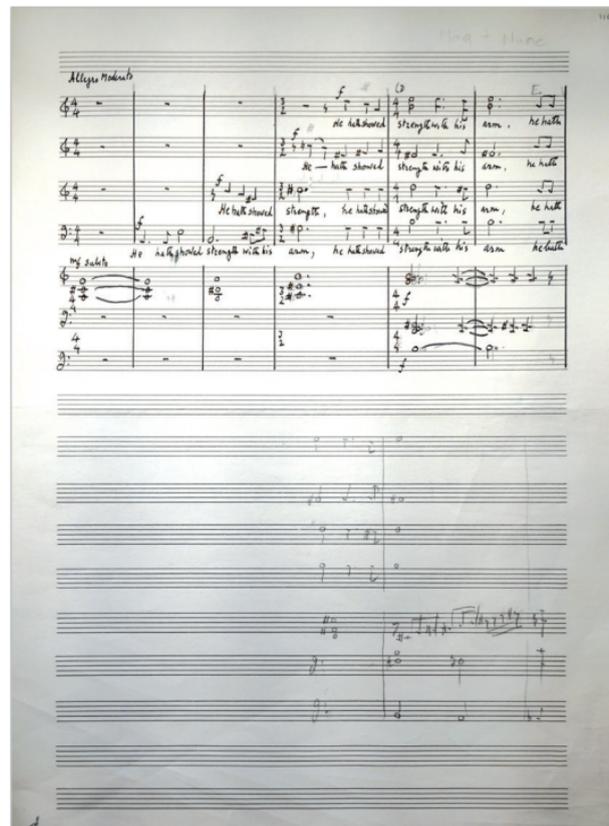
Berkeley's organ part often consists of long-held chords, over which the choir spins a mixture of homophonic and imitative melodic lines. The sketches show the process of distillation and purification which occurred during



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*Lennox Berkeley in his study at home at 8 Warwick Avenue, London, 1981*

composition. The opening, for instance, started life with four densely imitative parts before Berkeley alighted on a transparent 2-part texture. The organ part is reduced to create a clarity which never obscures the vocal lines. *He hath shewed strength* is a good example; the imitative entries are simply accompanied by right-hand organ chords. Berkeley approaches the text in subtle ways. *Throughout all generations* has charming musical repetitions. A similar passage of text at *Abraham and his*



*Sketch of Berkeley Chichester Service, with a revision showing the composer lightening his textures and creating more sense of direction (see online at l.ead.me/mag2)*

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*seed for ever* is treated with an imitative build up, as one generation begets the next. I love the arch-shape of the music at *He hath filled the hungry*. The hungry are tenderly lifted up, and the rich are gently put down; there is no grand standing, no drawing attention to one's actions, just calmly making the world fairer.

*Nunc Dimittis* opens with serene simplicity, very different from the Walton, and blossoms in a visionary way before retreating into private prayer as we prepare for the doxology (an expression of praise to the Trinity). The *Gloria*, which is the same in both canticles, evokes the monastic ritual of Gregorian chant in the *Opus Dei*. The *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* are each sung once daily, whereas the words of the *Gloria Patri* are used in worship many times every day. (I am using the term *Gloria* for shorthand in these notes. Strictly it should be called *Gloria Patri* to distinguish it from *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, the latter being part of the Ordinary of the Mass.) Berkeley's *Gloria* is music of the utmost fluidity and delicacy. It makes me think of the flexibility and nuance of George Guest's direction of plainsong, itself heavily influenced by the French Catholic monks at Solemnnes. As Berkeley said:

“no music has ever been more deeply religious than the plainsong chants - single melodic lines of magnificent shape and subtle expressiveness that seem eternal in their restrained yet unpredictable contours.”

## SUMSION IN G (1932)

Herbert Sumsion spent 39 years as Cathedral Organist in Gloucester. The Dean of Gloucester, Seiriol Evans, paid tribute to him when he retired in 1967:



Herbert Sumsion in 1928

With thanks to Gloucester Cathedral

“He has the great and rare gift of being so completely in command as to inspire the utter confidence of all of us. You sometimes found this gift in the war among young commanders of destroyers and M.T.Bs (Motor torpedo boats) - no side, no self-importance, no self-consciousness; as quiet as anything, yet able to be master of every situation.”

You can hear this self-effacing quality in the G major canticles, surely one of the most perfect works of English liturgical music from the past century. My hope is that the light, airy quality of the writing will serve as an *intermezzo* within this musical sequence.

Back in 1915 Sumsion had become an articulated pupil of his predecessor at Gloucester, Herbert Brewer, at the same time as John Dykes Bower, and a few years after Howells and Ivor Gurney. Sumsion and Dykes Bower were later to commission two of the three most admired settings of canticles by Howells, for Gloucester and St Paul's respectively. Sumsion's relationship with Howells was very close. Howells, whose nine-year-old son Michael had died from meningitis, wrote *Hymnus Paradisi* in response to his grief. In the composer's words, “it became a personal, private document.” For twelve years



Sydney Watson (left) and Francis Jackson at the 1959 Gloucester Three Choirs Festival, of which Herbert Sumsion was Artistic Director

he showed it to no one other than his wife, his daughter and Sumsion. Sumsion's memory is perpetuated in a window in the Musicians' Chantry at Gloucester Cathedral, directly beneath the windows commemorating Howells.

Sumsion wrote three settings of the evening canticles in G major. These include one for trebles and one for men's voices. The S.A.T.B. setting is heard on this recording. It has been wrongly attributed to the year 1935, but in

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fact the copies in Gloucester have the printed annotation *Gloucester, July 12 1932*. I wrote about Sumsion in my notes for *Magnificat 1*, whilst also commenting on the influence of the Cathedral architecture on the *Gloucester Service* by Howells. Likewise one might hear the light, graceful, soaring Quire of the Cathedral in Sumsion's opening phrase. Mary's sense of wonder mirrors that of a worshipper's ascending gaze in the Gloucester Quire, which was itself so wondrously magnified when rebuilt in the fourteenth century. I love the spring-like quality of the writing, redolent of new life.

Much of the best music exists on different levels; there is the first impression, but more is revealed when you delve beneath the surface. For instance, when listening to Brahms's beautiful *Geistliches Lied*, most people don't notice that it's a double canon at the ninth! Sumsion's music does not demand intellectual engagement, but I love the fact that - if you choose to look - it is so beautifully unified. Much of the *Magnificat* is constructed out of the first four notes of the treble part - a rising fourth followed by the first three notes of an ascending major scale. The opening 4th is inverted and filled in to form the initial organ theme of the *Nunc Dimittis*, which is also a variant of the organ

melody before *He remembering*. The *Magnificat's* ascending 3-note pattern is inverted in the *Nunc Dimittis*, creating a triplet motif which binds that movement together. The cumulative effect is exhilarating as the full choir combines for *to be a light* before the organ propels us towards the triumphant *Glory be to the Father*. These passages are tutti versions of the openings of the two canticles respectively. Likewise, *world without end Amen* is melodically identical to the first treble phrase of the *Nunc Dimittis*, yet transformed in character. Both *Glorias* end with the *Magnificat's* first three organ notes in reverse order, now heard in the pedal. Melodically, we end as we began with the three ascending notes of *soul*.

The technique of building a movement out of a few melodic fragments, through a sequence of subtle variations, perhaps has something in common with sixteenth-century parody masses like Victoria's *Missa O quam gloriosum*. The tunefulness and easy fluency of Sumsion's work make it easy to overlook the subtle technical mastery of the composition.

## JACKSON IN G (1952)

Francis Jackson has much in common with Sumsion. Both devoted virtually their whole careers to being Organist of one great Cathedral, for 36 and 39 years respectively. Both had been choristers in those same Cathedrals. The two institutions had particular traditions of Organist-Composers; at York Minster, Jackson served between Edward Bairstow and Philip Moore. Sumsion lived to the age of 96, whilst - as I write - Jackson is approaching his 103rd birthday. Jackson has been an international organist of great acclaim, continuing to give recitals throughout his first hundred years.

Byrd, Tomkins, Purcell and Stanford are among the many composers to have written complete works known as *Services* (not to be confused with the more specific *Evening Services* on this recording.) These comprised settings of the Morning and Evening Canticles, and also movements of the Communion Service sung in English. I have described above how Eric Milner-White inspired Howells to write a *Te Deum* which grew into a whole *Service* for King's. Having moved to be Dean of York, and after appointing Jackson as his Organist, Milner-White requested from him settings of



Francis Jackson

the nine-fold *Kyrie* and a *Benedicite*. Milner-White's idea for the long text of the *Benedicite* was that the Decani singers would sing the first half of each verse while the rest of the choir sang the second half simultaneously! (Haydn had adopted a similar but more extreme tactic in his *Kleine Orgelmesse*, and Swayne's *Magnificat I* employs the same technique.) Jackson followed these two movements with a full *Communion Service in G*, followed

First page of Jackson Evening Service in G (see online at [Lead.me/mag2](http://Lead.me/mag2))

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by the *Evening Canticles in G* and a set of *Morning Canticles in G*.

Jackson's music is *in G*, but not G major. There is no F-sharp in the key signature, creating a sense of the mixolydian mode. This is like a major scale but with a flattened seventh note, which lends a bluesy tinge to some of the writing. Whereas the settings by Watson and Sumsion were exclusively homophonic, Jackson's work incorporates more imitative writing than them or than Howells. *He hath shewed strength* and the *Gloria* exhibit a muscularity absent in most earlier Anglican music. The first organ phrase and the initial treble phrase generate much of the material for the work. The first four melodic organ notes (containing rising fourths) get squashed into a more lyrical version of the shape at *and his mercy* (with the fourths becoming seconds.) Jackson uses identical material for *And his mercy* and *He remembering his mercy*, highlighting parallels in the text as God protects his people *throughout all generations* and *for ever*. Where Sumsion had painted *He remembering* in nostalgic colours, Jackson comforts us at these words; the music relaxes into the warm security of B-flat major, as God shows his tender feelings towards his people - the first section of the work in a true

major key. A beautiful picture is painted by trebles and basses in canon, accompanied by shimmering chords from the organ and inner voices.

*World without end* has an apocalyptic quality not found in the earlier settings on this disc, but perhaps influenced by the canticles Howells had written for St Paul's Cathedral in 1950. This phrase's distinctive broken-chord figure is transfigured into a distant memory as the organ opens the *Nunc Dimittis*. Jackson assigns particular importance to the words *depart in peace*: the tension of F-sharp minor is released into a G major chord, with the resolution underlined by the first use of organ pedals in the movement. The slow harmonic movement of *To be a light* suits the immensity of York Minster, as the music gradually builds towards the *Gloria*. In his autobiography Jackson writes that at the time of its composition he hoped the *Evening Canticles* might be

“another ‘Coll-Reg’ in the Wood-Howells line. I don't think I got as far as proposing its dedication to King's, but I did play it to Boris Ord on one of his York visits and well remember his noticeable wince at the final cadence of the *Gloria* with its jazz-influenced

chromatics, and his stern injunction that there should be no such thing....Perhaps my trying it on was an earnest of things to come, when so-called jazz invaded the sacred precincts.”

## PÄRT – MAGNIFICAT (1989)

The Estonian composer Arvo Pärt began his career writing serial works, but later intensive study of mediaeval music led him to develop his distinctive style, often known as *tintinnabuli*. He converted from Lutheranism to Orthodox Christianity in the early 1970s. At the end of that decade he and his family were permitted to emigrate to the West. Pärt had been living in Berlin for several years before *Magnificat* was composed. In the Orthodox tradition, a refrain is generally interpolated between sections of the *Magnificat*. This refrain, whose words begin *Greater in honour than the cherubim*, is known as the *megalynarion* and is used in John Tavener's *Collegium Regale* canticles (1986.) Pärt eschews this refrain, and he also omits the *Gloria*. Like Swayne, Pärt repeats the opening words right at the end of the work. In Pärt's case, one has a sense of the wheel of the *Opus Dei* constantly turning. When one service finishes it is soon time for the next; indeed, Pärt evokes a suggestion



© Birgit Puve

Arvo Pärt

that the building itself will continue to worship even when no people are present.

The Berlin Wall came down in 1989. Pärt's *Magnificat* was commissioned in the same year by the Deutscher Musikrat (German Music Council); it received its premiere on 2 June 1990 at the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtnis-Kirche in one of two concerts celebrating the 525th anniversary of the Staats- und

First page of Pärt Magnificat (see online at [Lead.me/mag2](http://Lead.me/mag2))

Domchor Berlin. The unfettered exuberance of the reunification celebrations, in that most musical of cities, could not be a greater contrast with the introspective joy which Arvo Pärt portrays through Mary's words.

Pärt's *Magnificat* has a tender quality which seems to come from the innermost depths of Mary's soul; this has something in common with the opening of Howells's setting. Pärt once compared his own music to *white light which contains all colours*. A characteristic of *Magnificat* is the wonderfully-heard spacing of the chords, a sophistication of texture which Pärt shares with Stravinsky.

A variety of homophonic textures is used, from 2 to 6 parts at a time, with a new combination of voices introduced at the start of each phrase. There can be astringency in the writing, right from the clashing semitone in the first word; Mary seems to foretell the suffering of Christ's crucifixion. The work is *a capella*, yet Pärt employs a quasi-orchestral palette of sounds. This includes, at *Quia fecit mihi magna*, the telling combination of low cellos with a lone flute playing a single pitch two and a half octaves higher. The lines tend to move in a stepwise manner; this makes

the rare exceptions all the more striking, for instance the tenor tritone (B-flat to E-natural) at *Abraham et semini ejus*. Apart from the ending, no words are repeated, and only a handful of syllables are accorded as many as two notes instead of one! Nearly half the piece has treble part(s) singing every syllable to a single note, one octave above middle C; the role is often given to a soloist. This adds to the sense of solemnity and ritual; one is drawn into a mood of intense devotion. In addition to the repeated Cs, there are also times when a long G is sustained. This reinforces the sense of tonal grounding which pervades the piece; C is the dominant of the tonic F minor, whilst G is the dominant of C. Like Swayne a few years earlier, Pärt is very sparing in the number of pitch classes he uses, with virtually none from outside the diatonic major scale.

There are two occasions when silences get interpolated between the syllables of a single word - *dispersit superbos* and *et divites* - these broken words acknowledge the two most radical parts of the text using the subtlest means. Although on paper the music looks rather sectional, there is in fact a strong sense of the work being one unbroken entity; the overriding effect is of timeless, hypnotic, deep meditation.

## ANDERSON – ST JOHN'S SERVICE (2018-19)

With the music of Julian Anderson we come right up to the present day; we recorded the work just a few weeks after giving its premiere in 2019. Choral music was not part of Anderson's background: "in fact it's quite a surprise to me - but a very pleasant one - that I've ended up doing as much choral music as I have." He was commissioned to write a major choral and orchestral work for the 2006 BBC Proms, *Heaven is Shy of Earth*, becoming a member of the London Philharmonic Choir as he started to compose that piece. Anderson's "first proper teacher", John Lambert, was another Nadia Boulanger pupil like Berkeley. Anderson has commented on the rigorous training Lambert gave him in "how to hear pitch." His extraordinary ear was much in evidence as we learnt the work, and also his remarkable feel for texture and colour. Anderson has a very particular approach to the organ pedals - when there should and shouldn't be 16' pitch; this links back to the Howells at the start of our album.

*Magnificat* is based around two contrasting textures which are heard at the start. The first is characterised by bright, energetic two-part



Julian Anderson

writing for organ manuals. The second, which begins after *God my saviour*, sets lyrical choral writing over long sustained organ chords as Berkeley had done. The harmony makes use of Anderson's favourite chord from Dutilleux's *Second Symphony*. In my notes on the Watson, above, I compared the ways different composers set *He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent empty away*. Anderson described to me how, living in the city, he has

an image of *good things*, but he remembers the look on people's faces in 2008 after the financial crisis. The end of the *Magnificat Gloria* brings to mind the end of Jonathan Harvey's *Magnificat Gloria*, which Harvey described as having "an urgency, a pleading quality regarding the future, a strong impulse to transform the cosmos." Harvey and Anderson both spent time working in Paris, both are connected to the French tradition of spectralism, and they knew each other well.

Anderson wanted maximum contrast between the two canticles, and the *Nunc Dimittis* was in fact the first to be composed. The brevity of the *Nunc Dimittis* text, and a desire to balance the two canticles, led Anderson to use much word repetition. The opening is a two-part texture, with pairs of voices doubled in octaves. (Berkeley had done the same at *He remembering*.) Anderson conjures up a particular atmosphere through his use of dynamics, accents, tenutos and *fps*. The organ chords after *salvation* demonstrate the composer's ear for spacing, like Pärt, whilst referring to his wedding anthem *My beloved spake*. When composing *which thou hast prepared* Anderson tried out several harmonisations; he liked four, so he used them all! The first iteration of *To be a*

*light* has a particular glow, with six white notes close together within the space of an octave. *And to be glory* is designed to sound as though there are no bar lines, like sixteenth-century music. Anderson highlights a parallel between the ends of the two canticles, uniquely amongst composers on this recording, creating a sense of eternity for *thy people Israel* as well as *his seed for ever*. Both passages enhance the sudden exuberance of the doxology which follows. Anderson's brief use of the *Trompeta Real* at the start of the second *Gloria* pays homage to Tippett's *St John's Service*, as heard in *Magnificat 1. As it was in the beginning* returns us to the texture and shapes of the opening.

By the time this recording is released a major new book will have been published by Boydell and Brewer, *Julian Anderson: Dialogues on Culture, Composing and Listening*. The composer has also written a note on his *Evening Canticles*, printed below. I am grateful for this and for his generous words; it's been very enjoyable to perform and record the work. Anderson's music forms a fine ending to our recording, as these 2000-year-old religious texts continue to inspire composers in new ways.

Andrew Nethsingha

## A NOTE FROM JULIAN ANDERSON

Although I had already set separate Latin versions of both the *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis*, this is the first time I've made a setting in English of both texts for use at Evensong. I have often attended Evensong in the Cambridge college chapels: it's a service whose meanings and spirituality are quite different from any other, and it has its own special atmosphere. Evensong's coupling of *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* texts is fascinating: the exuberant celebration of the former contrasts so marvellously with the intimate reflections of the latter.

In my *Evening Canticles* I have tried to make the most of that contrast. The *Magnificat* is forceful, replete with sprung rhythms, polymeter, and bright harmonies showing off the brilliance of the choir. Some use is made (especially near the opening) of free rhythms in which every singer performs a passage at their own speed, creating a spray of sound. The *Nunc Dimittis*, on the other hand, is predominantly clear and transparent, even austere, allowing the singers to shape melodic lines with expression and lyricism, as befits the text.

I was enormously excited to be invited to compose my *Evening Canticles* for Andrew Nethsingha and the Choir of St John's College, Cambridge. I want to thank all the performers for giving the work such a splendid launch, and for the magnificent recording on this CD. The work is dedicated to Andrew Nethsingha.

Julian Anderson



Julian Anderson at the recording session with (background to foreground) Chris Hazell, Andrew Nethsingha, and Simon Eadon

© James Proctor

Handwritten musical score for 'Anderson Evening Canticles'. The score is written on five staves: Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), Bass (B.), and Organ/Pedal (Org./Ped.). The tempo is marked as ♩ = 56. The lyrics 'A - - - - - men' are written under the vocal staves. The organ part includes markings for '(legato)' and 'p'. The score is annotated with red ink, including the name 'Matthew Simba' written vertically on the right side and 'for Andrew' written vertically on the left side. The word 'FIVE' is written vertically in large red letters on the organ staff. The signature 'J. Anderson' is at the bottom right.

Final page of Anderson Evening Canticles (see online at [lead.me/mag2](http://lead.me/mag2))

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## MAGNIFICAT

My soul doth magnify the Lord:  
and my spirit hath rejoiced in  
God my Saviour.  
For he hath regarded:  
the lowliness of his hand-maiden.  
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 all 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 for ever.

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.

Luke 1: 46-55

## NUNC DIMITTIS

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.

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.

Luke 2: 29-32

## LATIN (PÄRT)

*Magnificat anima mea Dominum,  
et exultavit spiritus meus in  
Deo salutari meo;*

*quia respexit  
humilitatem ancillae suae,  
ecce enim ex hoc  
beatam me dicent omnes generationes.  
Quia fecit mihi magna, qui potens est  
et sanctum nomen eius,  
et misericordia eius a progenie  
in progenies timentibus eum.  
Fecit potentiam in brachio suo,  
dispersit superbos  
mente cordis sui,  
deposuit potentes de sede  
et exaltavit humiles,  
esurientes implevit bonis,  
et divites dimisit inanes.  
Suscepit Israel, puerum suum,  
recordatus misericordiae suae  
sicut locutus est ad patres nostros,  
Abraham et semini eius in saecula.*

## LATIN (SWAYNE)

*Mañificat, anima mea Dominum.  
Et exsultavit spiritus meus in  
Deo salutari meo.  
Quia respexit  
humilitatem ancillae suae.  
Ecce enim ex hoc  
beatam me dicent omnes generationes.*

*Quia fessit mihi maña, qui potens est,  
et sanctum nomen eius.  
Et misericordia eius a progenie  
in progenies, timentibus eum.  
Fessit potentiam in brachio suo,  
dispersit superbos  
mente cordis sui.  
Deposuit potentes de sede  
et exaltavit humiles,  
esurientes implevit bonis,  
et divites dimisit inanes.  
Suscepit Israel puerum suum,  
recordatus misericordiae suae.  
Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros,  
Abraham et semini eius in saecula.*

*Gloria Patri, et Filio,  
et Spiritui Sancto.  
Sicut erat in principio, et nunc  
et semper  
et in saecula saeculorum.  
Amen.*

## THE CHOIR OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

### Trebles

Adam Ahmad  
Felix Bamford

William Buttery

Jaylen Cheng <sup>6</sup>

Lewis Cobb <sup>14</sup>

Joshua Davidson

George Ducker

Lorenzo Granado

Alfred Harrison <sup>8</sup>

Harry L'Estrange

Toby L'Estrange

Jonathan Mews

Lucas Nair-Grepinet

Ewan Tatnell

Philip Tomkinson <sup>3</sup>

Thomas Watkins

### Counter Tenors

Hugh Cutting <sup>6</sup>

Richard Decker

Alec D'Oyly

Laurence Trowsdale-Stannard

Thomas Watts

### Tenors

Jack Bazalgette

Benedict Flinn

Gopal Kambo <sup>2,6</sup>

Henry Laird

Louis Watkins

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James Adams

Thomas Butler

Jamie Conway

Matthew Gibson <sup>6</sup>

Simon Grant

Oliver Morris <sup>6</sup>

William O'Brien

### Herbert Howells

Organ Scholar

Glen Dempsey

### Junior Organ Scholar

James Anderson-Besant

*Numbers indicate soloist credits for each track*

The Choir of St John's College, Cambridge is one of the finest collegiate choirs in the world, known and loved by millions from its broadcasts, concert tours and recordings. Founded in the 1670s, the Choir is known for its distinctive rich, warm sound, its expressive interpretations and its breadth of repertoire. Alongside these musical characteristics, the Choir is particularly proud of its happy, relaxed and mutually supportive atmosphere. The Choir is directed by Andrew Nethsingha who follows

a long line of eminent Directors of Music, recently Dr George Guest, Dr Christopher Robinson and Dr David Hill.

The Choir is made up of around 20 Choristers and Probationers from St John's College School and around 15 Choral Scholars who are members of St John's College, its primary purpose being to enhance the liturgy and worship at daily services in the College Chapel. The Choir has a diverse repertoire spanning

over 500 years of music. It is also renowned for championing contemporary music by commissioning new works, including recent compositions by Judith Bingham, Julian Anderson, Anna Semple, Katrina Toner, Ignacio Mañá Mesas and Cecilia McDowall. Each term the Choir sings Bach Cantatas liturgically with St John's Sinfonia, its period instrument ensemble. This Bach series has now entered its second decade.

The Choir brings the 'St John's Sound' to listeners around the world through its weekly webcasts (available at [www.sjcchoir.co.uk](http://www.sjcchoir.co.uk)). The Choir has also live-streamed video broadcasts of Chapel services on Facebook, in association with Classic FM. In addition to regular radio broadcasts in this country and abroad, the Choir releases multiple recordings each year. In May 2016 the College launched its new 'St John's Cambridge' recording label (in conjunction with Signum Classics) on which the Choir has released the BBC Music Magazine award-winning recording of Jonathan Harvey's music: *DEO*; *Christmas with St John's*; *KYRIE* (works by Poulenc, Kodály and Janáček); *Mass in G minor* (works by Vaughan Williams); two volumes of *Advent Live* (collections of live recordings from the College Chapel's Advent Carol Services,

broadcast each year by the BBC); *Locus Iste*, the Choir's 100th commercial recording which celebrated the 150th anniversary of the Consecration of St John's College Chapel; *Magnificat*, a recording of six settings of the Evening Canticles; *Ash Wednesday*, a live recording of the Choir's 2019 Ash Wednesday Evensong (Allegrì, Bach, Byrd and Weelkes); and *Pious Anthems & Voluntaries* (music by Michael Finnissy).

The Choir also performs concerts outside of Cambridge and tours internationally each year. Recent destinations have included the USA, the Netherlands, France, Sweden, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Hong Kong and Singapore. It also performs regularly in the UK, with venues including Symphony Hall, Birmingham, Royal Albert Hall and Royal Festival Hall, London.

## GLEN DEMPSEY

Born in Suffolk in 1994, Glen's formative musical experiences were centred around the English choral tradition – as a chorister in St Mary's, Bury St Edmunds and later in the choirs of St Edmundsbury Cathedral. Organ lessons with Michael Nicholas led to his being awarded a scholarship as a répétiteur to study at the Purcell School of Music. During this time Glen performed in all the major concert halls of London as a soloist and chamber musician on the organ and piano, and also conducted at the Wigmore Hall.

In 2013, Glen was appointed Organ Scholar at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. In this role he took a share in accompanying and directing the choir's daily services and assisted in the training of the choristers; he played for events attended by the British Royal Family.

Alongside his organ studies with Ann Elise Smoot he maintained a varied performance profile as organist, conductor and tenor.

During the academic year 2014/15 he resided in the Netherlands and was the Assistant Organist of St Nicholas's Basilica, Amsterdam.



© Louis Marlowe

Under the mentorship of Michael Hedley, Glen accompanied the majority of the choral services in the Basilica, as well as having responsibility for conducting the Basilica's various choirs and ensembles. During this time he studied with Jacques van Oortmerssen.

Glen then spent four years as Organ Scholar at St John's College, Cambridge under Andrew

Nethsingha, where he accompanied the Choir in the daily services, as well as for its busy schedule of tours, broadcasts and recordings; he also assisted in the training of the Choir. Gordon Stewart and Ann Elise Smoot were his organ teachers. Glen's interest in contemporary music has been developed through premiering several choir and organ, and solo organ works at St John's College, including a three-year collaboration with Michael Finnissy. After graduation Glen took up the roles of Assistant Director of Music at Ely Cathedral and Organist at King's Ely, where he plays the famous 1908 Harrison and Harrison organ, directs the Ely Cathedral Octagon Singers and teaches the boy choristers and pupils at the school. He is also active as a freelance organist and conductor.

## JAMES ANDERSON-BESANT

James Anderson-Besant is currently the Assistant Organist at St John's, having completed three years as Organ Scholar while studying for a degree in Music, in which he graduated with a double starred first. In his role as Assistant Organist he accompanies the Choir in its daily round of services, regular broadcasts, recordings and tours under the direction of Andrew Nethsingha, and also assists in the training



© James Beddoe

of the choristers. James has broadcast live on BBC Radio 3 and Radio 4, and his playing for the Choir appears on the recent releases *Pious Anthems & Voluntaries*, *Ash Wednesday*, and *Advent Live - Volume 2*. This year he is also supervising Cambridge music students in counterpoint and keyboard skills.

James also enjoys conducting, having organised and directed performances of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* in 2019 and *St John Passion* in 2020. He has also directed the St John's Sinfonia in a Bach Cantata evensong. James recently gave organ recitals at King's, Queens' and St John's Colleges as well as Truro and St Albans Cathedrals, and looks forward to upcoming engagements at Stockholm Cathedral and Trinity College, Cambridge. He won second prize at the 2019 Northern Ireland International Organ Competition, and was also Organ Scholar for the Charles Wood Summer School and Festival in Armagh, giving him the opportunity to work under David Hill and Philip Scriven.

James was a pupil at Abingdon School, and in his final year was Organ Scholar of the Cathedral Singers of Christ Church, Oxford. He spent his gap year as Organ Scholar at Gloucester Cathedral, which was especially exciting due to the addition of the first ever girl choristers in the cathedral's history.

For seven years James learned the organ with James Brown, and he now studies with Stephen Farr. He would love to pursue a career in cathedral music if possible.

## ANDREW NETHSINGHA DIRECTOR OF MUSIC, ST JOHN'S COLLEGE

Performing in North America, South Africa, the Far East, and throughout Europe, Andrew Nethsingha has been Director of Music at St John's College, Cambridge since 2007. He helped to set up the recording label, 'St John's Cambridge', in conjunction with Signum Classics. The first release on this label, *DEO* (music by Jonathan Harvey), was a 2017 BBC Music Magazine Award winner. Five recent albums have been 'Editor's Choice' in Gramophone Magazine.

Andrew Nethsingha was a chorister at Exeter Cathedral, under his father's direction. He later studied at the Royal College of Music, where he won seven prizes, and at St John's College, Cambridge. He held Organ Scholarships under Christopher Robinson at St George's Windsor, and George Guest at St John's, before becoming Assistant Organist at Wells Cathedral. He was subsequently Director of Music at Truro and Gloucester Cathedrals, and Artistic Director of the Gloucester Three Choirs Festival.



© James Beddoe

Andrew's concerts conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra have included: Mahler's *8th Symphony*, Beethoven's *9th Symphony*, Britten's *War Requiem*, Brahms' *Requiem*, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* and *The Kingdom*, Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, Poulenc's *Gloria* and Duruflé's *Requiem*. He has also worked with: the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, London Mozart Players,

Britten Sinfonia, Orchestra of St Luke's (New York), Aarhus Symfoniorkester, and BBC Concert Orchestra. Venues have included the BBC Proms, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Verbier Festival, Tokyo Suntory Hall, Konzerthaus Berlin, and Singapore Esplanade.

## Acknowledgements

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*The premiere of Anderson Evening Canticles, 23rd May 2019*

DEO HARVEY  
NETHSINGHA



CHRISTMAS WITH ST JOHN'S  
NETHSINGHA

THE CHOIR OF  
ST JOHN'S  
CAMBRIDGE



ASH WEDNESDAY  
NETHSINGHA

THE CHOIR OF  
ST JOHN'S  
CAMBRIDGE



PIOUS ANTHEMS & VOLUNTARIES  
FINNISSY | NETHSINGHA



LOCUS ISTE  
NETHSINGHA

THE CHOIR OF  
ST JOHN'S  
CAMBRIDGE



VAUGHAN WILLIAMS  
MASS IN G MINOR  
NETHSINGHA

THE CHOIR OF  
ST JOHN'S  
CAMBRIDGE



KYRIE  
POULENC | KODÁLY | JANÁČEK  
NETHSINGHA



ADVENT LIVE VOLUME 2  
NETHSINGHA

THE CHOIR OF  
ST JOHN'S  
CAMBRIDGE



ADVENT LIVE  
NETHSINGHA

THE CHOIR OF  
ST JOHN'S  
CAMBRIDGE



A BBC recording

## AWARD-WINNING RECORDINGS FROM THE CHOIR OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

Latest Release **Advent Live - Volume 2** SIGCD661

Live recordings from our Advent Carol Services, including commissions from Judith Bingham, Gabriel Jackson, John McCabe, and Cecilia McDowall

Gramophone  
Editor's Choice **Michael Finnissy – Pious Anthems & Voluntaries** SIGCD624

★★★★★ "The sequence maintains a powerfully communicative grip... The choir makes the music sound as lived-in as Byrd or Howells" *BBC Music Magazine*

Choral & Song Choice  
BBC Music Magazine

"Essential listening" *Planet Hugill*

★★★★★ "Exquisitely beautiful, sensual music" *Choir & Organ*

"An 84-minute work that might well change your listening life" *Classical Music*

"This is some of the most compelling music written for the 'English choral tradition' in many years... the results are infinitely rewarding" *Europadisc*

**Ash Wednesday** SIGCD605

"The malleable, sensitive trebles have what seems to me an unparalleled ability to invest text and phrase with meaning" *Gramophone*

"It's the most glorious, glorious music making" *BBC Radio 3, Record Review*

„Vor allem das *Misere mei, Deus* von Allegri und Byrds überwältigende Motette *Ne Irascaris, Domine* gehen unter die Haut, genau wie das zum Schluss erklingende *e-Moll Präludium für Orgel* von Johann Sebastian Bach" (Above all, the *Miserere mei, Deus* by Allegri and Byrd's overwhelming motet *Ne Irascaris, Domine* get under the skin, as indeed does Johann Sebastian Bach's *Prelude in E minor*, heard at the end) *Südwest-Press* (Germany)

★★★★★ "Exceptionally satisfying. Bravo. Bravissimo" *AllMusic*

Gramophone  
Editor's Choice

**Locus Iste** SIGCD567

★★★★★ “a glint of sunlight, inspired and inspiring” *BBC Music Magazine*

“Beautifully captured” *BBC Radio 3, Record Review*

“This disc really soars” *Gramophone*

**Advent Live** SIGCD535

“Under Andrew Nethsingha’s inspired direction, the choir has retained its renowned clarity, flamboyance and readiness to take risks” *Gramophone*

“Sung with typical St John’s verve and character, this superbly programmed collection will take your Advent listening in unexpected, but entirely apposite, directions” *BBC Music Magazine*

Choral and Song Choice  
BBC Music Magazine

**Vaughan Williams – Mass in G Minor** SIGCD541

★★★★★ “Formidably attractive” *BBC Music Magazine*

“Director Andrew Nethsingha shapes a performance of profound dignity and power, beautifully sung by this always impressive choir” *The Guardian*

“The choral recordings that St John’s College Choir have released on this label so far have been uniformly excellent, and this is another golden string to add to their bow” *MusicWeb International*

**Poulenc | Kodály | Janáček – KYRIE** SIGCD489

“The treble voices of St John’s bring an ineffably poised gravity... a signal virtue of this new recording is the moulded caress of every luscious harmony in what are predominantly homophonic works” *Gramophone*

“These two contrasting masses and Janáček’s *Lord’s Prayer* (Otče náš) are sung with characteristic ‘European’ ripeness of tone and precision by the choir of St John’s College” *The Observer*

★★★★★ “...a superb reading from Nethsingha and his forces... Throughout, the choir sing with their justly famed blend and perfect intonation. An essential disc...” *Choir & Organ*

**Christmas with St John’s** SIGCD458

“Under Nethsingha, St John’s Choir rides high among the Cambridge colleges... Nethsingha’s programming is eclectic while retaining a ‘traditional’ core” *The Sunday Times*

“A fine showcase of a choir on the top of its form” *planethugill*

“proving yet again, they are as good as it gets” *Classic FM*

“it’s a sign of how classy and successful a programme has been compiled, that Michael Finnissy’s John the Baptist fits so well into the weave of Christmas with St John’s” *Gramophone*

“showcases a choir and its director who are currently in very fine fettle indeed.” *MusicWeb International*

“a meticulously sung carol collection from the always classy choir of St John’s... shimmering tone clusters and delicious suspensions” *The Guardian*

“an evocatively sung collection...glowing with devotional joy, wonder and a kaleidoscope of colours and emotions” *Choir & Organ*

BBC Music Magazine  
Award Winner

Gramophone  
Editor’s Choice

**Jonathan Harvey – DEO** SIGCD456

★★★★★ “ecstatic...the Choir tackles it all with confidence and clarity” *The Observer*

★★★★★ “characterful yet authoritative performances of which they can be justly proud” *Choir & Organ*

ALSO AVAILABLE



## Magnificat

Choir of St John's College, Cambridge  
Andrew Nethsingha *Director*  
SIGCD588

*"extreme perception of blend (vowel and timbre), words and phrasing; a true ensemble"* **Gramophone Editor's Choice**

★★★★★ *"A fascinating hour's music"*  
**Choir & Organ**

*« Superbe. Les petits trebles sont en grande forme »*  
**Diapason (France)**

*"A finely calibrated sense of tone colour. Don't miss it"*  
**Limelight (Australia)**

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