

AMERICAN BACH SOLOISTS – What Sweeter Music – Notes and Texts

JOHN RUTTER is one of several highly successful living composers whose styles meld contemporary and traditional harmonies in a way that is at once accessible and memorable. He studied at Clare College, Cambridge, and later became its Director of Music before leaving to pursue his composing and conducting careers. He formed the Cambridge Singers, a professional chamber choir, and has composed a significantly extensive catalogue of works.

The English choral tradition has thrived within the artistically fertile confines of England's greatest cathedrals and college chapels. Their choirs have handed down the repertory and performance styles of generations past; the most famous of these choirs is, of course, that of King's College, Cambridge. **DAVID WILLCOCKS** was an organ scholar at King's College in 1939-40, and later, in 1957, was appointed organist and choirmaster at there. His dozens and dozens of recordings with the choir are still considered to be benchmark standards. Several of his arrangements of traditional carols are presented on this recording.

BORIS ORD had been an organ scholar at Corpus Christi College (in Cambridge), and spent just one year away from the university in 1927 at the Cologne Opera before accepting the position as choirmaster at King's in 1928. In the thirty-eight years under his direction, the King's College Choir became known around the world as the very best of its genre. He published just one composition: *Adam lay ybounden*.

BENJAMIN BRITTEN, RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS, and WILLIAM WALTON were each prolific composers of music that, although meant for liturgical use, typically sounded anything but sacred. All three wrote in styles—each one thoroughly unique and pervasive throughout their works—that transcended the sacred or profane nature of their chosen texts. Vaughan Williams' characteristic waves of parallel chromaticism, Britten's use of close dissonance, and Walton's distinctive rhythmic energy are abundant in their works on this recording.

CECIL ARMSTRONG GIBBS, first educated at Cambridge, studied composition with Vaughan Williams at the Royal College of Music. Primarily a composer of exquisite songs, he wrote an ample quantity of music for choirs, of which *While the shepherds were watching* is among the most well known.

ROBERT LUCAS PEARSALL was a barrister by profession, but had an intense and ultimately overwhelming interest in heraldry, history, genealogy, painting, and music. He composed madrigals in the Renaissance idiom of Thomas Morley, but extended the stylistic parameters to great success.

ZOLTÁN KODÁLY brings an innate native style and sonority to his arrangement of *A Christmas Carol*, a setting of a traditional Hungarian tune. Chromaticism imposed on repetitive parallel intervals and ambiguous meters create a mood of reverent mystery.

MORTEN LAURIDSEN, born in 1943 in Colfax, Washington, is Chair of the Composition Department at the University of Southern California School of Music in Los Angeles, a faculty he joined in 1967 following his studies in advanced composition with Ingolf Dahl and Halsey Stevens. He has emerged as one of America's finest and most-beloved composers. His music has garnered a permanent place in the standard vocal repertoire, and is performed regularly by choruses and vocal artists through the world.

In the bleak mid-winter is a poem by Christina Rossetti, the daughter of Gabriele Rossetti, a political exile who became a professor of Italian at King's College, London. The author of several volumes of poetry and devotional texts, she wrote these words in response to a request for a Christmas poem from Scribner's Monthly magazine. Gustav Holst's setting is well known to many, but there are problems in confining Rossetti's free rhythm to the restraints of a hymn-tune. **HAROLD DARKE**, a British organist, filled in for Boris Ord at Cambridge while he was serving in the armed forces. He subsequently became a Fellow at King's, and was well respected as an organist (although it is said that his performances of Bach were not at all elucidated by modern advancements in performance practice). His setting of the poem is ultimately more successful, as its phrase lengths more willingly accommodate the text.

JOHN GOSS, at the age of eleven, became a chorister at the Chapel Royal. After his days as a boy soprano, he joined the chorus at Covent Garden, before devoting much of his time to composition and teaching (Sir Arthur Sullivan was one of his students). His life-long understanding of the singing voice enabled him to compose melodies characterized by mellifluousness and perfectly fitting word settings.

1 WHAT SWEETER MUSIC

What sweeter music can we bring,
Than a carol, for to sing
The birth of this our heavenly King?
Awake the voice! Awake the string!

Dark and dull night, fly hence away,
And give the honour to this day
That sees December turned to May.

Why does the chilling winter's morn
Smile, like a field beset with corn?
Or smell like a meadow newly-shorn
Thus, on the sudden? Come and see
The cause, why things thus fragrant be:

'Tis he is born, whose quickening birth
Gives life and lustre, public mirth,
To heaven, and the under-earth.

We see him come, and know him ours,
Who, with his sunshine and his showers,
Turns all the patient ground to flowers.

The darling of the world is come,
And fit it is, we find a room
To welcome him, to welcome him.

The nobler part,
Of all the house here, is the heart,
Which we will give him; and bequeath
This holly, and this ivy wreath,
To do him honour; who's our King,

And Lord of all this reveling.

(What sweeter music can we bring,
Than a carol, for to sing
The birth of this our heavenly King?)

Robert Herrick (1591-1675)
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, INC.

2 INFANT HOLY, INFANT LOWLY

Infant holy,
Infant lowly,
For his bed a cattle stall;
Oxen lowing,
Little knowing
Christ the Babe is Lord of all.
Swift are winging
Angels singing,
Nowells ringing,
Tidings bringing,
Christ the Babe is Lord of all.

Flocks were sleeping,
Shepherds keeping
Vigil till the morning new;
Saw the glory,
Heard the story,
Tidings of a gospel true.
Thus rejoicing,
Free from sorrow,
Praises voicing,

Greet the morrow,
Christ the Babe was born for you!

Polish carol, transl. by Edith M. Reed
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, INC.

3 ADAM LAY YBOUNDEN

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
Abeen heavené queen.

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

Words anon. 15th century
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, INC.

4 A BOY WAS BORN

A boy was born in Bethlehem;
Rejoice for that, Jerusalem!
Alleluya.
He let himself a servant be,
That all mankind he might set free:
Alleluya.
Then praise the Word of God who came
To dwell within a human frame:
Alleluya.

Anon. 16th century German; translated by Percy Dearmer
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, INC.

5 THE BLESSED SON OF GOD

The blessed son of God only
In a crib full poor did lie;
With our poor flesh and our poor blood
Was clothed that everlasting good.
Kyrieleison.

The Lord Christ Jesu, God's son dear,
Was a guest and a stranger here;
Us for to bring from misery,
That we might live eternally.
Kyrieleison.

All this did he for us freely,
For to declare his great mercy;
All Christendom be merry therefore,
And give him thanks for evermore.
Kyrieleison.

Miles Coverdale; after Martin Luther
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, INC.

6 NO SAD THOUGHT HIS SOUL AFFRIGHT

No sad thought his soul affright,
Sleep it is that maketh night;
Let no murmur nor rude wind
To his slumbers prove unkind:
But a quire of angels make
His dreams of heav'n, and let him wake
To as many joys as can
In this world befall a man.

Promise fills the sky with light,
Stars and angels dance in flight;
Joy of heav'n shall now unbind
Chains of evil from mankind,
Love and joy their power shall break,
And for a newborn prince's sake;
Never since the world began
Such a light such dark did span.

Verse 1. Anon.
Verse 2. Ursula Vaughan Williams
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, INC.

7 ALL THIS TIME

All this time this song is best:
'Verbum caro factum est.'

This night there is a child yborn
That sprang out of Jesse's thorn;
We must sing and say therefor,
All this time this song is best:
'Verbum caro factum est.'

Jesus is the child's name,
And Mary mild is his dame;
All our sorrow shall turn to game:
All this time this song is best:
'Verbum caro factum est.'

It fell upon high midnight:
The stars shone both fair and bright;
The angels sang with all their might,
All this time this song is best:
'Verbum caro factum est.'
Now kneel we down on our knee,
And pray we to the Trinity
Our help, our succour for to be;
All this time this song is best:
'Verbum caro factum est.'

Anon. 16th century
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, INC.

8 WHILE THE SHEPHERDS WERE WATCHING

While the shepherds were watching, were
watching their sheep,
An angel came to them and woke them from
sleep,
His message was simple, as simple as they,
But oh, what good tidings he gave them that
day.
Now sing Glory to God, goodwill towards
men,
And peace to you all on the earth. Amen.

Not to rulers and princes was God's word
revealed,
But to rough-and-tumble shepherds who were
out in the field,
Who huddled in sheepskins over fires of bleak
thorn,
Until they were told God's Son had been born.
Now sing Glory to God...

Not in a bright palace was young Jesus found,
But in a dim stable with straw on the ground,
His cradle a manger, and Mary's soft breast
Was the gentle warm pillow where he took his
rest
Now sing Glory to God...

To these simple shepherds, to the thief on the
tree
God spoke in his mercy and he set us all free;
And his was the carol, the day Christ was born,
That rang from a night-sky as bright as the
dawn.
Now sing Glory to God...

Benedict Ellis
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, INC.

9 WHAT CHEER?

What cheer? Good cheer!
Be merry and glad this good New Year!

'Lift up your hearts and be glad
In Christ's birth', the angel bade,
Say each to other, if any be sad:
'What cheer?'

Now the King of heav'n his birth hath take,
Joy and mirth we ought to make;
Say each to other for his sake:
'What cheer?'

I tell you all with heart so free:
Right welcome, welcome, ye be to me;
Be glad and merry, for charity!
What cheer? Good cheer!
Be merry and glad this good New Year!

from Richard Hill's Commonplace Book (16th century)
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, INC.

10 SUSSEX CAROL

On Christmas night all Christians sing,
To hear the news the angels bring,
News of great joy, news of great mirth,
News of our merciful King's birth.

Then why should men on earth be so sad,
Since our Redeemer made us glad,
When from our sin he set us free,
All for to gain our liberty?

When sin departs before his grace,
Then life and health come in its place;
Angels and men with joy may sing,
All for to see the new-born King.

All out of darkness we have light,
Which made the angels sing this night:
'Glory to God and peace to men,
Now and for evermore. Amen'.

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11 BLESSED BE THAT MAID MARY

Blessed be that maid Mary;
Born he was of her body;
Very God ere time began,
Born in time the Son of Man.
Eya! Jesus hodie
Natus est de virgine.

In a manger of an ass
Jesu lay and lulled was;
Born to die upon the tree
Pro peccante homine.
Eya! Jesus hodie
Natus est de virgine.

Sweet and blissful was the song
Chanted of the angel throng,
'Peace on earth', Alleluya.
In excelsis Gloria.
Eya! Jesus hodie
Natus est de virgine.

Fare three kings from far-off land,
Incense, gold and myrrh in hand;
In Bethlem the Babe they see,
Stelle ducti lumine.

*Eya! Jesus hodie
Natus est de virgine.*

Make we merry on this fest,
In quo Christus natus est;
On this child I pray you call,
To assoil and save us all.

*Eya! Jesus hodie
Natus est de virgine.*

*G. R. Woodward
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, INC.*

12 IN DULCI JUBILO

In dulci jubilo
Let us our homage shew;
Our heart's joy reclineth
In præsepio
And like a bright star shineth
Matris in gremio.
Alpha es et O.

O Jesu parvule!
I yearn for thee alway!
Hear me, I beseech thee,
O Puer optime!
My prayer let it reach thee,
O Princeps gloriæ!
Trahe me post te!

O Patris caritas,
O Nati lenitas!
Deeply were we stained
Per nostra crimina;
But thou has for us gained
Cœlorum gaudia.
O that we were there!

Ubi sunt gaudia, where,
If that they be not there?
There are angels singing,
Nova cantica
There the bells are ringing
In Regis curia:
O that we were there!

*Anonymous German, circa 1570, translated by
Reginald Jacques
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, INC.*

13 A CHRISTMAS CAROL

All men draw near,
Christmas is here,
All the welkin rings.
Tell the story,
Sing all glory
To the King of kings.

He who of old
Prophets foretold,
Now is come to birth,
Come one and all
To the ox stall:
He brings peace on earth!

See where the star,
Gleaming afar,
Guides us through the dark,
God's holy dove
Brings back in love
Sinners to his ark.

Tell the story
Of his glory,
Christ by all adored.
Songs upraising,
Praise him, praise him,
All men praise the Lord.

Babe all holy,
Whom all lowly
Ox and ass adore,
Bless our cattle,
Bless our harvest,
Bless each house and store.

Jesu, hear us,
Christ, be near us,
Make us holy all,
With joyful praise
Fill all our days,
Hear us when we call.
Amen.

*Clement F. Rogers
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, INC.*

14 O MAGNUM MYSTERIUM

*O magnum mysterium
et admirabile sacramentum,
ut animalia viderent
Dominum natum
jacentem in præsepio!
Beata virgo, cujus viscera
meruerunt portare
Dominum Christum. Alleluia!*

(O great mystery
and wondrous sacrament
that animals should see
the new-born Lord
lying in a manger!
Blessed is the Virgin whose womb
was worthy to bear
the Lord Christ, Alleluia!)

*Matins Responsory for Christmas Day
PEERMUSIC, LTD.*

15 IN THE BLEAK MID-WINTER

In the bleak mid-winter
Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone:
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter,
Long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold him
Nor earth sustain:
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When he comes to reign:
In the bleak midwinter
A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God almighty
Jesus Christ.

Angels and archangels
May have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim
Thronged the air:
But only his mother
In her maiden bliss
Worshipped the beloved
With a kiss.

What can I give him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man
I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him—
Give my heart.

*Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)
HOPE PUBLISHING COMPANY*