

The Cherwell Singers

present

‘Aspects of Christ’

A musical exploration
of the person of Christ

James Brown conductor
Steven Grahl organ
Benjamin Bloor chamber organ

Sunday, 25th March 2012
The Chapel of Exeter College, Oxford

Programme

CHRIST THE CHILD

Cui luna, sol et Omnia	Francisco López Capillas
Puer natus in Bethlehem	Josef Rheinberger
<i>La Vierge et L'enfant</i> (from <i>La Nativité du Seigneur</i> for organ)	Olivier Messiaen

CHRIST THE HEALER

Salvator mundi	John Blow
The Spirit of the Lord	Edward Elgar

CHRIST THE TEACHER

Teach me O Lord	William Byrd
If ye love me	Philip Wilby

Interval

CHRIST THE FRIEND OF SINNERS

Nolo mortem peccatoris	Thomas Morley
Agnus Dei (from <i>Messe solennelle</i>)	Louis Vierne

CHRIST THE SUFFERING SERVANT

Crucifixus (à 8)	Antonio Lotti
Solus ad victimam	Kenneth Leighton

CHRIST THE KING

<i>Majesté du Christ demandant sa gloire à son Père</i> (from <i>L'Ascension</i> for organ)	Olivier Messiaen
Ascendit Deus	Peter Philips
If ye then be risen with Christ	Charles Villiers Stanford

Introduction

Lent is traditionally a time when Christians reflect on their faith, and study aspects of it, and in this concert we explore the many ways in which Christ has come to be known: as child, teacher, healer, friend of sinners, suffering servant and ultimately as King. Christ himself asked his disciples at Caesarea Philippi: “Who do men say that I am?”, and he is variously (perhaps even confusingly) identified not just as the Son of God but as the Son of Man.

Composers have responded richly to the various aspects of Christ, the stages in his life, and his various roles - and this concert presents a cross-section of contrasting works from across the centuries which illuminate both the image of Christ and his character. Familiar works by Elgar and Byrd are included alongside less familiar works by Capillas and Philip Wilby, and organist Steven Grahl will play extracts from Olivier Messiaen’s large scale organ depictions of pivotal moments in Christ’s life: *La Nativité* and *L’Ascension*.

We hope you will enjoy this evening in which believers and non-believers alike can reflect on the importance of this man who was “born a child and yet a King”.

James Brown

Aspects of Christ

In our exploration of composers' responses to various aspects of Christ's life, we are pairing pieces from the Tudor or early Baroque periods with nineteenth or twentieth century compositions. In some cases we also see the responses of both Catholic and Protestant composers.

Christ the child.

I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. (Mark 10:15)

Francisco López Capillas (1612-1673) was the first Mexican Creole composer of significance, working in Mexico City and in Puebla; much of his music was also taken to Spain and then widely disseminated. His style can be very polished and sophisticated, as is shown in the motet *Cui luna* which comments on the virgin birth of Christ. The relationship between the slow two time and the fast three time of the central section is particularly characteristic of the early baroque.

Cui luna, sol et omnia deserviunt per tempora,
perfusa coeli gratia gestant puellae viscera.

He that the Moon, the Sun, and all things serve at all times,
by the outpouring of heavenly grace was born of a virgin.

(Venantius Honorius Clementianus Fortunatus, c.600)

Josef Rheinberger (1839-1901) lived and worked in Munich; he is best known for his organ music (he wrote no less than twenty sonatas for organ), but was a prolific composer in a wide range of genres. His motet *Puer natus* is one of a set of six hymn settings, and at times the writing even resembles Bach, with attractive sequences. The text celebrates Christ's birth by looking forward to the redemption He brings to mankind.

Puer natus in Bethlehem,
Unde gaudet Jerusalem,
Hic iacet in praesepio,
Qui regnat sine termino,
Reges de Saba Veniunt,
Aurum thus myrrham offerunt,
Sine serpentis vulnere,
De nostro venit sanguine,
In carne nobis similis,
Peccato sed dissimilis,
Ut redderet nos homines,
Deo et sibi similes,
In hoc natali gaudio,
Benedicamus Domino,
Laudetur sancta Trinitas,
Deo dicamus gratias,

A child is born in Bethlehem,
And joy is in Jerusalem!
There in a lowly manger lies
The one who reigns above the skies,
And kingly pilgrims, long foretold,
From East bring incense, myrrh and gold.
No poison from the serpent stains
The human blood that fills His veins;
And though our flesh He meekly wears,
No mark of sin His nature bears;
That He might man to God restore,
And give the grace that once He wore.
Come then, and on his natal day,
Rejoice before the Lord and pray.
To God, the holy Trinity,
Give praise and thanks eternally

(fourteenth century or earlier)

Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) was organist at the Église de la Sainte-Trinité in Paris from 1931 to his death. Many of his compositions depict what he termed “the marvellous aspects of the faith”, and drew on his deeply held Roman Catholicism. He expressed the desire that his organ cycles should be “at the service of Catholic theology”, and aimed to deepen the listener’s understanding of the concepts they illustrate. It is not necessary to be a practising believer to appreciate Messiaen’s music; but it might be argued that it is only when seen in its spiritual context that his music is revealed in its full dimensions. None the less, as is always the case with great art, it can be appreciated from a multitude of different standpoints and at many different levels, and it will surely continue to reveal more insights to our successors as time goes by.

La Vierge et L'enfant is the first movement of *La Nativité*, the first of his great organ cycles that was written originally for the instrument, which he wrote in 1935 at the age of 27. Messiaen perceived colours when he heard certain musical chords, particularly those built from his modes (a phenomenon known as synaesthesia); combinations of these colours, he said, were important in his compositional process. So *La Nativité* includes parts inspired by the stained glass in mediaeval cathedrals, as well as by the French Alps near Grenoble where it was written.

Christ the Healer

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me: because he hath anointed me to bring the gospel to the poor, and to heal the broken-hearted. (Isaiah 61:1)

John Blow (1648-1708) was the teacher of Henry Purcell, whom he both preceded and succeeded as organist of Westminster Abbey. In Blow's time Latin was not used in the Church of England, and so *Salvator mundi* was probably intended for domestic performance. The text is an antiphon proper to the Matins of the Exaltation of the Cross, and is used (in English) in the Visitation of the Sick in the Book of Common Prayer; it is about the healing of our sin through Christ's suffering. Blow goes to extreme lengths to achieve an affective setting of the text, using suspensions, chromaticism, a dramatic key change at the climax, and inverted pedal points in the later, calmer sections.

Salvator mundi, salva nos,
qui per crucem et sanguinem redemisti nos,
auxiliare nobis, te deprecamur, Deus noster.

O saviour of the world, save us,
who by thy cross and blood has redeemed us,
help us, we pray thee, our God.

(Anon)

After the eventual success of *The Dream of Gerontius*, **Edward Elgar** (1857-1934) planned to write a trilogy of oratorios, of which he eventually wrote two. *The Spirit of the Lord* is the prologue of the first of these, *The Apostles*, which depicts various aspects of the calling of Christ's apostles, including his sending them out with the power of healing.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor: He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind – to preach the acceptable year of the Lord; to give unto them that mourn a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called the trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified. For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden that causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel.

(Isaiah 61)

Christ the Teacher

The people were astounded at the teachings of Jesus: for he taught them with authority. (Matthew 7: 28,29)

William Byrd (1540-1623) was a Catholic who, like his teacher, Thomas Tallis, succeeded in maintaining his position under the Protestant Queen Elizabeth. *Teach me, O Lord*, being in English, would have been intended for liturgical use in the Church of England. It is a verse anthem, alternating solo and choral verses, which is a form that became popular with the introduction of vernacular settings at the Reformation; in addition to the fact that the words were in English, the solo verses allowed them to be put across more clearly. Although this text is about the Old Testament commandments, Christ said he came to complete them, not replace them.

Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes: and I shall keep it unto the end.
Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law: yea, I shall keep it with my whole heart.
Make me to go in the path of thy commandments: for therein is my desire.
Incline my heart unto thy testimonies: and not to covetousness.
O turn away mine eyes, lest they behold vanity: and quicken thou me in thy way.
O stablish thy word in thy servant: that I may fear thee.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, and is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.

(Psalm 119: 33–38)

Philip Wilby (1949-) is a British composer who is perhaps best known for his music for brass bands in the North of England, but also for his religious music. His setting of *If ye Love me* alternates unison and harmonised sections, a little like the Byrd, but not in the formal manner of a verse anthem. The words refer directly to Christ's commandments.

If ye love me, keep my commandments,
And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter
That He may abide with you for ever; e'en the Spirit of Truth.
And ye know him, for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.
I will not leave you comfortless. I will come to you.

(John 14 vv 15-18)

Christ the Friend of Sinners

*I take no pleasure in anyone's death, says the Lord : Repent and live.
(Ezekiel 18 :32)*

The anthem *Nolo mortem peccatoris* is found in a manuscript written in 1616, but there is no indication of the composer. The attribution to **Thomas Morley** (c.1557-1602) is based simply on the fact that the previous anthem in the collection is by him; the style is somewhat more antiquated than might be expected of Morley. The words are taken from a long mediaeval poem reworked by John Redford (d.1547), who was a poet as well as being organist of St Paul's Cathedral - where Morley was organist from 1590.

Nolo mortem peccatoris; Haec sunt verba Salvatoris.

(I do not wish the death of a sinner. These are the words of the Saviour.)

Father I am thine only Son, sent down from heav'n mankind to save.

Father, all things fulfilled and done according to thy will, I have.

Father, my will now all is this: *Nolo mortem peccatoris.*

Father, behold my painful smart, taken for man on ev'ry side;

Ev'n from my birth to death most tart, no kind of pain I have denied,
but suffered all, and all for this: *Nolo mortem peccatoris.*

(John Redford)

Louis Vierne (1870-1937) was organist of the church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris when he wrote his *Messe Solennelle*. The great French churches often had an organ next to the choir as well as the grand organ over the West door, and there are masses by several composers which use the organs antiphonally, as we are doing this evening. The organ in Exeter College chapel is in the style of a French grand organ, and so is particularly suitable tonight. The *Agnus Dei* is the last point in the mass where a direct plea is made for the forgiveness of sins.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi; miserere nobis.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi; dona nobis pacem.

O Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world; have mercy on us.

O Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world; grant us thy peace.

(Latin Mass)

Christ the Suffering Servant

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve: and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:28)

The suffering of Christ in order to relieve humanity of its suffering is a key part of the gospel. The *Crucifixus* is a part of the Nicene Creed recited as a part of the mass, but **Antonio Lotti** (1667-1740), like other composers of his time, also made several settings of the words in isolation. This eight-part setting was probably composed in Venice, although the manuscript comes from Dresden, where Lotti worked for some years. The extensive use of suspensions produces discords which illustrate Christ's suffering.

Crucifixus etiam pro nobis, sub Pontio Pilato; passus, et sepultus est.

He was crucified also for us, under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried.

(Nicene Creed)

Kenneth Leighton (1929-1988) studied at Queen's College, Oxford. He spent most of his life teaching in Edinburgh, but also taught at Worcester College, Oxford for a few years. The Latin hymn *Solus ad victimam* was written for the third nocturnal office on Good Friday at his wife's convent by the mediaeval French theologian, Peter Abelard (1079-1142). Leighton's setting makes use of discordant appoggiaturas to illustrate the suffering in the texts.

Alone to sacrifice thou goest, Lord, giving thyself to Death whom thou hast slain.
For us thy wretched folk is any word? Who know that for our sins this is thy pain?
For they are ours, O Lord, our deeds, our deeds. Why must thou suffer torture for our sin?
Let our hearts suffer in thy Passion, Lord, that very suffering may thy mercy win.
This is the night of tears, the three days' space, sorrow abiding of the eventide,
Until the day break with the risen Christ, and hearts that sorrowed shall be satisfied.
So may our hearts share in thine anguish, Lord, that they may sharers of thy glory be;
Heavy with weeping may the three days pass, to win the laughter of thine Easter Day.

(Peter Abelard (1079-1142), trans. Helen Waddell)

Christ the King

The Father has brought us into the Kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.

(Colossians 1: 13-14)

L'Ascension by **Messiaen** is a cycle of four pieces from early in his career, originally written for orchestra, and then rewritten for organ the next year. Tonight we hear the first: *Majesté du Christ demandant sa gloire à son Père*, whose title: “Majesty of Christ praying that His Father should glorify Him” refers to the verse in John’s gospel: “Father, the hour is come: glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee.”

The composer **Peter Philips** (c.1560-1628) was a Catholic who chose to live in exile in Flanders from 1582 – where he was later ordained to the priesthood. *Ascendit Deus* was published in Antwerp, in a collection that was defiantly dedicated to the “amplification of the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman faith”.

Ascendit Deus in jubilatione,
et Dominus in voce tubae. Alleluia.
Dominus in caelo paravit sedem suam.
Alleluia.

God goes up amid jubilation, and the
Lord at the sound of the trumpet. Alleluia.
The Lord has prepared his throne in heaven.
Alleluia.

(Psalms 47:5, 103:19)

Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924) was a prolific composer in almost any genre, but has become best-known for his sacred choral works. *If ye then be risen with Christ* dates from 1883; the closing Hallelujahs quote from the eighteenth-century tune of a well-known Easter hymn.

If ye then be risen with Christ,
seek those things which are above
where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.
Set your affection on things above,
not on things of the earth, for ye are dead,
and your life is hid with Christ in God.
When Christ, who is our life, shall appear
Then shall ye also appear with him in glory.
Amen. Hallelujah.

(Colossians 3:1-4 - epistle for Easter Sunday)

Steven Grahl organ

Steven enjoys a varied career as both organist and conductor. He combines the post of Assistant Organist at New College, Oxford with that of Organist & Director of Music at St Marylebone Parish Church, London, and he was acting Director of the New College Choir during Trinity Term 2010. He is a member of the Oxford University Faculty of Music. Since 2006 he has held the Principal Conductorship of the Guildford Chamber Choir.

Recent years have seen performances in America, France, Germany, Italy and Spain, and at numerous prestigious UK venues, such as Westminster Cathedral and St John's Smith Square.

A prize-winning graduate of Magdalen College, Oxford (where he was Organ Scholar) and the Royal Academy of Music, Steven gained the Limpus (highest mark) and Dixon (improvisation) prizes in his FRCO examination, and he is also a holder of the Worshipful Company of Musicians' Silver Medallion.

Benjamin Bloor chamber organ

Benjamin is the organ scholar at New College, Oxford, where he is a first year undergraduate reading music. A former chorister of Derby Cathedral, he was organ scholar at St George's Chapel, Windsor from 2010-2011.

James Brown conductor

James was Organ Scholar of Girton College, Cambridge and upon graduating studied organ at the Conservatoire de Musique, Geneva with Lionel Rogg. After two years working as an organist in Texas James returned to England where he is currently Organist of the University Church, Oxford and a lay clerk in New College Choir, with whom he tours regularly. James currently studies the organ with Stephen Farr.

James has conducted the Cherwell Singers since 2007.

The Cherwell Singers

Soprano

Marie Crossland *
Clare Moorhouse
Clare Scott-Dempster
Rebecca Tudor
Judith Ward
Lucy Watson
Steph White

Alto

Virginia Allport
Jenny Ayres
Rachel Bryans
Katherine Butler
Gillian Hargreaves
Lizzie Newton
Joanna Poulton

Tenor

Jeremy Bryans
Guy Peskett
Gerald Pickford
Matthias Range
David Sutton

Bass

Dominic Hargreaves
Neil Herington
Paul Hodges
Simon Jones
Iain McLean
Jonathan Mapley

* Soloist in *Teach me O Lord*

Next concert:

‘Sixty years a Queen’

A diamond retrospective of music from
royal occasions of the past sixty years

Sunday, 1st July 2012 at 7.30pm
Exeter College Chapel

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