

The Cherwell Singers

present

British Choral Music of the New Millennium

Charles Maxtone-Smith organ
James Brown conductor

Saturday, 14th March 2020
New College Chapel, Oxford

Programme

This is the Day
Ave maris stella
Something Understood

John Rutter
Matthew Martin
Alec Roth

(Organ Solo)

Church Bells Beyond the Stars

Cecilia McDowall

Angelus Domini
A Hymn for St Cecilia

Patrick Hawes
Malcolm Archer

Interval

Aspire to God My Soul
The Lord Build the House

David Bednall
Toby Young

(Organ Solo)

In dich hab ich gehoffet Herr

Nigel Allcoat

Gloria

Simon Johnson

Charles Maxtone-Smith
James Brown

organ
conductor

The New Millennium

British Choral Music 2000-2020

The passage of twenty years seems as good a time as any to review some of the new works produced since the millennium in this country, and so this term the Cherwell Singers presents a programme of fresh and exciting new music by living and working British composers.

Most of the works are commissions, which provide a vital lifeline for the production of new music, as does its exposure to audiences brave enough to eschew temporarily the familiar.

Works we are presenting range from celebrations of anniversaries, marking of retirement and national events. Established composers such as John Rutter and Malcolm Archer are featured alongside younger writers such as David Bednall and Matthew Martin.

Some of the pieces have an Oxford connection, with first performances of three of the works occurring here in the chapel of New College, where we are pleased to be returning to present this concert.

The relatively young and dynamic organ of the chapel, dating from 1969, is the perfect partner for modern works, and is being played by the college's Acting Assistant Organist, Charles Maxtone-Smith.

We hope you will enjoy this evening of some of the best new choral music from Britain.

James Brown

Discord and Concord

Throughout musical history there has been a progression from simple "pure" sounds to more complex "discordant" sounds. Starting from simple melodies such as plainchant, the first moves were to adding parallel movement at consonant intervals such as the fifth; and then with the introduction of the third, triad-based harmony became possible. In the renaissance period polyphony developed, with interlocking melodic lines generating simple diatonic harmonies; rhythms were simplified and made more uniform to make this possible. The composers of the baroque period

started to add some spiciness to music by tolerating discords – but they had to be in a form that moved directly to a concordant harmony, typically as appoggiaturas. Alongside discord came an increase in modulation, which could unsettle the listener by moving away from the main key of a piece and then relax them by returning. These tendencies increased through the classical and romantic periods, until Wagner made keys and harmonies that were so fluid that at times the listener could be completely lost. Finally, in the early twentieth century, discord was accepted in its own right, with no obvious requirement for it to be resolved, though writers like Schoenberg and Hindemith did design ways to understand the relationships between discords, just as composers and theorists like Zarlino, Quantz and CPE Bach had described the workings of the harmony and discord of their times. Freed from the constraints of polyphony, rhythmic irregularity flourished.

But by the middle of the twentieth century, the composers had left the public far behind. This had happened in previous periods, to be sure, but never as completely as this time. Composers also found that having achieved complete freedom of expression in so many ways, there was nowhere left to go, so in the latter part of the last century they started to return to the discipline of more traditional forms of harmony and discord. But they also could not forget their recent experience, so the simpler and more traditional music that they wrote still showed signs of what had been done in the recent past, for instance, by still incorporating more discord into harmonically simpler music in a way that now feels natural. The use of more varied rhythms has also remained and developed to distinguish recent music from that preceding the extremes of the last century.

The composers in tonight's program illustrate aspects of this "modified retrenchment" of style in the present; indeed, they are all living.

It is appropriate to place **John Rutter** (1945-) first in this programme, as the oldest and best known of the composers represented. He was educated at Highgate School, where he became an accomplished organist. As a student at Cambridge University, he became involved with music in the college chapels; and by the mid-1970s he was director of music at his old college, Clare. Since then he has made a remarkable contribution to the repertoire. In 1981, Rutter founded his own choir, the Cambridge Singers, which he conducts and with which he has made many recordings of sacred choral repertoire (including both his own works and those by other composers). He now lives in Cambridgeshire and frequently conducts many choirs and orchestras around the world.

This is the Day was composed for the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton in 2011.

This is the day which the Lord hath made: We will rejoice and be glad in it.
O praise the Lord of heav'n: praise him in the height.
Praise him, all ye angels of his: praise him, all his host.
Praise him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars and light.
Let them praise the Name of the Lord.
For he shall give his angels charge over thee: To keep thee in all thy ways.
The Lord himself is thy keeper, the Lord is thy defence upon thy right hand:
So that the sun shall not burn thee by day, neither the moon by night.
The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: Yea, it is even he that shall keep thy soul.
The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in:
From this time forth for evermore. He shall defend thee under his wings.
Be strong, and he shall comfort thine heart: And put thou thy trust in the Lord.

Words from Psalms 118, 148, 91, 121, and 27

Matthew Martin (1976-) read music at Magdalen College, Oxford, where he was organ scholar. He has held posts at the University Church, Oxford, New College, Oxford, Canterbury Cathedral, and Westminster Cathedral. He is currently Director of Music at Keble College Oxford, and is about to move to Gonville and Gaius College, Cambridge.

Ave maris stella is a setting of 6th-century words, written in 2018 for Harrow School. It is a harmonisation of the traditional plainsong melody associated with the words, somewhat in the style first used by Bartók a century ago in which the harmonies often appear unrelated to the theme. At several places in the score an additional plainsong theme for the word “Salve” is woven into the music; but only those who are very familiar with it will notice.

Ave, maris stella,
Dei mater alma,
atque semper virgo,
felix cœli porta.

Solve vincla reis,
profer lumen cæcis,
mala nostra pelle,
bona cuncta posce.

Monstra te esse matrem,
sumat per te precem
qui pro nobis natus
tulit esse tuus.

Hail, star of the sea,
Nurturing Mother of God,
And ever Virgin
Happy gate of Heaven

Loosen the chains of the guilty,
Send forth light to the blind,
Our evil do thou dispel,
Entreat (for us) all good things.

Show thyself to be a Mother:
Through thee may he receive prayer
Who, being born for us,
Undertook to be thine own.

Vitam præsta puram,
iter para tutum,
ut videntes Jesum
semper collætetur.

Sit laus Deo Patri,
summo Christo decus,
Spiritu Sancto
tribus honor unus. Amen.

Bestow a pure life,
Prepare a safe way:
That seeing Jesus,
We may ever rejoice.

Praise be to God the Father,
To the Most High Christ be glory,
To the Holy Spirit
Be honour, to the Three equally. Amen.

possibly by Saint Venantius Fortunatus (6th century)

Alec Roth (1948-) works across a wide range of genres, and is currently Composer in Residence with Jeffrey Skidmore's choir, Ex Cathedra.

Something Understood is a setting of *Prayer (I)* by George Herbert, written for the choir of New College. It evokes the manner in which prayer can be an overwhelming aesthetic activity. The whole poem is a single sentence but it is grammatically incomplete having no main verb. The clauses pile in one after the other without any conjunctions. On their own these fragments are difficult to make sense of, but the poem seems intelligible precisely because its meaning doesn't need to be pinned down. It is a kaleidoscope spiralling through a succession of moods. Beyond grammar, or any argument which could be paraphrased and defended, is "something understood".

Prayer the Churches banquet, Angels age,
Gods breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth ;
Engine against th' Almightye, sinner's towre,
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
The six daies world-transposing in an houre,
A kinde of tune, which all things heare and fear ;
Softnesse, and peace, and joy, and love, and blisse,
Exalted Manna, gladnesse of the best,
Heaven in ordinarie, man well drest,
The milkie way, the bird of Paradise,
Church-bels beyond the stars heard, the souls bloud,
The land of spices, something understood.

George Herbert (1593-1633)

Cecilia McDowall (1951-) read music at the University of Edinburgh continuing her studies at Trinity College of Music, London. She has won many awards and been eight times short-listed for the British Composer Awards. In 2014 she won the British Composer Award for Choral Music. Much of McDowall's choral music is performed worldwide, as well as her orchestral music. McDowall's distinctive style speaks directly to listeners, instrumentalists and singers alike. Her most characteristic works fuse fluent melodic lines with occasional dissonant harmonies and rhythmic exuberance. In 2010, Oxford University Press signed McDowall as an 'Oxford' composer. Works by Cecilia McDowall proclaim an instinctive understanding of the medium allied to the ability to speak directly to the listener and wholly without artifice.

Church Bells Beyond the Stars is the third part of a trilogy written in 2013 inspired by the works of the metaphysical poet George Herbert - the title of this part is taken from his words which were sung in the previous piece.

Patrick Hawes (1958-) has emerged as one of the country's most popular and inspirational composers of the new millennium. Born in Lincolnshire, he read music as an organ scholar at Durham University, and soon went on to make an impact in the world of choral music. For a time he was Classic FM's composer in Residence. He is a quintessentially English composer who prides himself on writing in the same idiom as the likes of Elgar, Vaughan Williams and Delius.

Angelus Domini was written for the choir of New College in 2013. The words are the first couplet of an 11th century Roman Catholic devotion known as the Angelus.

Angelus Domini nuntiavit Mariae.
Et concepit de Spiritu Sancto.

The angel of the Lord brought tidings to Mary.
And she conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Malcolm Archer (1952-) has been Organist and Director of Music at Wells Cathedral, St Paul's Cathedral, London, and Winchester College.

His setting of *A Hymn for St Cecilia* uses a poem in praise of the Patron Saint of music by Ursula Vaughan Williams. The setting is energetic, evoking the changing moods explored within the text with music by turns joyous and reflective and leading to an ecstatic conclusion.

Sing for the morning's joy, Cecilia, sing,
in words of youth and praises of the Spring,
walk the bright colonnades by fountains' spray,
and sing as sunlight fills the waking day;
till angels, voyaging in upper air,
pause on a wing and gather the clear sound
into celestial joy, wound and unwound,
a silver chain, or golden as your hair.

Sing for your loves of heaven and of earth,
in words of music, and each word a truth;
marriage of heart and longings that aspire,
a bond of roses, and a ring of fire.
Your summertime grows short and fades away,
terror must gather to a martyr's death;
but never tremble, the last indrawn breath
remembers music as an echo may.

Through the cold aftermath of centuries,
Cecilia's music dances in the skies;
lend us a fragment of the immortal air,
that with your choiring angels we may share,
a word to light us thro' time-fettered night,
water of life, or rose of paradise,
so from the earth another song shall rise
to meet your own in heaven's long delight.

Ursula Vaughan Williams (1911-2007)

David Bednall (1979-) was Organ Scholar at The Queen's College, Oxford and then at Gloucester Cathedral, where he was closely involved with the Three Choirs Festival. He won prizes in Improvisation and Performance at the examination for FRCO. He is Sub-organist at Bristol Cathedral, as well as having an extensive freelance career. He is now perhaps most prominent as a composer. In 2006 he played the organ for a Cherwell Singers concert.

Aspire to God, my soul sets a macaronic text written in 2009 by Canon John Dilnot (1934-), with the titular words recurring throughout the setting as an emphatic refrain. This short anthem is optimistic and uplifting in tone, with frequently changing time-signatures that convey a rhythmic fluidity and the flexibility to follow the declamation of the words.

Aspire to God my soul, in soaring music, in art and words fantastical, that saints
may have true coin for heavens praise, *Cantate domino in excelsis*.

Canon John Dilnot, (1934-)

Toby Young (1990-) studied composition with Robin Holloway at Cambridge, whilst also being a choral scholar in the King's College Chapel Choir. He is a composer of operas, chamber music and symphonic works whose influences range from plainchant to electronic dance music, and he also has considerable experience writing for choirs. His work explores the boundaries between pop music, classical music and sonic art.

Toby is also active as a researcher, exploring the relationship between creative practice and philosophy in his work at Linacre College, Oxford.

The Lord Build the House was written for the choir of New College in 2016. The words were written as a prayer by Thomas Ken, who was a Fellow of New College for a time, and took part in the local musical life.

O God, make the door of this house wide enough to receive all who need human love and fellowship, and a heavenly Father's care; and narrow enough to shut out all envy, pride and hate. Make its threshold smooth enough to be no stumbling-block to children, nor to straying feet, but rugged enough to turn back the tempter's power: make it a gateway to thine eternal kingdom. Amen

Bishop Thomas Ken (1637-1711)

Nigel Allcoat (1950-) is an organist and teacher with a particular reputation for improvisation. He studied at the Royal School of Church Music and calls himself "An hopeless aesthete living in the wrong century".

He has been a Visiting Tutor at the Royal Northern College of Music, and for over 24 years has been teaching organists at Oxford and Cambridge Universities. He also has been a Professor in Dresden, the St Petersburg Conservatory and the Royal Academy of Music in London. He also has founded the International Summer Organ Conservatoire in 1986 which is now held each year in France. Furthermore, he is the Organ Adviser to the Diocese of Coventry.

Nigel has been on the juries of numerous international organ competitions, most notably the Concours in Haarlem (NL) and Montbrison (F), the Albert Schweitzer in Deventer (NL), the Boellmann in Strasbourg (F), and numerous times for the European Improvisation Concours in Belgium.

In dich hab ich gehoffet Herr (*In you, Lord, have I placed my hope*) is his contribution to the *Orgelbüchlein Project*, in which a number of composers are filling the gaps that Bach left in his collection of chorale preludes known as the *Orgelbüchlein*. It was first performed in 2017.

Simon Johnson (1975-) is one of the most versatile musicians of his generation, successfully combining life as a virtuoso organist with extensive work in choral direction, composition and arrangement. Recitals have taken him all over Europe and the USA, as well as to many parts of the UK.

As the Organist and Assistant Director of Music at St Paul's Cathedral, he has been involved in all the national occasions that have taken place there since his appointment in 2008.

This highly original and exciting setting of the *Gloria* was commissioned in 2014 by Peachtree Presbyterian Church, Atlanta to celebrate twenty years work of their organist, Nicholas Bowden. The work is full of exciting rhythmic and melodic motifs as well as appropriately being a showpiece for the organ. Indeed, the scale of the work is such that an alternative accompaniment for organ and brass instruments is available. Following long-established tradition, the words *Cum Sancto Spiritu* are set as a fugue.

Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.

Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te

Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam.

Domine Deus, Rex caelestis, Deus Pater omnipotens.

Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe.

Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris.

Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.

Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram.

Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere nobis.

Quoniam tu solus sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu solus altissimus, Jesu Christe.

Cum Sancto Spiritu, in gloria Dei Patris.

Amen.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will.

We praise you. We bless you. We adore you. We glorify you.

We give you thanks for your great glory.

Lord God, king of heaven, God the Father almighty,

Lord, only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ,

Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,

you who take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us;

you who take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer;

you who sit at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us.

For you only are holy. You only are Lord.

You only are most high, Jesus Christ,

With the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

Biographies

Charles Maxtone-Smith organ

Charles Maxtone-Smith was organ scholar at New College, Oxford from 2016-19 where he studies for a music degree, and is now Acting Assistant Organist for the current academic year. He was a music scholar at Winchester College, and then took up a gap-year organ scholarship at Hereford Cathedral.

Charles has given organ recitals across the country, notably in Hereford, Winchester, Truro, Southwark and Coventry Cathedrals; St George's Chapel, Windsor; New, Merton, Keble and The Queen's College, Oxford; Clare College, Cambridge; St Lawrence's, Ludlow; and St John's, Buxton as part of the Buxton Festival. In summer 2019 he played a recital on the 1778 Stumm Organ in Bendorf-Sayn, Germany, and took part in the International Organ Summer Festival in Rome.

A prize-winner of the Royal College of Organists, he passed his FRCO in July 2016 at the age of nineteen. Since 2014 he has been assistant organist at the Edington Festival of Music Within the Liturgy in Wiltshire. As well as playing regularly in the Oxford Bach Soloists, he is the Organist at St Michael at the North Gate, Oxford.

James Brown conductor

James Brown was organ scholar of Girton College, Cambridge before doing further study of organ with Lionel Rogg at the Geneva Conservatoire, Switzerland. After two years as Guest Artist in Residence at the First United Methodist Church, Lubbock, Texas, USA, he returned to England where he was Organist of Dean Close School.

In 2006 James moved to Oxford where he is Organist of the historic University Church, and teaches organ at Abingdon and New College Schools as well as pursuing freelance work as an organist and pianist. He is also a tenor lay clerk in the choir of New College.

James has given recitals in the UK, USA, Belgium and Switzerland, and appeared on both BBC radio and television. He also performs solo classical piano recitals for Cunard, P&O, and Fred Olsen cruise lines.

James has been conducting the Cherwell Singers since 2007.

The Cherwell Singers

Soprano

Christy Callaway-Gale
Stephanie Gilroy*
Janet Johnson
Elina Screen
Stephanie Sumner-Jones
Marie Thebaud-Sorger
Lucy Watson
Eve-Marie Wenger

Tenor

Josh Crolla
Jack Lovell
David Read
Alistair Sterling

Alto

Virginia Allport
Francesca Donellan
Anna Orłowska
Joanna Poulton
Rosemary Roberts
Vanessa Sinclair

Bass

Toby Blundell
Benjamin Breyer
Paul Hodges
Simeon Mitchell
Tom Robinson

* *Soloist in the Archer.*

If you are interested in joining us please contact James Brown at:
director@cherwellsingers.org

Next Concert

An Independence Day Celebration

Choral works by American composers to include works by:
Copland, Barber, Thompson, and Whitacre.

Sunday July 5th 2020, 7.30pm
Venue *tbc*

Please visit our web site to learn more about the choir, and listen to some of our recordings online. Use the web form to register yourself on our email list, to ensure you receive notification and full details of future concerts.

www.cherwellsingers.org