

The Cherwell Singers

present

Angels and Archangels

Dónal McCann

James Brown

organ

conductor

Saturday, 20th November 2021

Chapel of New College, Oxford

Programme

Factum est silentium

Duo seraphin

Richard Dering

Tibi Christe splendor Patris

Tomás Luis de Victoria

Stetit angelus

G. P. da Palestrina

(Organ Solo)

St Bride, Assisted by Angels

Judith Bingham

(from Messiah)

There were shepherds / Glory to God

Unto which of the angels / Let all the angels of God

G. F. Handel

(from Elijah)

Lift thine eyes

For He shall give His angels charge over thee

Felix Mendelssohn

Interval

Angels

John Tavener

(Organ Solo)

Les Anges, *from* La Nativité du Seigneur

Olivier Messiaen

The angel Gabriel from heaven came

arr. David Willcocks

Angelus Domini

Patrick Hawes

Angelus ad virginem

arr. Andrew Carter

Angels' Carol

John Rutter

Dónal McCann

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Angels and Archangels

Michaelmas term takes its name from the Archangel Michael, chief among the warrior angels fighting the dragon and his angels, the forces of evil, and ultimately defeating them. Angels as warriors, and as God's messengers, appear throughout scripture, both named and unnamed, and composers have depicted them, and their actions, in various and colourful ways.

Our concert explores this rich depiction, from the polyphonic tradition of Palestrina and Victoria, through to their appearance in the great oratorios "Messiah" and "Elijah".

After the interval we showcase twentieth-century settings of works about angels, including examples by Messiaen, John Tavener, and living composers such as Andrew Carter and John Rutter.

New College Chapel, with its large and dramatic wooden angel roof bosses looming down on us, will provide a suitable setting for our programme, and joining us on the organ for the first time will be the Assistant Organist of New College, Dónal McCann.

We hope you will enjoy this very wide variety of choral works using the angels to trace the journey from Michaelmas to Christmas.

James Brown

About Angels

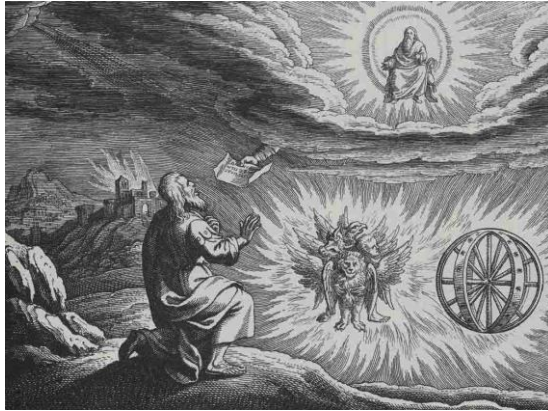
In pre-history, mankind imagined hidden creatures which were responsible for things they did not understand, both good and bad. These creatures survive in folk-myth, for instance as fairies and goblins, and the many other such beings. Some of the imaginings were not merely invisible, but incorporeal – spirits, which might represent our ancestors, or the essence of a place such as an awesome mountain, or they might represent disasters such as floods.

As religion started to develop, the most powerful of these spirits were elevated to the status of gods – either multitudinous, as in Japan, merely numerous, as in ancient Greece or Rome, or single, as in the Abrahamic religions. In the Abrahamic religions, the other spirits came to be seen as the retinue of God, living in Heaven with him, and were called angels (from a Hebrew word meaning “messenger”). That some spirits had been seen as bad was covered by having some angels rebel and be thrown out of Heaven into Hell, headed by Lucifer, the Devil; these are the fallen angels who became demons.

Although angels in general are referred to in the Bible and Qur'an on many occasions, mainly in the role of unceasingly praising God, only two of them are given names – Gabriel, who is a messenger from God at several crucial moments (specifically, he speaks to Daniel, Zechariah, Mary, and Muhammad), and Michael, who is named in the book of Daniel as the leader of heaven's army against the Devil. Both these angels – called archangels because of their pre-eminent importance – are subjects of some of the music this evening. Although unnamed, more junior angels are often also thought of individually in the specific role of guardian angels.



Later tradition developed considerable lore about angels, varying between specific religions. For instance, Hebrew lore divides them into twelve “orders”, varying in both seniority and appearance – the hymn *Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones* is a pæan in praise of angels, and at one point spells out the twelve orders (rearranged to fit the metre). Other names appear, such as the archangels Raphael and Uriel, familiar from Haydn's *Creation*. The best known of the angelic orders are the seraphim and cherubim, and the descriptions of these have given rise to huge amounts of art, from bright winged beings, often with six wings, through to chubby cherubs. Sometimes their forms are fantastical, as in this depiction of two angels following the description of their appearance in Ezekiel's vision of God:



Notes and Words

Richard Dering (c.1580-1630) was an English-born composer, but being Catholic, he moved to the low countries and spent his entire working life there; his music is thus in a style more continental (with particular Spanish influence) than English. *Factum est silentium* depicts the war between Michael (for Heaven) and the Dragon (for the Devil), and is often performed around the season of Michaelmas.

Factum est silentium in cœlo,
 Dum committeret bellum draco cum Michaelæ Archangelo.
 Audita est vox millia millium dicentium:
 Salus, honor et virtus omnipotenti Deo.
 Alleluia.

*There was silence in heaven
 When the dragon fought with the Archangel Michael.
 The voice of thousands of thousands was heard saying:
 Salvation, honour and power be to almighty God.
 Alleluia.*

(First Respond at Matins for Michaelmas)

Duo seraphim clamabant alter ad alterum:
 Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
 Plena est omnis terra gloria ejus.

*Two seraphim cried to one another:
 Holy is the Lord God of Sabaoth.
 The whole earth is full of his glory.*

(Isaiah 6:3)

The Spanish composer **Tomás Luis de Victoria** (c.1548-1611) studied in Rome, and subsequently succeeded Palestrina as Maestro at the Pontifical Roman Seminary. In middle age he returned to Spain as a royal chaplain. His musical style is a merger of Italian and Spanish styles.

Tibi Christe splendor Patris

vita, virtus cordium
in conspectu angelorum
votis, voce psalimus
alternantes concrepando
melos damus vocibus.

Collaudamus venerantes
omnes cœli milites
sed præcipue primatem
cœlestis exercitus
Michaellem in virtute
conterentem Zabulon.

Quo custode procul pelle
rex Christe piissime
omne nefas inimici
mundo corde et corpore
paradiso redde tuo
nos sola clementia.

Gloriam Patri melodis
personemus vocibus:
Gloriam Christo canamus,
Gloriam Paraclito:
Qui trinus et unus Deus
Extat ante sæcula.

Amen.

*Thee, O Christ, the Father's splendour,
Life and virtue of the heart,
In the presence of the angels
Sing we now with tuneful art,
Meetly in alternate chorus,
Bearing our responsive part.*

*Thus we praise with veneration
All the armies of the sky;
Chiefly him, the warrior primate,
Of celestial chivalry,
Michael, who in princely virtue
Cast Abaddon from on high.*

*By whose watchful care repelling -
King of everlasting grace -
Every ghostly adversary,
All things evil, all things base,
Grant us of Thine only goodness,
In Thy paradise a place.*

*We sound with sweet voices
the glory of the Father,
We sing about the glory of Christ,
of the Glory of the Paraclite;
The Triune God who existed
before the world began.*

Amen.

(Office hymn for the feast of St Michael)

G. P. da Palestrina (1525-1594) took the prevailing dominant musical styles from France and the Netherlands and forged from them a new truly Italian style of polyphony, which became hugely influential.

Stetit angelus juxta aram templi habens thuribulum aureum in manu sua,
et data sunt ei incensa multa, et ascendit fumus aromatum in conspectu Dei.

*An angel stood near the Temple sanctuary holding a golden thurible in his hand,
and he was given much incense, and aromatic smoke rose in the sight of God.*

(Revelation 8:3-4)

Judith Bingham (1952-) is a contemporary English composer. Her music frequently draws upon biblical narrative and art for inspiration. ***St. Bride, Assisted by Angels*** is inspired by the legend of the Irish Saint Bride who was transported miraculously to Bethlehem to attend the nativity of Christ.

G. F. Handel (1685-1759) needs no introduction, and *Messiah* is his most famous work. We are singing the movements which highlight the angelic host. It is interesting to note that, although Handel is often thought of as less intellectual than Bach, the chorus *Let all the angels of God* is a double fugue in which the second subject is the diminution of the first.

There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night.

And lo! The angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them: fear not, for behold! I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ, the Lord

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying:

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

Unto which of the angels said he at any time: Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

Let all the angels of God worship Him

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) wrote his oratorio *Elijah* after the pattern (but not the style) of Handel's oratorios. It was commissioned in 1845 for the Birmingham Festival of 1846. The work was carefully written for both German and English words, and first performed in English at Birmingham. *Lift thine eyes* is sung to Elijah by a trio of angels.

Lift thine eyes to the mountains, whence cometh help. Thy help cometh from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. He hath said, thy foot shall not be moved. Thy keeper will never slumber.

For He shall give His angels charge over thee that they shall protect thee in all the ways thou goest, that their hands shall uphold and guide thee lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

For the composer **John Tavener** (1944-2013) creativity sprang from religious faith. Many of his works held an appeal for audiences that did not necessarily identify with contemporary music or the theological values from which he started. Their response meant a great deal to him, and he took it as affirmation that his music was operating on a spiritual level.

Angels was commissioned by All Saints' Church, Basingstoke in 1985, for the unveiling of new stained-glass windows by Cecil Collins, two of which include representations of angels. The composer wrote:

The improvisatory style of the organ part should convey something of the Byzantine doctrine of Angels... 'Dazzling youths, arrayed in white'.

Bright beings from the realm of light,
Messengers from the Lord of Might!
Silent as dawn and swift as sound,
Your presence shines where God is found.

When Jacob lay in deep despair,
Angelic waves in vision fair
Disclosed at Bethel, Heaven's gate,
And broke his chain of evil fate.

Angel and maid in stillness met,
And Mary's 'Yes', lest we forget,
Sprang from a Spirit touched by grace,
Through Gabriel's word and golden face.

Unseen as air, in fiery power,
Angelic hordes make demons cower,
And won with Christ in holy fight
Salvation's gift from human plight.

The sun's bright beams bring light to earth,
And angels bless our pain and mirth,
May angel hosts transport us high
To God in heaven when we die.



The windows in Basingstoke

(Keith Walker, 1985)

The music of **Olivier Messiaen** (1908-1992) breathes his Catholic faith.

Les Anges is one movement of his 1935 suite *La Nativité du Seigneur* - the organist Dame Gillian Weir wrote of this movement:

The music explodes into a kind of ecstatic dance, as the angels exult and the sun flashes on their jewel-studded wings, beating jubilantly. They swoop lower and lower over the crib, and for an instant are still; then soar into the sky again, circling ever higher until, in a cascade of trills, they are lost to view.

The following three pieces all describe the Annunciation, when Gabriel came to Mary with the news that she would bear the Christ-child. They are therefore especially appropriate for us to perform as we approach Christmas.

The angel Gabriel is an arrangement of a Basque carol, translated by S. Baring-Gould (1834-1924) and set by **Sir David Willcocks** (1919-2015).

The angel Gabriel from heaven came,
his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;
"All hail," said he, "thou lowly maiden Mary,
most highly favour'd lady," Gloria!

"For known a blessed Mother thou shalt be,
all generations laud and honour thee,
thy Son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold,
most highly favour'd lady," Gloria!

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head,
"To me be as it pleaseth God," she said,
"my soul shall laud and magnify his holy Name."
Most highly favour'd lady, Gloria!

Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ, was born
in Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,
and Christian folk throughout the world will ever say:
"Most highly favour'd lady," Gloria!

Patrick Hawes (1958-) writes music in a wide range of genres, from film scores to a *capella* choral pieces. He has been Composer in Residence at Classic FM. *Angelus Domini* was written for Edward Higginbottom and the choir of New College in 2013, and it was first performed in this chapel.

Angelus Domini nuntiavit Mariæ,
Et concepit de Spiritu Sancto.

*The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary,
And she conceived of the Holy Spirit.*

Andrew Carter (1939-) writes mainly organ and choral music, and several of his carols have featured in the annual *Nine Lessons and Carols* from King's, Cambridge – for which this arrangement of *Angelus ad virginem* was written. Nothing is known about the origins of the carol, but it was well-known in the 14th century, as Chaucer mentions it in *The Miller's Tale*.

Angelus ad virginem,
Subintrans in conclave,
Virginis formidinem
Demulcens, inquit: "Ave!
Ave, regina virginum:
Cœli terræque dominum
Concipies et paries intacta
Salutem hominum;
Tu porta cœli facta,
Medela criminum."

"Quomodo conciperem,
Quæ virum non cognovi?
Qualiter infringerem,
Quod firma mente vovi?"
"Spiritus sancti gratia
Perficiet hæc omnia.
Ne timeas, sed gaudeas
Secura, quod castimonia
Manebit in te pura
Dei potentia."

*The angel came to the Virgin,
entering secretly into her room;
calming the Virgin's fear,
he said, "Hail!
Hail, queen of virgins:
you will conceive the Lord of heaven and earth
and bear him, while remaining a virgin,
to be the salvation of mankind;
you will be made the gate of heaven,
the cure of sins."*

*"How can I conceive,
When I have never known a man?
How can I transgress
resolutions that I have vowed with a firm mind?"*
*"The grace of the Holy Spirit
shall do all this.
Do not be afraid, but rejoice
without a care, since your chastity
will remain in you unspoilt
through the power of God."*

Ad hæc virgo nobilis
Respondens inquit ei:
“Ancilla sum humilis
Omnipotentis Dei.
Tibi cælesti nuntio,
Tanti secreti conscio,
Consentiens et cupiens videre
Factum quod audio,
Parata sum parere
Dei consilio.”

Eia Mater Domini,
Quæ pacem reddidisti
Angelis et homini
Cum Christum genuisti!
Tuum exora filium
Ut se nobis propitium
Exhibeat, et debeat peccata,
Præstans auxilium
Vita frui beata
Post hoc exilium.
Deo Gracias!

*To this, the noble Virgin,
replying, said to him,
“I am the humble maidservant
of almighty God.
To you, heavenly messenger,
and bearer of such a great secret,
I give my consent, and wishing to see
done what I hear,
I am ready to obey
the will of God.”*

*Hail, Mother of our Lord,
who brought peace back
to angels and men
when you bore Christ!
Pray your son
that he may show favour to us
and blot out our sins,
giving us help
to enjoy a blessed life
after this exile.
Thanks be to God!*

(Words and melody: 14th century or earlier)

John Rutter (1945-) is an English composer of choral music, including many carols and carol settings. In the early part of his career he collaborated with Sir David Willcocks in the preparation of the widely used *Carols for Choirs* volumes.

He often writes the words as well as the music of his pieces, and *Angels' Carol* is an example of this.

Have you heard the sound of the angel voices
Ringing out so sweetly ringing out so clear?
Have you seen the star shining out so brightly
As a sign from God that Christ the Lord is here?
Have you heard the news that they bring from heaven
To the humble shepherds who have waited long?
Gloria in excelsis Deo, Gloria in excelsis Deo!
Hear the angels sing Their joyful song
He is come in peace in the winter's stillness
Like a gentle snowfall in the gentle night
He is come in joy like the sun at morning
Filling all the world with radiance and with light
He is come in love as the child of Mary
In a simple stable we have seen his birth
Gloria in excelsis Deo, Gloria in excelsis Deo!
Hear the angels singing 'Peace on earth'

He will bring new light to a world in darkness
Like a bright star shining in the skies above
He will bring new hope to the waiting nations
When he comes to reign in purity and love
Let the earth rejoice at the Saviour's coming
Let the heavens answer with the joyful morn
Gloria in excelsis Deo, Gloria in excelsis Deo!
Hear the angels singing 'Christ is born'

Biographies

Dónal McCann organ

Originally from Belfast, Dónal read music at King's College, Cambridge, where he was an academic and organ scholar, and accompanied the choir in daily chapel services, as well as in recordings, broadcasts and extensive tours, including to America and Australia. Prior to this, Dónal was the Andrew Lloyd Webber Scholar at Eton College, where he gained the FRCO with the Limpus Prize, subsequently being nominated for the Silver Medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians. The following year he won the inaugural Dame Gillian Weir Medal at the Northern Ireland International Organ Competition.

Dónal studied piano at the Royal Irish Academy of Music in Dublin, and organ with Professor Gerard Gillen at St Mary's Pro Cathedral. He has performed as a soloist with the Ulster Orchestra and the Academy of Ancient Music, and has given many recitals in the UK and abroad.

He is currently Assistant Organist at New College, 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
Judith Ward
Lucy Watson

Alto

Virginia Allport
Jenny Ayres
Elizabeth Kreager
Wendy Morris
Anna Orłowska
Jo Poulton
Vanessa Sinclair

Tenor

Joshua Crolla *
Jack Lovell
David Read

Bass

Toby Blundell
Benjamin Breyer
Paul Hodges
Simon Jones
Iain McLean

* Soloists in *Messiah* extracts.

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

Next Concert

Songs of the sea

including music by
Stanford, Vaughan-Williams, Grieg, Britten, and Whitacre.

20th March 2022.
(venue to be announced)

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