

# The Cherwell Singers

present

## A Spanish Christmas

*Seasonal Music from Spain*

**Dónal McCann**  
**James Brown**

organ  
conductor

Sunday, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2023  
Chapel of Mansfield College, Oxford

# Programme

Canite tuba

Francisco Guerrero

Veni Domine

Juan Esquivel

*(Organ Solo:)*

Tiento - Ave maris stella

Juan Bautista Cabanilles

Ave maris stella

Tomás Luis de Victoria

O magnum mysterium

Tomás Luis de Victoria

Ave Maria

Tomás Luis de Victoria

## Interval

Riu, riu, chiu

Mateo Flecha the elder

Gabriel's Message

*arr.* Malcolm Archer

O Bethlehem

*arr.* Elizabeth Poston

The Song of the Birds

*arr.* Enrique Ribo

*(Organ Solo:)*

Pastorela

Jesús Guridi

I saw a maiden sitten and sing

*arr.* Edgar Pettman

*(Organ Solo:)*

Villancico

Jesús Guridi

The Infant King

*arr.* David Willcocks

El Noi de la Mare

*arr.* John Rutter

Sant Josep i la Mare de Deu

*arr.* Père Jorda

Torches

John Joubert

*It is suggested that applause is reserved for  
the end of each group of pieces*

Dónal McCann  
James Brown

organ  
conductor

# A Spanish Christmas

## *Seasonal Music from Spain*

This term the Cherwell Singers continues its exploration of Christmas music from different lands by focusing on Spain. The glories of the choral music of the Spanish Renaissance mean that we can devote the first half of the programme to explore some of this rich seam of music, and we will be featuring works by Guerrero, Esquivel, and several by Victoria, including his lavish 8-part setting of *Ave Maria*. In the second half of the programme arrangements of popular Spanish Christmas melodies will feature, including the ever-popular Basque carol, *The Angel Gabriel*.

This is the first time the Cherwell Singers have performed in the spacious chapel of Mansfield College, with its newly restored organ played by Dónal McCann, assistant organist of New College.

We hope you will enjoy this exploration of some of the best of Spanish Christmas music as we approach the festive season.

James Brown

## *Notes & Words*

Christmas is a solemn festival of the church as well as a time of joy even without considering its secular history. In a country as devout as Spain, it is natural that we will find a wealth of serious-minded church music appropriate to the season – and the most notable of this is found in the period of the Renaissance.

We begin our program with the music of four composers from that period – **Mateo Flecha the elder** (1481–1553), **Francisco Guerrero** (1528-1599), **Tomás Luis de Victoria** (c.1548-1611), and **Juan Esquivel** (c.1560 - after 1623). The last three of these contribute the kind of serious polyphony that we might expect, but the first provides a piece written in a popular style, but intended for use in church none the less.

**Francisco Guerrero** (1528-1599) spent the least time working outside Spain of any of the Spanish composers in our program. He is also notable in this group for composing as much secular music as sacred. Some of his work was so advanced harmonically that a piece by him in a Lima library was long thought to be from the eighteenth century until its authorship was discovered.

We start our concert tonight with Guerrero's vivacious and onomatopœic Advent motet, ***Canite tuba***. This is in two parts, each ending with the same invocation of *Veni Domine*.

Canite tuba in Sion,  
quia prope est dies Domini:  
ecce venit ad salvandum nos.  
Erunt prava indirecta,  
et aspera in vias planas.  
Veni, Domine, et noli tardare.

*Sound the trumpet in Sion,  
for the day of the Lord is near:  
See, he is coming to save us.  
Winding paths will be made straight  
and rough places smooth;  
Come, Lord, and do not delay.*

Rorate cæli desuper et nubes pluant iustum:  
aperiatur terra, et germinet Salvatorem:  
Ostende nobis Domine  
misericordiam tuam  
et salutare tuum da nobis.  
Veni Domine, et noli tardare.

*Drop down ye heavens, from above, and let  
the skies pour down righteousness:  
Let the earth open and bring forth a Savior.  
Show us your mercy, O Lord,  
And grant us your salvation;  
Come, Lord, and do not delay.*

**Juan Esquivel** (c.1560 – after 1623) was the most prominent of the last generation of Spanish church composers of the Renaissance era. Although he never served in one of the major Spanish cathedrals, his music was known throughout Spain during the early seventeenth century. His principal influences were Morales (c.1500-1553) and Guerrero, and he used some of Guerrero's motets as the basis for parody masses.

*Veni Domine* was set by several composers of the period. Morales was the first, and subsequently Guerrero and Esquivel copied an unusual feature of Morales's setting: each of them adds an extra part to their usual four voices, and this part repeats the first line of the text to the same music at two alternate pitches as an ostinato throughout the piece.

Veni Domine, et noli tardare.

Veni visitare nos in pace, ut laetemur coram te corde perfecto.

*Come, Lord, and do not delay.*

*Come visit us in peace, that we may rejoice before you with a perfect heart.*

**Juan Bautista Cabanilles** (1644-1712) was born near Valencia. He sang as a choirboy in Valencia cathedral, and at the age of 21 became the cathedral's principal organist, which post he held until his old age. He is considered by

many to be the greatest Spanish Baroque composer, often being called “the Spanish Bach”. His music is often virtuosic. *Tiento* is a vague title for a piece, being roughly equivalent to “Fantasia”.

**Tomás Luis de Victoria** (c.1548-1611) was given a grant to study in Rome in his late teens. He remained in Rome for over twenty years, becoming regarded by some as on the same level as Palestrina and succeeding Palestrina as Maestro at the Pontifical Roman Seminary. He is now regarded as one of the finest composers of the late Renaissance. Many years after he returned to Spain as a royal chaplain he travelled again to Rome for two more years, during which visit he attended Palestrina’s funeral. His music combines Spanish and Italian elements. It is characterised by a more overt emotional appeal than the more placid style of Palestrina, and is more daring in its use of dissonance and “forbidden” intervals. Although Victoria is perhaps best known for his poignant and intense music, he was known to have a rather cheerful disposition.

*Ave maris stella* is a setting of a plainsong hymn in praise of Mary, and is an early example of Catholic Marian devotion. It is an example of a common Renaissance form in which the verses of the text are set alternately to plainsong and in a choral arrangement. Each choral verse contains the plainsong melody, but this may be distorted rhythmically to meet the requirements of the setting. The plainsong is in the tenor in the first and third choral verses and in the soprano in the second.

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

Sumens illud «Ave»  
Gabrielis ore,  
funda nos in pace,  
mutans Evæ nomen.

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*

*Receiving that “Ave” (hail)  
From the mouth of Gabriel,  
Establish us in peace,  
Transforming the name “Eva” (Eve)*

*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.*

Virgo singularis,  
inter omnes mitis,  
nos culpis solutos  
mites fac et castos.

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

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

Amen.

*O unique Virgin,  
Meek above all others,  
Make us, set free from (our) sins,  
Meek and chaste.*

*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;  
Honour, to the Three equally.*

*Amen.*

***O magnum mysterium*** is one of Victoria's most endearing creations. It unfolds serenely, richly warm when it expresses the wonder that even the animals behold the Infant in the manger. Then a wonderful hush as Victoria musically caresses 'O beata Virgo'. The final 'Alleluia' dances in triple time and then, with a welter of running notes, comes grandly to a close.

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

*O great mystery,  
and wonderful sacrament,  
that animals should see the new-born Lord,  
lying in a manger.  
Blessed the Virgin whose womb was worthy  
to bear Jesus Christ the Lord.  
Alleluia*

Victoria set the words ***Ave Maria*** twice, for different size choirs. The eight-part setting is one of his most splendid works; the eight parts combine into two alternating choirs, but in varying groupings of the parts, and the effect is extremely rich.

Ave Maria, gratia plena,  
Dominus tecum;  
benedicta tu in mulieribus,  
et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus.  
Sancta Maria, Regina coeli,  
dulcis et pia, o Mater Dei,  
ora pro nobis peccatoribus,  
ut cum electis te videamus.

*Hail Mary, full of grace,  
the Lord is with thee;  
blessed art thou among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.  
Holy Mary, Queen of heaven  
sweet and merciful, O Mother of God,  
pray for us sinners,  
that with the elect we may gaze upon thee.*

We move on to the second part of this concert with an intermediate kind of piece - composed, but in the popular style known as a Villancico, which was often used for what we would call Christmas carols.

**Mateo Flecha** *the elder* (1481–1553) is the earliest composer in our program, and probably the most significant Spanish composer before Guerrero. He directed the music at a number of chapels and cathedrals, and for a time was teacher to the daughters of Charles I/V. His little surviving music is largely secular, but includes some religious villancicos (a folk-song form which was also adapted for religious use).

**Riu, riu, chiu** is one of these, dwelling on the theme of the Immaculate Conception. This doctrine was a contentious issue at the time, and that may even be why this piece doesn't appear to have been published in Spain (the text is somewhat corrupt; the Italian printer clearly didn't know Spanish!). The first line is often mistranslated – but compare *guardarrío*, a modern name for the kingfisher, a bird known to be aggressive in defending its young. The title phrase, “Riu, riu, chiu”, is intended to represent the kingfisher's warning song.

#### *Chorus:*

“Riu, riu, chiu” la guarda ribera Dios guardó el lobo de nuestra cordera.

[Crying] “Riu, riu, chiu”, the kingfisher, God, kept the wolf [Satan] from our ewe-lamb  
[the Virgin Mary].

#### *Verses:*

El lobo rabioso la quiso morder, mas Dios poderoso la supo defender;  
quisole hazer que no pudiesse pecar, ni a un original esta Virgen no tuviera.

*The rabid wolf sought to bite her, but God Almighty defended her;  
He chose to make her unable to sin, not even original sin was found in her.*

Este ques nacido es el gran monarca, Christo patriarca de carne vestido;  
a nos redimido con se hazer chiquito a unquera infinito, finito se hiziera.

*This one that is born is the Great King, Christ the Patriarch clothed in flesh;  
He redeemed us by becoming a baby, though Infinite, He became finite.*

Muchas profecias lo an profetizado, y aun en nuestros dias lo hemos alcançado  
a Dios humanado vemos en el suelo, y al hombre en el cielo porque el le quisiera.

*Many prophecies foretold him, and we have seen them fulfilled.  
We see God made human on earth, and man in heaven, as He desired it.*

Yo vi mil garçones que andavan cantando, por aqui bolando haziendo mil sones,  
diziendo a gascones: ‘Gloria sea en el çielo y paz en el suelo, pues Jesus nasciera’.

*I saw a thousand young men [angels] singing as they flew, making a thousand sounds,  
chanting to Basques: ‘Glory be in the heavens, and peace on Earth, now Jesus is born’.*

Este viene a dar a los muertos vida, y viene a reparar de todos la caida;  
es la Luz del dia aqueste moçuelo; este es el cordero que San Juan dixera.

*He comes to give life to the dead, and to atone for man's fall:  
this very Babe is the Light of Day, the Lamb of whom St John spoke.*

Mira bien que os quadre que ansina lo oyera que Dios no pudiera hazer la mas que madre.  
el que era su Padre oy della nascio y el que la crio su hijo se dixera.

*Look to it! it concerns you all: God made her [Mary] a mere mother;  
her father was born of her today; and her creator her calls himself her son.*

Pues que ya tenemos lo que deseamos, todos juntos vamos, presentes llevemos;  
todos le daremos nuestra voluntad, pues a se igualar con el hombre viniera.

*Now we have what we desired let us go together to present him gifts;  
let us all submit our will to Him, for he came to be our equal.*

The pieces in the rest of the concert are all arranged from Catalan or Basque sources, ending with a Galician text in a modern setting.

***Gabriel's Message*** (The Angel Gabriel) is one of the best-loved carols. The Basque tune is arranged in this version by **Malcolm Archer** (1952- ), and the words are a paraphrase by **Sabine Baring-Gould** (1834-1924).

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 favoured lady," Gloria!

"For know, a blessed Mother thou shalt be,  
All generations laud and honour thee,  
Thy Son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold,  
Most highly favoured 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 favoured 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 favoured lady," Gloria!

***O Bethlehem*** is also of Basque origin. Both words and music are arranged by **Elizabeth Poston** (1905-1987), who wrote a number of original carols, and published new versions of old English carols; she also edited the Penguin Book of Carols, from which this carol is taken.

O Bethlehem, Heaven's fair rose its bud embowering, O Bethlehem  
O Bethlehem, had in thy heart its time for flowering, O Bethlehem  
Was there no room for God's own Son sheltered within a lowly manger?  
Now we have room, O royal stranger, But He is gone, O Bethlehem

O Bethlehem, ancient of days, within thy story Heaven was laid  
O Bethlehem, anguish must be the price of glory, for us he paid  
God's greatest gift to man was made, so to himself our gift is given  
Given, ourselves, from earth to heaven, O Bethlehem, O Bethlehem



*The Song of the Birds* is a Catalan carol, arranged here by **Enrique Ribó** (1916-1996). The words are a loose paraphrase by **James Woodhouse** (fl.2000) – the original has several other birds as well.

In this most joyful night the small birds greet the light a new daybreak is bringing.  
A light more dazzling far than any sun or star they proclaim with sweetest singing.

The eagle, king of skies, through heaven swiftly flies and cries out the glad story:  
‘This Jesus, born today, our sin hath swept away; now he brings us to his glory’.

The partridge sings these words to all the other birds on stable roof assembling:  
My nest in there I’ll build so I can see the Child in his mother’s arms a-trembling’.

**Jesús Guridi** (1886-1961) was an important late romantic composer. His style was based on Wagnerian romanticism with strong influence from Basque culture. He was Professor of Organ in Bilbao, but wrote works in a wide range of genres. *Pastorela* is more chromatic than the folk model suggested by its name, and *Villancicos* is a vigorous set of variations.

*I saw a maiden* is a fifteenth-century English text, which has been set by several composers, including Holst and Terry. But the best-known version is this one in which **Edgar Pettman** (1865-1843) set it to a Basque melody, adding an original refrain. Pettman is mainly known for his arrangements of Basque carols, of which several are still commonly used.

I saw a maiden sitten and sing:  
She lulled a child, a sweete Lording.

*Lullay, lullay, my dear son, my sweeting.*  
*Lullay, lullay, my dear heart, my own dear darling.*

This very Lord he made alle thing:  
Of lordes the Lord, of kinges the King.

There was mickle melody at that childe's birth:  
And all in heaven's bliss, they made mickle mirth.

Angels sang that night and saiden to that child:  
Now blest be thou and she, both meek and mild.

Pray we to that child and to His mother dear,  
His blessing to them that maken now cheer.

*The Infant King* (Sing lullaby) is an original text written by Sabine Baring-Gould to carry this traditional Basque tune. It is often sung in an arrangement by Edgar Pettman, but tonight we are using the equally well known version by **David Willcocks** (1919-2015).

Sing lullaby! Lullaby baby, now reclining. Sing lullaby  
Hush, do not wake the Infant King  
Angels are watching, stars are shining  
Over the place where he is lying. Sing lullaby!

Sing lullaby! Lullaby baby, now a-sleeping. Sing lullaby!  
 Hush, do not wake the Infant King  
 Soon will come sorrow with the morning  
 Soon will come bitter grief and weeping. Sing lullaby!

Sing lullaby! Lullaby baby, now a-doing. Sing lullaby!  
 Hush, do not wake the Infant King  
 Soon comes the cross, the nails, the piercing  
 Then in the grave at last reposing. Sing lullaby!

Sing lullaby! Lullaby! is the babe a-waking? Sing lullaby  
 Hush, do not wake the Infant King  
 Dreaming of Easter, gladsome morning  
 Conquering death, its bondage breaking. Sing lullaby!

***El Noi de la Mare*** (Qué li darem) is a traditional Catalan carol first made famous by Andrés Segovia regularly playing a guitar arrangement of the tune as an encore. This setting was composed by **John Rutter** (1945- ).

Què li darem an el Noi de la Mare?	<i>What will we give to the Son of the Mother?</i>
Què li darem que li sàpiga bo?	<i>What will we give that he will enjoy?</i>
Li darem panses amb unes balances,	<i>We shall give Him a tray full of raisins,</i>
Li darem figues amb un paneró.	<i>We shall give a basket of figs.</i>
Què li darem al Fillet de Maria?	<i>What will we give to the beloved of Mary?</i>
Què li darem al formós Infantó?	<i>What will we give to her beautiful Child?</i>
Panses i figues i nous i olives,	<i>Raisins and figs and nuts and olives,</i>
Panses i figues i mel i mató.	<i>Raisins and figs and honey and curd.</i>
Tam-pa-tam-tam que les figues són verdes,	<i>Tam-pan-tam-tam, the figs are green,</i>
Tam-pa-tam-tam que ja maduraran.	<i>Tam-pa-tam-tam, they will mature.</i>
Si no maduren el dia de Pasqua,	<i>If they do not mature on Easter,</i>
maduraran en el dia del Ram.	<i>They will mature on Palm Sunday.</i>

***Sant Josep i la Mare de Deu*** is another text loosely translated by James Woodhouse. The original words and music are both Catalan, and the music is arranged by **Père Jorda**.

Mary, mother of God's dear child, with Saint Joseph made a journey,  
 'Twas from Nazareth they came; it was as the sun was rising.

*Dondorondon! Mary is singing her baby to sleep.*

All the day they travel far. In the evening, faint and weary  
 They seek rest in Bethlehem; but all folk their doors are closing.  
 They have found no lodging there, far too poor they seem for pity.  
 They must seek a shelter mean all of reeds and rushes woven.

Now Saint Joseph finds wood for a fire, though the wood is far to carry.  
 In the cave, so dark, so cold, Jesus Christ is born to Mary.

The setting of *Torches* by **John Joubert** (1927-2019) is surely one of the best known modern carols. The music is his own, of course, but the words are a translation by **John Brande Trend** (1887-1958) from a traditional Galician carol

Torches, torches, run with torches all the way to Bethlehem!  
Christ is born and now lies sleeping; come and sing your song to Him!  
Ah, Roro, Roro, my baby; Ah, Roro, my love, Roro;  
Sleep you well, my heart's own darling while we sing you our Roro  
Sing, my friends, and make you merry, joy and mirth and joy again;  
Lo, He lives, the King of heaven, now and evermore. Amen

## 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. Next September he moves to Winchester College as Director of Chapel Music.

### **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. In September he was appointed Director of Music at Mansfield 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, and appeared as the solo classical artist on the Cunard flagship Queen Mary 2 twice in 2023.

James has been conducting the Cherwell Singers since 2007.

# The Cherwell Singers

## **Soprano**

Sian Cattell  
Hester Crombie  
Stephanie Gilroy \*  
Janet Johnson  
Elina Screen  
Lucy Watson  
Eve Marie Wenger

## **Alto**

Virginia Allport  
Jenny Ayres  
Elizabeth Kreager  
Ann Leggett  
Wendy Morris  
Anna Orłowska  
Vanessa Sinclair

## **Tenor**

William Harpin  
Nathan Mulcock  
Simon Murray  
David Read  
Maks Tobiasiewicz

## **Bass**

David Gillespie  
Paul Hodges  
Simon Jones  
Brian Leach

*\* Soloist in the Rutter.*

If you are interested in joining us, please contact James Brown at:

[director@cherwellsingers.org](mailto:director@cherwellsingers.org)

*Next Concert:*

## **Stanford – A Centenary Celebration**

Marking 100 years since the death of Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924)

Mansfield College chapel – Sunday, 24 March 2024.

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