

# The Cherwell Singers

present

## *Crucifixus* *pro nobis*

*Works for Passiontide*  
*by Leighton and Finzi*

<b>Dominic Bevan</b>	tenor
<b>Dónal McCann</b>	organ
<b>James Brown</b>	conductor

Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 2026  
Chapel of Mansfield College, Oxford

# Programme

Welcome Sweet and Sacred Feast

Gerald Finzi

*(Organ solo)*

Prelude, Op.25

Gerald Finzi  
(arr. Alan Ridout)

Corpus Christi Carol

Benjamin Britten

Solus ad victimam

Kenneth Leighton

## Interval

*(Organ solo)*

Fantasy on *Aus der Tiefe*

Kenneth Leighton

Crucifixus pro nobis

Kenneth Leighton

1. Christ in the Cradle
2. Christ in the Garden
3. Christ in his Passion
4. Hymn

Lo, the Full, Final Sacrifice

Gerald Finzi

Dominic Bevan      tenor

Dónal McCann      organ

James Brown      conductor

# Crucifixus pro nobis

*Choral and organ works by Kenneth Leighton and Gerald Finzi*

Passion Sunday marks the beginning of Passiontide, the period when the church reflects more deeply on Jesus' suffering leading up to his crucifixion. Falling this year on March 22nd it seems appropriate therefore to mark this observance with Kenneth Leighton's dramatic work "Crucifixus pro nobis" written for the choir of New College in 1961 and so first performed just a very short walk from our own performance in Mansfield College Chapel. With words by Patrick Carey and Phineas Fletcher, the events of the crucifixion in this four movement work are sung by the choir and a tenor soloist, who for our performance is the opera singer Dominic Bevan.

Also in the programme are the two extensive Eucharistic anthems by Gerald Finzi - "Lo, the Full, Final Sacrifice" and "Welcome Sweet and Sacred Feast" which similarly reflect on the events of Passiontide and the Last Supper. With organ solo works also by Leighton and Finzi played by Dónal McCann, this concert promises to be an intense exploration in music of this most solemn and dramatic period of the church year.

James Brown

## Notes

**Gerald Finzi** (1901-1956) was born in London, and became one of the most characteristically English composers of his generation. Despite his being an agnostic of Jewish descent, he wrote a significant amount of Christian choral music that remains consistently in the performance repertoire.

During World War I he moved to Harrogate, and began to study music privately under Ernest Farrar, who described Finzi as "very shy, but full of poetry". Finzi found him a sympathetic teacher, and Farrar's death on the Western Front affected him deeply. During those formative years, Finzi also suffered the loss of all three of his brothers, adversities that contributed to his bleak outlook on life; in the 1930s he also worried about the threat of Nazi

invasion. He found solace in the poetry of Hardy, Traherne, and other poets, many of whose poems he set as cycles of songs; he also amassed a large library of some 3,000 volumes of English poetry, philosophy and literature. From the very beginning most of his music was elegiac in tone.

After his marriage in 1933 he settled in Wiltshire, where he devoted himself to composing, and to growing apples - reputedly saving a number of rare English apple varieties from extinction.,

Finzi's varied settings of Christian poetry have greatly enriched modern choral and vocal repertoire. His motet *Welcome Sweet and Sacred Feast* (1953) was commissioned by the BBC Religious Broadcasting Department. It shares a Eucharistic theme with his earlier and better-known *Lo, the Full, Final Sacrifice* (1946), and contains some of Finzi's most impressive word painting, with a moving point of arrival at the words "O rose of Sharon! O the lily of the valley," sung to a theme which was used for the organ opening (though it was actually first written for the words).

**Henry Vaughan** (1621-95) credited his conversion to the Church of England to the sacred poetry and sermons of George Herbert. His poems are admired for their long-drawn alliterations, frequent monosyllables, and development of mystical themes. This poem, *The Holy Communion*, was directly inspired by Herbert's hymn *Welcome Sweet and Sacred Cheer*.

Welcome sweet and sacred feast; welcome life!  
Dead I was, and deep in trouble;  
But grace, and blessing came with thee so rife  
That they have quicken'd even dry stubble.  
Thus souls their bodies animate,  
And thus, at first, when things were rude,  
Dark, void, and crude  
They, by thy Word, their beauty had, and date;  
All were by thee,  
And still must be,  
Nothing that is, or lives,  
But hath his quick'nings, and reprieves  
As thy hand opes, or shuts;  
Healings, and cuts,  
Darkness, and day-light, life, and death  
Are but mere leaves turn'd by the breath.

But that great darkness at thy death  
When the veil broke with thy last breath,  
Did make us see  
The way to thee.

Was't not enough that thou hadst paid the price  
And given us eyes  
When we had none, but thou must also take  
Us by the hand  
And keep us still awake,  
When we would sleep,  
Or from thee creep,  
Who without thee cannot stand?

Was't not enough to lose thy breath  
And blood by an accursed death,  
But thou must also leave  
To us that did bereave  
Thee of them both, these seals the means  
That should both cleanse  
And keep us so,  
Who wrought thy woe?

O rose of *Sharon*! O the lily *[N.B. the italics are the poet's]*  
Of the valley!  
How art thou now, thy flock to keep,  
Become both *food*, and *shepherd* to thy sheep.

Finzi wrote no solo organ music. However, a considerable number of his pieces for other instruments have been arranged for organ. Tonight we will hear an arrangement of his *Prelude for String Orchestra, Op.25* made by the composer Alan Ridout (1934-96).

**Benjamin Britten** (1913-76) is widely considered to have brought greatness back to British music, picking up in some respects where Purcell had left off. His musical talent emerged in early childhood, and he is one of the few composers to have works from their teenage years regularly performed. His upbringing was religious, but although not a church-goer, he wrote a number of works based on religious texts. However, few of them are suitable for regular church use, and those were mainly written for special occasions.

Britten extracted the *Corpus Christi Carol* (1962) as a setting for solo treble and piano or organ from his choral variations *A Boy was Born*. The tune is based on a mediæval theme, adapted by Britten to suit the fifteenth-century words. The words have been variously interpreted; some see the knight as the Fisher King, guarding the Grail with wounded legs, while others see the knight as Christ himself, bleeding for the sins of humanity with Mary looking on. It has also been linked with the cult of the Easter Sepulchre.

He bare him up, he bare him down,  
He bare him into an orchard brown.

*Lully lullay, lully lullay,*

*The falcon hath borne my make [=mate, love] away.*

In that orchard there was an hall  
That was hanged with purple and pall,  
And in that hall there was a bed.  
It was hanged with gold so red.

*Lully etc*

In that bed there lieth a knight,  
His woundes bleeding, day and night.  
By that bedside kneeleth a may, [=maid]  
And she weepeth both night and day.

*Lully etc*

And by that bedside there standeth a stone,  
*Corpus Christi* written thereon.

**Kenneth Leighton** (1929-88) was born and bred in Yorkshire, and is regarded as one of the most distinguished of British post-war composers. He believed that his musical training as a chorister at Wakefield Cathedral was responsible for his ability to respond emotionally to Christian subjects and text. He held the Reid Chair of Music at Edinburgh University from 1970 until his early death.

His early works, although founded in church traditions, show the influence of atonality and chromaticism. He developed a distinctive compositional flair with biting chromaticism, tight counterpoint, harmony often in fourths and fifths (providing a stark modernity) and a fluently organic way of steadily building tension; he also explored serial methods and a degree of performer choice in his instrumental music. His church music was, unsurprisingly, less radical; but he was never afraid to bring distinctively modern means of expression into what has traditionally been a conservative arena.

The Latin hymn *Solus ad victimam* was written for the third nocturnal office on Good Friday at his wife Héloïse's convent by the mediaeval French theologian, **Peter Abelard** (1079-1142). Leighton's setting of the translation by **Helen Wadell** (1889-1965) 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.

The *Fantasy on 'Aus der Tiefe'* is the second of Leighton's *Six Fantasies on Hymn Tunes Op.72*, composed in 1975 shortly after he was appointed Reid Professor of Music at the University of Edinburgh. It is a dark, brooding meditation on the hymn tune 'Aus der Tiefe', most commonly sung at the start of Lent to the words 'Forty Days and Forty Nights'. Leighton does not shy away from stacking the polyphonic lines even if it results in uncomfortable dissonances. The tune, though alluded to in the opening material, first appears fully in the pedals.

Leighton's cantata *Crucifixus pro nobis*, was written in 1961 for the choir of New College, Oxford. It combines a directness of expression and quite fierce, uncompromising harmonic language with a great lyrical beauty, anguished in its response to the powerful poems of **Patrick Carey** (1623-57) who was brought up and lived as a Catholic, but gave up his faith in 1651.

The work is in four sections. *Christ in the Cradle* is a reverie for soloist and organ alone. Then the agony of Christ's time of doubt is pictured in *Christ in the Garden*, built on strong, often homophonic writing for choir. In *Christ in his Passion* a winding chromatic line for the soloist leads an accumulation of choral sound - the response to the horror of the Passion is never over-dramatic, though, and the music subsides to a pianissimo 'Thou didst make Him all those torments bear', and the soloist takes over to point Carey's moral: "If then his love / Do thy soul move / Sigh out a groan / Weep down a melting tear'.

The final section turns to the verse of **Phineas Fletcher** (1582-1650) for a concluding *Hymn* which has something of the same effect as the final chorale in a Bach cantata, summing up the response of all to the events which have

just been meditated upon. A great tension has been building, each movement ending with an image of tears, weeping at the inevitable crucifixion. The reflection concerns the inevitability of our sins in the knowledge that a great sacrifice was made to secure our forgiveness.

### 1: Christ in the Cradle

Look, how he shakes for cold!  
How pale his lips are grown!  
Wherein his limbs to fold  
Yet mantle has he none.  
His pretty feet and hands  
(Of late more pure and white  
Than is the snow  
That pains them so)  
Have lost their candour quite.  
His lips are blue  
(Where roses grow),  
He's frozen everywhere:  
All th' heat he has  
Joseph, alas  
Gives in a groan;  
                  or Mary in a tear.

### 3: Christ in his Passion

What bruises do I see!  
What hideous stripes are those!  
Could any cruel be  
Enough, to give such blows?  
Look, how they bind his arms  
And vex his soul with scorns,  
Upon his hair  
They make him wear  
A crown of piercing thorns.  
Through hands and feet  
Sharp nails they beat:  
And now the cross they rear:  
Many look on;  
But only John  
Stands by to sigh,  
                  Mary to shed a tear.

### 2: Christ in the Garden

Look, how he glows for heat!  
What flames come from his eyes!  
'Tis blood that he does sweat,  
Blood his bright forehead dyes:  
See, see! It trickles down:  
Look, how it showers amain!  
Through every pore  
His blood runs o'er,  
And empty leaves each vein.  
His very heart  
Burns in each part;  
A fire his breast doth sear:  
For all this flame,  
To cool the same  
He only breathes a sign,  
                  and weeps a tear.

Why did he shake for cold?  
Why did he glow for heat?  
Dissolve that frost he could,  
He could call back that sweat.  
Those bruises, stripes, bonds, taunts,  
Those thorns, which thou didst see,  
Those nails, that cross,  
His own life's loss,  
Why, oh, why suffered he?  
'Twas for thy sake.  
Thou, thou didst make  
Him all those torments bear:  
If then his love  
Do thy soul move,  
Sigh out a groan,  
                  weep down a melting tear.

#### 4: Hymn

Drop, drop, slow tears, and bathe those beauteous feet  
Which brought from Heaven the news and Prince of Peace:

Cease not, wet eyes, His mercy to entreat;  
To cry for vengeance sin doth never cease.

In your deep floods drown all my faults and fears;  
Nor let His eye see sin, but through my tears.

The anthem *Lo, the Full, Final Sacrifice* memorializes the celebration of the Eucharist. Finzi assembled the text from two poems of **Richard Crashaw** (1613-49), an English poet of the Metaphysical tradition. These two poems, “Adoro Te” and “Lauda Sion Salvatorem”, are themselves free translations of Latin hymns by **St Thomas Aquinas** (c. 1225–1274). Finzi did not set the entirety of the poems; he instead excerpted and re-ordered selected stanzas from Crashaw’s originals to create his own composite text for the work.

The music of the piece adheres to a conservative tonal idiom, albeit one that modulates frequently. The highly sectionalized form follows the stanza divisions of the text, featuring episodes of homophonic textures as well as short stretches of polyphony. The text is set in a syllabic style, except for the melismatic *Amen* that closes the piece.

Lo, the full, final sacrifice  
On which all figures fix’t their eyes,  
The ransomed Isaac, and his ram;  
The Manna, and the Paschal lamb.  
Jesu Master, just and true!  
Our Food, and faithful Shepherd too!  
O let that love which thus makes thee  
Mix with our low Mortality,  
Lift our lean Souls, and set us up  
Convictors of thine own full cup,  
Coheirs of Saints. That so all may  
Drink the same wine; and the same way.  
Nor change the Pasture, but the Place  
To feed of Thee in thine own Face.  
O dear Memorial of that Death  
Which lives still, and allows us breath!  
Rich, Royal food! Bountiful Bread!  
Whose use denies us to the dead!

Live ever Bread of loves, and be  
My life, my soul, my surer self to me.  
Help Lord, my Faith, my Hope increase;  
And fill my portion in thy peace.  
Give love for life; nor let my days  
Grow, but in new powers to thy name and praise.  
Rise, Royal Sion! rise and sing  
Thy soul's kind shepherd, thy heart's King.  
Stretch all thy powers; call if you can  
Harps of heaven to hands of man.  
This sovereign subject sits above  
The best ambition of thy love.  
Lo the Bread of Life, this day's  
Triumphant Text provokes thy praise.  
The living and life-giving bread,  
To the great twelve distributed  
When Life, himself, at point to die  
Of love, was his own Legacy.  
O soft self-wounding Pelican!  
Whose breast weeps Balm for wounded man.  
All this way bend thy benign flood  
To a bleeding Heart that gasps for blood.  
That blood, whose least drops sovereign be  
To wash my worlds of sins from me.  
Come love! Come Lord! and that long day  
For which I languish, come away.  
When this dry soul those eyes shall see,  
And drink the unseal'd source of thee.  
When Glory's sun faith's shades shall chase,  
And for thy veil give me thy Face.

Amen.

## Biographies

### **Dominic Bevan** Tenor

Dominic is a graduate of the Royal College of Music, where he was awarded a Sir Gordon Palmer scholarship. He studies with Timothy Evans-Jones. Dominic's undergraduate degree was in English and French Law, part of which he studied at the Sorbonne in Paris, where he lived for many years. After five years working in financial services, he decided to embrace a career as a tenor soloist.

In 2019 he was a finalist of the Wagner Society competition at the Wigmore Hall. Past opera roles include Tamino in Zauberflöte and Rodolfo in La Bohème for Westminster Opera, and Nemorino in L'Elisir d'Amore for Opera de Baugé. In November later this year he will be singing Gerontius in the Dream of Gerontius with the London Mozart Players.

### **Dónal McCann** Piano

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 Director of Chapel Music at Winchester College.

### **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 School as well as pursuing freelance work as an organist and pianist. He is also Organist at St John's College. From 2006-2024 he was a tenor lay clerk in the choir of New College, Oxford, and in 2023 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  
Judith Homann  
Janet Johnson  
Elina Screen  
Judith Ward  
Lucy Watson  
Eve-Marie Wenger

## **Tenor**

Simon Murray  
David Read  
Justin Snoxall  
Brian Tibbels

## **Alto**

Jenny Ayres  
Elizabeth Kreager  
Ann Leggett  
Wendy Morris  
Claire Naylor  
Anna Orłowska

## **Bass**

Paul Hodges  
Matthew Holmes  
Simon Jones  
Simeon Mitchell  
Kieran Suchet

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

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

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](http://www.cherwellsingers.org)