



The Sixteen at Christmas

The Sixteen & Harry Christophers

Narration by Simon Callow

15-16 December 2020

Cadogan Hall



The Sixteen at Christmas

Programme

Traditional The truth from above

Will Todd My Lord has come

Palestrina Rorate caeli

Howard Skempton Adam lay ybounden

Byrd Rorate caeli

Traditional Gabriel's message

Narration

Nicholas Allan Jesus' Christmas Party

Plainsong Veni, veni Emmanuel

Jonathan Dove I am the day

Traditional Wexford Carol

Lassus Laetentur caeli

Ord Adam lay ybounden

Byrd Laetentur caeli

Narration

Clement Clarke Moore A Visit From St Nicholas

Leontovich Carol of the Bells

Cecilia McDowall Now may we singen

The Truth from Above

William Wordsworth, in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, proposed that poetic truth offers greater understanding of life than anything revealed by other disciplines: 'Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge', the immortal, infinite measure of all human experience. Its language, he maintained, should be accessible to all, not reserved for elites or initiates. The eloquent poetry of Christmas and the music that carries so much of it elevate the experiences of ordinary life to the extraordinary and the miraculous, recalling the particulars of a child born in squalid conditions and translating them into universal truths of unconditional compassion, loving-kindness and forgiveness. These are the essential truths that, like the ballads and sonnets of a great poet, touch the heart long after the last helping of turkey has been served and the tinsel packed away for another year.

The Sixteen's Christmas programme at Cadogan Hall takes its theme from the opening line of a traditional English folk carol, so simple, so affecting in its expression of God's love and of mankind's habitual rejection of it. *This is the truth sent from above* is performed this evening in the version collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams in Herefordshire in 1909 and arranged by him for four-part choir. Within five short stanzas and a melody built from six notes it manages to span the creation, mankind's fall from grace, God's promise

of salvation and Christ's example as teacher and redeemer – the truth from above.

Myth, symbolism and truth coincide in the texts of countless carols and Christmas hymns. The words of *Adam lay ybounden*, which survive in a fifteenth-century manuscript, deal with the *felix culpa* or 'happy fault' that led Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. Their anonymous author presents the joyful occasion not as the cause of mankind's redemption through Christ's passion but of the Virgin Mary's elevation as queen of heaven; perhaps the carol was intended for a courtly audience and to flatter a living queen. Boris Ord's sonorous setting was written for the annual Christmas Eve Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at King's College, Cambridge, where he served as organist and director of music between 1929 and 1957. Howard Skempton takes a more contemplative approach to the text, projected into a hauntingly beautiful melody for soprano and its mantra-like choral accompaniment.

Adam's fall and the long road to the Crucifixion are unlikely to be uppermost in the minds of most Christmas congregations. The nativity is above all a time for joyful celebration, a point not lost on William Byrd in his glorious setting for five-part choir of *Laetentur caeli* or that by his older contemporary Orlande de Lassus. Byrd, a member of Elizabeth I's Chapel Royal, demonstrates here his complete mastery of imitative counterpoint and feeling for the dramatic tension built into the words of this processional respond for Advent. The clear lines and irresistible rhythmic

energy of Lassus' short setting, published six years before Byrd's in 1569, show why he was regarded during his lifetime as one of Europe's finest composers.

Rorate caeli, sung at Mass and vespers during Advent, takes its words from the Book of Isaiah. The text conveys the yearning of the Old Testament's patriarchs and prophets for the coming of the Messiah, the 'anointed one' or saviour. Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, chapel master of the papal choir in Rome, was regarded by many as the saviour of church music or at least the champion of the new, unadorned style of polyphony favoured by the reformers of the Roman Catholic Council of Trent. His setting of *Rorate caeli* for five voices strikes an ideal balance between words and music, giving prominence to every syllable without impeding the flow of the motet's exuberant melodic lines or limiting its ingenious combinations and contrasts of choral textures.

Advent in the Christian calendar is traditionally a time of fasting and penitence, of watching and waiting for the Lord, of contemplating death and the Day of Judgement, and preparing for the Second Coming. The plainchant hymn *Veni, veni Emanuel*, sung at vespers during Advent, calls for the Messiah's return; its folk-like melody, performed by The Sixteen in a version preserved in a fifteenth-century French manuscript, expresses the expectation shared by those awaiting the birth of 'God's dear son'. Jonathan Dove's *I am the day*, composed in 1999 to words appropriate to Advent from the Book of Revelation

and the legend of St Christopher, weaves strands of the *Veni, veni Emmanuel* melody into its second section, voiced by the choir's upper voices. The composition's bold contrasts of textures and rhythms suggest the infinite, eternal nature of Jesus the son and God the father, the alpha and omega, the first and the last, a central theme of the Advent season.

The sense of a great change to come courses through the traditional Basque tune of *Gabriel's Message*, set to words reworked and refined by the Anglican priest and folksong collector Sabine Baring-Gould. It surfaces again in the charming *Wexford Carol*, which distils the Christmas story's essence into a few verses first notated in the early 1900s in Enniscorthy in County Wexford.

Will Todd received a priceless musical education as a boy chorister in Durham before achieving prominence as jazz pianist, composer, conductor and broadcaster. *My Lord has come* grows out of the near silence of a drone bass to reveal the composer's heartfelt response to his own carol text, by turns introspective and dramatic. The piece was chosen for inclusion in a new Christmas anthology published by Oxford University Press in 2011 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of *Carols for Choirs I*. 'Such an exciting moment, as I have wonderful memories of singing music from the earlier *Carols for Choirs* in my formative years,' Todd recalls.

Cecilia McDowall recalls the confident spirit and verse-and-refrain style of late medieval carols in *Now may we sing*, written in 2006 for the Bedford-

based Concord Singers. The piece catches the ear with its dancing melody, introduced by the sopranos, taken up by the lower voice parts as the carol unfolds and enriched by bell-like harmonies.

During the early 1900s Mykola Dmytrovych Leontovych collected the peasant songs and dances he heard while working as a music teacher in the Podolia region of western Ukraine. His arrangement of the traditional New Year's song, *Shchedryk*, became an international hit following its first performance in the United States in 1921, given by the Ukrainian National Chorus and their charismatic conductor, Alexander Koshetz. The choir's North American tours established *Shchedryk*'s popularity, a position secured in the 1930s with the publication of Peter Wilhousky's English-language version, *Carol of the Bells*.

Andrew Stewart, 2020

Texts and translations

Traditional The truth from above

This is the truth sent from above,
The truth of God, the God of love,
Therefore don't turn me from your door,
But hearken all both rich and poor.

The first thing which I do relate
Is that God did man create,
The next thing which to you I'll tell
Woman was made with man to dwell.

Thus we were heirs to endless woes,
Till God the Lord did interpose,
And so a promise soon did run
That he would redeem us by his Son.

Our blest Redeemer did appear;
He here did live, and here did preach,
And many thousands he did teach.

Thus he in love to us behaved,
To show us how we must be saved;
And if you want to know the way,
Be pleased to hear what he did say

Will Todd My Lord has come

Shepherds, called by angels,
called by love and angels;
no place for them but a stable.
My Lord has come.

Sages, searching for stars,
searching for love in heaven;
no place for them but a stable.
My Lord has come.

His love will hold me,
His love will cherish me,
love will cradle me.

Lead me, lead me to see Him,
sages and shepherds and angels;
no place for me but a stable.
My Lord has come.

Palestrina Rorate caeli

Rorate coeli desuper,
et nubes pluant justum;
aperiatur terra, et germinet salvatorem.
Ostende nobis Domine, misericordiam tuam,
et salutare tuum da nobis.
Veni Domine, et noli tardare.
Alleluia.

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

Howard Skempton Adam lay ybounden

Adam lay ybounden,
Bounden in a bond;
Four thousand winter
Thought he not too long.
And all was for an apple,
An apple that he took,
As clerkés finden
Written in theiré book.

Ne had the apple taken been,
The apple taken been,
Ne haddé never our lady
Abeen heaven's queen.
Blessed be the time
That apple taken was!
Therefore we may singen,
Deo gracias!

Byrd Rorate caeli

Rorate caeli desuper,
et nubes pluant justum:
aperiatur terra, et germinet salvatorem.
Benedixisti, Domine, terram tuam:
avertisti captivitatem Jacob.
Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto.
Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper,
et in saecula saeculorum.
Amen.

*Drop down ye heavens, from above,
and let the skies pour down righteousness:
Let the earth open and bring forth a Saviour.
Lord, thou hast blessed thy land:
Thou hast turned away the captivity of Jacob.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy
Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall
be, world without end.
Amen.*

Traditional Gabriel's Message

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 know 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!

Plainsong Veni, veni Emmanuel

Veni, veni, Emmanuel,
captivum solve Israel,
qui gemit in exilio,
privatus Dei Filio.
Gaude! Gaude! Emmanuel,
nascetur pro te Israel!

Veni, O Sapientia,
quae hic disponis omnia:
veni, viam prudentiae
ut doceas et gloriae.
Gaude! Gaude! etc.

Veni, veni, Adonai,
qui populo in Sinai
legem dedisti vertice
in maiestate gloriae.
Gaude! Gaude! etc.

Veni, O Jesse Virgula,
ex hostis tuos ungula,
de spectu tuos tartari
educ et antro barathri.
Gaude! Gaude! etc.

Veni, Clavis Davidica,
regna reclude caelica:
fac iter tutum superum,
et claude vias inferum.
Gaude! Gaude! etc.

*O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here,
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*O come, Thou Wisdom, from on high,
and order all things far and nigh:
to us the path of knowledge show,
and teach us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! etc.*

*O come, O come, Thou Lord of might,
who to thy tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times did give the law,
in cloud, and majesty, and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! etc.*

*O come, Thou Rod of Jesse's stem,
from every foe deliver them
that trust Thy mighty power to save,
and give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! etc.*

*O come, Thou Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home:
make safe the way that leads on high,
that we no more have cause to sigh.
Rejoice! Rejoice! etc.*

Veni, veni, O Oriens,
solare nos adveniens:
noctis depelle nebulas,
dirasque mortis tenebras.
Gaude! Gaude! etc.

*O come, Thou Dayspring from on high,
and cheer us by thy drawing nigh:
disperse the gloomy clouds of night
and death's dark shadow put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! etc.*

Veni, veni, Rex Gentium,
veni, Redemptor omnium,
ut salvas tuos famulos
peccati sibi conscios.
Gaude! Gaude! etc.

*O come, Desire of nations, bind
in one the hearts of all mankind:
bid every strife and quarrel cease
and fill the world with heaven's peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! etc.*

Jonathan Dove I am the day

Soon to be born, I am the day soon to be born.
I am alpha and o, and omega, I am the day soon to be born.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel, O come, O come, Emmanuel.
I am the sprig from the root of David and the bright star of
the morning.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee.
I am alpha and o, and omega, I am the day soon to be born.
I am the first and the last, the beginning and the end.
I am the day soon to be born, I am the sprig from the root of David.
I am the alpha and the omega, I am the sprig from the root of David.
I am the first and the last, I am the sprig from the root of David
and the bright star of the morning.
Soon to be born, soon.

Traditional Wexford Carol

Good people all, this Christmas time,
Consider well and bear in mind
What our good God for us has done,
In sending his beloved Son.
With Mary holy we should pray
To God with love this Christmas Day;
In Bethlehem upon that morn
There was a blessed Messiah born

The night before that happy tide,
The noble Virgin and her guide
Were long time seeking up and down
To find a lodging in the town.
But mark how all things came to pass:
From ev'ry door repell'd, alas!
As long foretold, their refuge all
Was but a humble ox's stall.

Lassus Laetentur caeli

Laetentur caeli et exsultet terra:
commoveatur mare, et plenitudo ejus:
gaudebunt campi, et omnia quae in eis sunt.

Exsultabunt omnia ligna
silvarum a facie Domini, quia venit:
quoniam venit judicare terram.

*Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad,
let the sea make a noise and the fullness thereof;
the fields and all things that are in them shall be joyful.*

*Then shall all the trees of the wood
rejoice before the face of the Lord,
because He cometh to judge the earth.*

Ord Adam lay ybounden

Adam lay ybounden,
Bounden in a bond;
Four thousand winter
Thought he not too long.
And all was for an apple,
An apple that he took,
As clerkés finden
Written in theiré book.

Ne had the apple taken been,
The apple taken been,
Ne haddé never our lady
Abeen heaven's queen.
Blessed be the time
That apple taken was!
Therefore we may singen,
Deo gracias!

Byrd Laetentur caeli

Laetentur coeli et exultet terra.
Iubilare montes laudem,
quia Dominus noster veniet,
et pauperum suorum miserebitur.

Orietur in diebus tuis iustitia,
et abundantia pacis;
et pauperum suorum miserebitur

*Let the heavens rejoice and earth be glad;
you mountains sing forth your praise,
for our Lord will come
and will take pity on his poor people.*

*In your days justice will dawn,
and the fullness of peace;
and will take pity on his poor people*

Leontovich Carol of the Bells

Hark how the bells,
sweet silver bells,
all seem to say,
“throw cares away.”

Christmas is here,
bringing good cheer,
to young and old,
meek and the bold,

Ding dong ding dong
that is their song
with joyful ring
all caroling

One seems to hear
words of good cheer
from ev’rywhere
filling the air

Oh, how they pound,
raising the sound,
o’er hill and dale,
telling their tale,

Gaily they ring
while people sing
songs of good cheer,
Christmas is here,

Merry, merry, merry, merry Christmas,
Merry, merry, merry, merry Christmas,
On, on they send,
on without end,
their joyful tone
to every home.

Cecilia McDowall Now may we singen

Refrain:
Now may we singen as it is.
Quod puer natus est nobis.

The Babe to us that now is born,
Wonderful works He hath ywrought,
He would not loss what was forlorn,
But boldly again it bought;

*And thus it is Forsooth ywis,
He asketh nought but that is His.
Now may we singen as it is.
Quod puer natus est nobis.*

This bargain loved He right well,
The price was high and bought full dear.
Who would suffer and for us feel
As did that Prince withouten peer?

And thus it is Forsooth ywis etc.

His ransom for us hath ypaid;
Good reason have we to be His.
Be mercy asked and He be prayed,
Who may deserve the heavenly bliss.

And thus it is Forsooth ywis etc.

To some purpose God made man;
I trust well to salvation.
What was his blood that from him ran
But fence against damnation?

And thus it is Forsooth ywis etc.

Almighty God in Trinity,
Thy mercy we pray with whole heart,
Thy mercy may all woe make fell
And dangerous dread from us to start.

And thus it is Forsooth ywis etc.

The Sixteen

Whether performing a simple medieval hymn or expressing the complex musical and emotional language of a contemporary choral composition, The Sixteen does so with qualities common to all great ensembles. Tonal warmth, rhythmic precision and immaculate intonation are clearly essential to the mix. But it is the courage and intensity with which The Sixteen makes music that speak above all to so many people.

Celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2019 The Sixteen gave its first concert in 1979 under the direction of Founder and Conductor Harry Christophers CBE. Their pioneering work since has made a profound impact on the performance of choral music and attracted a large new audience, not least as 'The Voices of Classic FM' and through BBC television's *Sacred Music* series.

The voices and period-instrument players of The Sixteen are at home in over five centuries of music, a breadth reflected in their annual Choral Pilgrimage to Britain's great cathedrals and sacred spaces, regular appearances at the world's leading concert halls, and award-winning recordings for The Sixteen's CORO and other labels.

Recent highlights include the world premiere of James MacMillan's *Stabat mater* (at the Barbican in 2016 and live streamed from the Sistine Chapel in 2018), and his *Fifth Symphony 'Le grand inconnu'* (2019 Edinburgh International Festival and the Lincoln Centre, New York), both commissioned for Harry Christophers and The Sixteen by the Genesis Foundation, an ambitious ongoing series of Handel oratorios, a debut tour of China, and a new, specially-commissioned series of programmes presented by Sir Simon Russell Beale entitled *A Choral Odyssey*. All five programmes are available to watch online until 31 January 2021 and tickets can be purchased directly from www.thesixteen.com.

Harry Christophers CBE

Harry Christophers stands among today's great champions of choral music. In partnership with The Sixteen, he has set benchmark standards for the performance of everything from late medieval polyphony to important new works by contemporary composers.

Under his leadership The Sixteen has established its hugely successful annual *Choral Pilgrimage*, created the *Sacred Music* series for BBC television, and developed an acclaimed period-instrument orchestra. Highlights of their recent work include an Artist Residency at Wigmore Hall, a large-scale tour of Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610*, the world premiere of James MacMillan's *Fifth Symphony* at the 2019 Edinburgh International Festival and a live-streamed performance of MacMillan's *Stabat mater* from the Sistine Chapel. Their future projects, meanwhile, comprise a new series devoted to Purcell and an ongoing survey of Handel's dramatic oratorios.

Harry Christophers has served as Artistic Director of the Handel and Haydn Society since 2008, is Principal Guest Conductor of the City of Granada Orchestra and has worked as guest conductor with, among others, the London Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic, the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra and the Deutsches Kammerphilharmonie. Christophers' extensive commitment to opera has embraced productions for English National Opera and Lisbon Opera and

work with the Granada, Buxton and Grange festivals.

He recently collaborated with BBC Radio 3 presenter Sara Mohr-Pietsch to produce a book entitled *A New Heaven: Choral Conversations* in celebration of the group's 40th anniversary.

Harry Christophers was awarded a CBE in the Queen's 2012 Birthday Honours list. He is an Honorary Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, as well as the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, and has Honorary Doctorates in Music from the Universities of Leicester, Northumbria, Canterbury Christ Church and Kent.



Simon Callow CBE

Simon Callow is an actor, author and director. He studied at Queen's University, Belfast, and then trained as an actor at the Drama Centre in London. He joined the National Theatre in 1979, where he created the role of Mozart in Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*. His many one-man shows include *Tuesday's at Tesco's*, *The Mystery of Charles Dickens*, *Being Shakespeare*, *De Profundis*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Inside Wagner's Head*, *Juvenalia* and *The Man Jesus*. He has appeared in many films including his one man version of *A Christmas Carol*, *A Room with a View*, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Shakespeare in Love*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Viceroy's House*, and *Hampstead*. Recent credits include *Blue Iguana*, *Victoria & Abdul* and *The Man Who In-vented Christmas*.

Simon's recent TV credits include *Dead Room*, Henry Palmer in *The Rebel*, *Death in Paradise*, The Duke of Sandringham in the television series *Outlander*, Galavant and *The Life of Rock* With Brian Pern. He directed *Shirley Valentine* in the West End and on Broadway, *Single Spies* at the NT and *Carmen Jones* at the Old Vic, as well as the film of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. He has written biographies of Oscar Wilde, Charles Laughton and Charles Dickens, and three autobiographical books: *Being An Actor*, *Love Is Where It Falls*, and *My Life in Pieces*. The third volume of his massive Orson Welles biography, *One Man Band* was published in 2015; *Being Wagner: the Triumph of the Will* a biography of Wagner, was released in 2017. Music is his great passion, and he has made many

appearances with the LPO, the LSO and the LMP.



Performers

The Sixteen

Harry Christophers CBE conductor

Simon Callow CBE narrator

Soprano

Julie Cooper

Katy Hill

Kirsty Hopkins

Alexandra

Kidgell

Charlotte

Mobbs

Emilia Morton

Alto

Daniel Collins

Edward

McMullan

Elisabeth Paul

Kim Porter

Tenor

Simon Berridge

Mark Dobell

George Pooley

Tom Robson

Bass

Ben Davies

Eamonn Dougan

Tim Jones

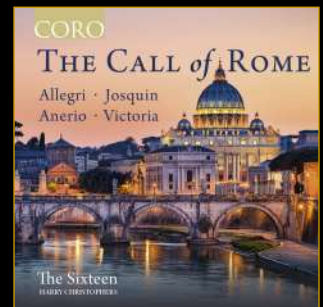
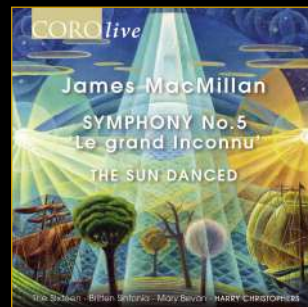
Rob Macdonald



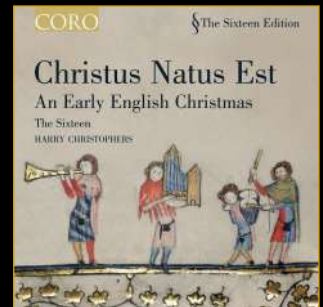
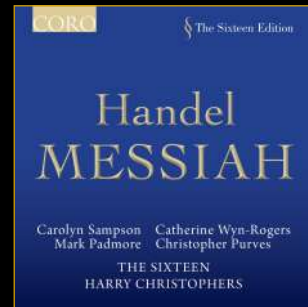
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