

Meridian

The Spirit of Christmas Present
Elysian Singers of London - Director Sam Laughton

CDE 84601

Meridian

A Natural Sound Recording

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Recorded 8th- 9th January 2011
at Cranleigh School, Surrey.

Recorded by Richard Hughes
Produced by Susanne Stanzeleit
Assistant engineer Karen Thomas

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The Spirit of Christmas Present

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Alice Ruffle, Andrew Cruise, Andy Chan, Anna Simpson, Anne Webster, Charlotte Dodson,
Charlotte Lary, Christopher Whitehouse, Claire Valencia, David Hardwick,
Deirdre Hollingsworth, Emily Fletcher, Geraldine Mynors, Helen Dickinson, Helly Seeley,
Jo Dew-Jones, Jo Reynolds, Joe Dodson, Jonathan Glasspool, Kathryn Smale,
Katie Saunders, Lois Gallagher, Lucy Budd, Mark Galtrey, Naveen Rajendran,
Richard Warren, Soo-Lin Lui, Stephen Cviic, Tony Zacaroli

www.elysiansingers.com

Recorded 8th-9th January 2011 at Cranleigh School, Surrey.

This is the first recording on the school's Mander organ, completed in 2010. It was conceived as a teaching and practice instrument, with the aim of presenting as wide a palette of tonal colours as possible within a limited number of stops. To enhance the experience of the earlier repertoire, a mild unequal temperament was used, although it is hoped that this will only add to, rather than detract from, the listener's enjoyment of this contemporary repertoire.

The season of Christmas has always involved a combination of tradition and renewal: the gatherings of family and old friends, the playing of traditional games and the family reminiscences, intermingled with the excitement of opening presents and discovering new books and toys; or the celebration of the year about to end mixed with anticipation of the year about to begin.

So it is with Christmas music: the love of traditional carols and songs is equalled by the constant search for new ways to express the Christmas message, or indeed to seek out a new message altogether. Leaving aside the honourable search for a truly authentic manner of performing music from the past, modern composers have sought out the past in two ways. Firstly, by finding new inspiration from poetry composed over the centuries, and in this regard the medieval, often anonymous, poets appear to provide the richest, most evergreen source of material for original compositions. Secondly, by arranging, incorporating, or recomposing, traditional melodies in a modern context. And this CD is a collection of the finest examples of both these forms of Christmas music, all created in the 21st century.

The backbone of the disc is provided by the various movements of James Whitbourn's *Missa Carolae*, which was commissioned for Rochester Cathedral and first performed there during the Eucharist for Christmas Night, 24 December 2004, in celebration of the 1400th anniversary of the cathedral's foundation. As the composer writes: 'The work, though not literally for dancing, is intended to invoke a dance-like spirit, which is true to the origin of the carol as a simple dance form.' The Mass incorporates a number of melodies from traditional Christmas Carols:

Processional Introit

Guillò, pran ton tamborin!

Kyrie eleison

Noël nouvelet! (French trad)

Gloria in excelsis

Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen (Praetorius)

God rest ye merry gentlemen (English trad)

Sanctus & Benedictus

In dulci jubilo (German trad)

Remember, O thou man (Ravenscroft)

Agnus Dei *W lobie le y*

('Infant holy': Polish trad)

Ironically, Thomas Ravenscroft's *Remember, O thou man*, having provided the melody only for the Benedictus of the *Missa Carolae*, has also provided the text only for an entirely new composition by Bob Chilcott. Written as a modern spiritual, this short gem is a masterful example of Chilcott's total ease in the choral medium, as well as his abiding love of jazz.

The remainder of the pieces can be grouped into a number of categories. Two carols are, like the *Missa Carolae*, simply arrangements of well-known tunes and texts. *The Angel Gabriel* was already 'recomposed' in that Sabine Baring-Gould wrote entirely new words to a traditional Basque melody. Howard Goodall has newly arranged it for his ethereal female choir Enchanted Voices, accompanied by cello and organ. Jonathan Rathbone's rich close-harmony setting of *Silent Night* also had a specific group in mind, this time the Swingle Singers.

Two medieval texts celebrating the Virgin Mary are very familiar from other modern settings, but have found new life in the 21st century. In *I sing of a maiden*, John McCabe has found an extraordinary stillness (in an echo of the text) in the dialogue between a solo quartet



and the main choir. By contrast, Francis Pott's *Hymn to the Virgin* employs a fast-moving harmonic style to provide a pulsating reflection of the macaronic text.

18th century poetry is represented by carols using nature imagery to illustrate the Christmas story. In *Spring in Winter* (commissioned by King's College, Cambridge for the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols in 2001), John Woolrich treats the words of the troubled Christopher Smart in an exotic through-composed fashion. By contrast, the Irish *Carol of the Birds* inspired Stephen McNeff to a more 'traditional'-sounding melody, albeit with naturalistic sounds interposed in the refrains.

The youngest composers here represented are James Lavino and Tarik O'Regan. Lavino's *Before the paling of the stars* is a haunting setting of 'A Christmas Carol' by Christina Rossetti, with its 'Christmas-card' treatment of the Nativity. O'Regan however has turned to the contemporary poet Mark Pryce who brings a modern social awareness to bear on the image of the child Jesus. In *Bring rest, sweet dreaming child* (commissioned by Sam Laughton and the Elysian Singers in 2004), O'Regan uses the soprano solo and a harp to set up a deceptive peace, which is increasingly drowned out by the pressures of modern existence, before returning with the image of the 'sweet breathing child'.

James MacMillan is arguably the finest choral composer working today, and it is fitting that two of his 'Strathclyde Motets' complete the music on this disc. MacMillan combines his deep theology with an extraordinary palette to produce two quite different pieces. *O Radiant Dawn*, an antiphon for 21 December, was written for the composer's local parish church in Maryhill, Glasgow, and is suitably straightforward both to perform and to listen to. The more sophisticated *Dominus dabit benignitatem*

employs many of MacMillan's most characteristic choral techniques, with the sopranos weaving long lines full of Scotch snaps over the trance-like repetitions of the lower parts. Eventually, the choir comes together in a new incandescent harmony before the divided sopranos dissolve their 'Amen' into a hummed chord which appears to translate the hope of the Advent message into an eternal mystery.

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[1] **Processional Introit & Kyrie Eleison**
(from 'Missa Carolae') James Whitbourn (1963-)
Additional words: Anon (translated by James Whitbourn), Isaiah, & Bernard de la Monnoye (1641-1728)

Solo: Lois Gallagher

Introit

Guillô play your tambourin,
Robin with your flute begin,
Play your pipe and play your drum,
Tu-re-lu-re-lu!
Pa-ta-pa-ta-pan!
Play your pipe and play your drum.
Sing Nowell to all and some!

Man of ancient days, he sings
In praise of the King of kings,
When you hear the pipe and drum,
Tu-re-lu-re-lu!
Pa-ta-pa-ta-pan!
When you hear the pipe and drum
You will know that the Saviour's come.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Dance and sing and leap with joy
At the birth of the infant boy.
Dance with pipe and dance with drum.
Tu-re-lu-re-lu!
Pa-ta-pa-ta-pan!
Dance with pipe and dance with drum
For to us is born a Son.

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

Kyrie eleison

Kyrie eleison.
Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christe eleison
Christ, have mercy upon us.
Kyrie eleison
Lord, have mercy upon us.

[2] Dominus Dabit Benignitatem

James MacMillan
Words: Psalm 84

Dominus dabit benignitatem: et terra nostra dabit fructum suum.

The Lord will show us his kindness, and our earth shall yield its fruit.

[3] I sing of a maiden

John McCabe (1939-)
Words: Anon. 15th century

Solos: Emily Fletcher, Claire Valencia, Tony Zacaroli, Naveen Rajendran

I sing of a maiden
That is makeless;
King of all kings
To her son she ches.

He came all so still
Where his mother was
As dew in April
That falleth on the grass.

He came all so still,
To his mother's bow'r
As dew in April
That falleth on the flower.

He came all so still
Where his mother lay,
As dew in April
That falleth on the spray.

[4] A Hymn to the Virgin

Francis Pott (1957-)
Words: Anon. 13th century, adapted

Of one that is so fair and bright,
Velut maris stella, [as a star of the sea]
Brighter than the day is light,
Parens et puella: [mother and maiden]
I cry to thee thou see to me
Lady, pray thy son for me,
Tam pia, [thou gracious one]
That I may come to thee.
Maria.



Lady, flower of alle thing,
Rosa sine spina, [rose without thorn]
 Thou bere Jesu, Hevene King,
Gratia divina: [by divine grace]
 Of alle Thou bear'st the prize,
 Lady, Queen of Paradise
Electa: [chosen one]
 Maid milde, mother *es*
Effecta. [you are fulfilled]

All this world was forlore
Eva peccatrice, [by sinful Eve]
 Till our Lord was ibore
De te genetrice. [of thee, his mother]
 With 'Ave' it went away,
 Darkest night, and cometh the day
Salutis. [of salvation]
 The welle springeth out of thee.
Virtutis. [of virtue]

[5] Remember, O thou man

Bob Chilcott (1955-)

Words: Thomas Ravenscroft? (c.1582-1635)

Electric piano: Sam Laughton

Remember, O thou man,
 O thou man, O thou man.
 Remember, O thou man,
 thy time is spent:
 Remember, O thou man,
 how thou art dead and gone,
 and I did what I can:
 therefore repent.

Remember God's goodness,
 O thou man, O thou man,
 Remember God's goodness,
 and promise made!
 Remember God's goodness,
 How he sent his Son, doubtless,
 our sins for to redress;
 be not afraid!

The angels all did sing,
 O thou man, O thou man,
 The angels all did sing
 On heaven's high hill!
 The angels all did sing,
 praises to our heavenly King,
 and peace to man living,
 with a good will.

To Bethlem did they go,
 O thou man, O thou man,
 To Bethlem did they go
 the shepherds three;
 To Bethlem did they go
 to see whether it were so,
 whether Christ were born or no
 to set man free.

[6] Gloria in Excelsis

James Whitbourn: (from 'Missa Carolae')

Gloria in excelsis

Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Gloria to God in the highest,

Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis

And on earth peace to people of good will.

Laudamus te.

We praise you.

Benedicimus te.

We bless you.

Adoramus te.

We adore you.

Glorificamus te.

We glorify you.

Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam

We give thanks to you for your great glory

Domine Deus, Rex caelestis,

Lord God, Heavenly King,

Deus Pater omnipotens.

God Almighty Father.

Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe,

Lord, only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ,

Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris.

Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father
Qui tollis peccata mundi,
You who take away the sins of the world,
miserere nobis.
have mercy on us.

Qui tollis peccata mundi,
You who take away the sins of the world
suscipe deprecationem nostram.
hear our prayer.

Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,
You who sit at the right hand of the Father.
miserere nobis,
have mercy on us.

Quoniam tu solus Sanctus.
For you alone are holy.

Tu solus Altissimus, Jesu Christe.
You alone the Most High, Jesus Christ.

Cum Sancto Spiritu: in gloria Dei
With the Holy Spirit in the glory of
Patris. Amen
God the Father. Amen

[7] Spring in Winter

John Woolrich (1954-)

Words: from *Hymn 32, The Nativity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, by Christopher Smart (1722-71)

Nature's decorations glisten
Far above their usual trim;
Birds on box and laurels listen,
As so near the cherubs hymn.

Boreas now no longer winters
On the desolated coast;
Oaks no more are riv'n in splinters
By the whirlwind and his host.

Spinks and ouzles sing sublimely,
'We too have a Saviour born';
Whiter blossoms burst untimely
On the blest Mosaic thorn.

God all-bounteous, all-creative,
Whom no ills from good dissuade,
Is incarnate, and a native
Of the very world he made.

[8] Carol of the Birds

Stephen McNeff (1951-)

Words: 18th century Irish

Full many a bird did wake and fly,
Curoo, curoo, curoo,
To the manger bed with a wandering cry
On Christmas day in the morning.
Curoo, curoo, curoo.

The lark, the dove, the red bird came,
Curoo, curoo, curoo,
And they did sing in sweet Jesus' name
On Christmas day in the morning.
Curoo, curoo, curoo.

The owl was there with eyes so wide
Curoo, curoo, curoo
And he did sit at sweet Mary's side
On Christmas day in the morning.
Curoo, curoo, curoo.

The shepherds knelt upon the hay.
Curoo, curoo, curoo
And angels sang the night away
On Christmas day in the morning.
Curoo, curoo, curoo.



[9] The Angel Gabriel

Traditional Basque - arr. Howard Goodall (1958-)
Words: Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924)

Solo: Geraldine Mynors
Cello: Deirdre Hollingsworth

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!

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!

'For known 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!

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!

[10] Sanctus & Benedictus

James Whitbourn (from 'Missa Carolae')
Sanctus
Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus,
Holy, Holy, Holy,
Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Lord God of hosts,
Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua.
Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory,
Hosanna in excelsis.
Hosanna in the highest.

Benedictus

Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord
Hosanna in excelsis.
Hosanna in the highest.

[11] Before the paling of the stars

James Lavino (1973-)
Words: 'A Christmas Carol' by Christina Rossetti
(1830-1894)

Before the paling of the stars,
Before the winter morn,
Before the earliest cock crow,
Jesus Christ was born:
Born in a stable,
Cradled in a manger,
In the world his hands had made
Born a stranger.

Priest and king lay fast asleep
In Jerusalem;
Young and old lay fast asleep
In crowded Bethlehem;
Saint and angel, ox and ass,
Kept a watch together
Before the Christmas daybreak
In the winter weather.

Jesus on his mother's breast
In the stable cold,
Spotless lamb of God was he,
Shepherd of the fold:
Let us kneel with Mary maid,
With Joseph bent and hoary,
With saint and angel, ox and ass,
To hail the King of Glory.



[12] Bring rest, sweet dreaming child

Tarik O'Regan (1978-), Words: Mark Pryce
Commissioned by Sam Laughton and the Elysian
Singers of London in 2004 with the aid of a generous
grant from the PRS for Music Foundation.

Solo: Helly Seeley

Harp: Maria-Christina Papadopoulou

If you came at night,
Pushing your way down the long dark
Out into starlight;
Come now into our anxious, sleepless hours:
Bring rest, sweet dreaming child.

If you came at dawn,
Lifting a voice from the dumb void,
Your new song born;
Speak now into our shouting, stifled days:
Bring praise, sweet singing child.

If you came at day's
Noon, spreading out your arms to shade
From anger's fierce sun-blaze;
Reach now into our frenzied, drifting years:
Bring peace, sweet trusting child.

If you came at dusk,
Warming our chill fears with the blood
Of love's sure pulse;
Touch now the numb limbs of our fading lives:
Bring love, sweet breathing child.

[13] O Radiant Dawn

James MacMillan (1959-)
Words: Antiphon for 21 December
O Radiant Dawn, Splendour of eternal Light, Sun of
Justice: come, shine on those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death. Isaiah had prophesied: 'The
people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has
shone.' Amen.

[14] Agnus Dei (from 'Missa Carolae')

James Whitbourn

Agnus Dei

*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.
Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have
mercy on us.*

*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.
Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have
mercy on us.*

*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis
pacem.*

*Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.*

[15] Silent Night

F. Gruber - arr. Jonathan Rathbone (1957-)

Silent night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright,
Round yon virgin mother and child,
Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night,
Shepherds quake at the sight,
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing "Alleluia",
Jesus the Saviour is born,
Jesus the Saviour is born.

Silent night, holy night,
Holy babe smiles alight,
Radiant from Thy innocent face,
In this saving hour of Thy grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

Silent night, holy night,
Silent night.



Sam Laughton

Whilst reading music at Cambridge University, Sam Laughton developed his instrumental, conducting, and organisational skills as organ scholar of Sidney Sussex College. He now juggles life as a father of four young children with busy careers as a barrister and musician. He is musical director of the Elysian Singers, the Craswall Players and the Chiltern Camerata. Sam is devoted to conducting and organising the music camps at Pigotts, and is in demand as a guest conductor, working with such orchestras as the Oxford Sinfonia, Kensington Chamber Orchestra, the Kew Sinfonia and the Orchestra of the City. He has also worked with the groups as varied as Oxford Philomusica, the Joyful Company of Singers and ENO Baylis.

Mark Brafield

Mark Brafield is a founder member of the Elysian Singers. He held an Organ Scholarship together with an Open Scholarship in English Literature at Trinity College, Oxford and is a Fellow and Trustee of the Royal College of Organists. Mark combines a legal profession as a solicitor and judge with a career as a concert organist. His recent recitals have included Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, St Thomas's, Fifth Avenue, New York, and Notre Dame de Paris.

The Elysian Singers

The Elysian Singers of London, under musical director Sam Laughton, is one of the UK's leading chamber choirs, and is known for its adventurous programming and imaginative repertoire.

Founded in 1986 by Matthew Greenall, the group quickly developed a special interest in contemporary music, giving the world premieres of works by John Woolrich, Howard Skempton and Sir John Tavener who, since 2002, has been the choir's patron.

Recent world premieres include John Habron's *Salve Regina, Exile Lamentations* by the Australian composer Paul Stanhope, and in March 2011, Ian Stephens's *Timepieces* for choir and saxophone. London premieres during the past six years include works by Peter Maxwell Davies, James MacMillan, James Whitbourn and Henryk Gorecki. The choir regularly performs Baroque and Romantic masterpieces at venues such as St John's, Smith Square, St Martin-in-the-Fields and Holy Trinity, Sloane Square. It has also taken part in numerous festivals, including the Spitalfields Festival, the Corsham Festival, the London Festival of Contemporary Church Music, the Malcolm Arnold Festival, the York Late Music concert series and the English Music Festival.

In 2004, the Elysians released a CD of music by James MacMillan *Cantos Sagrados* which received outstanding reviews and a 5-star rating from BBC Music Magazine. Reviewing *Songs of the Isles*, the choir's 2009 Bantock release with Meridian, the same publication spoke of the Elysians' "young, fresh-toned voices, brightly attentive to text without becoming over-punctilious."

There have been several radio and television broadcasts, including the first broadcast performances of Gorecki's *Miserere* and *Three Lullabies* on BBC Radio 3, the televised finals of the Sainsbury's Choir of the Year competition and BBC2's Lesley Garrett Easter Special.





THE
**ELYSIAN
SINGERS**
of London



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12. A Faery Song
13. The Lake Isle of Innisfree

Two Scottish Poems

14. Song to the Seals
15. My luve is like a red, red rose

"...Laughton and the Elysian Singers do fair justice to this interesting programme. Theirs is a clean, young, fresh sound..." Jeremy Dibble - Gramophone, Aug 2009