A CAMBRIDGE CHRISTMAS

JOHN RUTTER

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The Cambridge Singers • Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
conducted by John Rutter

Total playing time: CD 1 58' 08" CD 2 42' 43"
Note: Text credits are given at the end of each text.

CD 1: THE PEACE OF CHRISTMAS

1 **Was I the lamb?** (3' 31")
John Rutter
Solo soprano: Sumei Bao-Smith

2 **All the stars looked down** (4' 12")
John Rutter

3 **Bethlehem Down** (3' 37")
Peter Warlock (1894–1930)

4 **Away in a manger** (3' 07")
Edward T. Chapman (1902–81)

5 **Hush! my dear, lie still and slumber** (3' 16")
French traditional carol, arranged by David Willcocks (1919–2015)

6 **Christ our Emmanuel** (4' 43")
John Rutter

7 **Cradle Song** (3' 29")
Flemish traditional carol, arranged by John Rutter

8 **Lute-book lullaby** (2' 14")
16th-century English carol

9 **O magnum mysterium** (4' 19")
G. P. da Palestrina (1525–94)

10 **Infant holy, infant lowly** (2' 49")
Polish traditional carol, arranged by John Rutter
Solo baritone: Jonathan Brown

11 **I sing of a maiden** (3' 12")
John Rutter

12 **La Berceuse** (4' 06")
Barbara Bell (b. 1957), arranged by John Rutter

13 **Es ist ein' Ros' entsprungen** (3' 24")
German traditional carol, arranged by John Rutter
Solo oboe: John Roberts

14 **Quelle est cette odeur agréable?** (3' 51")
French traditional carol, arranged by David Willcocks

15 **Blake's Lullaby** (4' 46")
John Rutter

16 **Love came down at Christmas** (2' 41")
John Rutter

CD 2: THE JOY OF CHRISTMAS, AND BEYOND

1 **Up! good Christen folk, and listen** (1' 15")
Piae Cantiones (1582), arranged by G. R. Woodward

2 **Hodie Christus natus est** (2' 16")
G. P. da Palestrina

3 **Hereford Carol** (2' 51")
English traditional carol, arranged by Christopher Robinson

4 **The holly and the ivy** (2' 51")
Matthew Owens (*b.* 1972)

5 **The Colours of Christmas** (3' 08")
John Rutter

6 **Sussex Carol** (1' 51")
English traditional carol, arranged by David Willcocks

7 **In dulci jubilo** (2' 26")
Old German carol, arranged by H. Praetorius (1560–1629)

8 **Christmas Child** (3' 59")
John Rutter

9 **King Jesus hath a garden** (3' 18")
Dutch traditional carol, arranged by John Rutter

10 **The Jolly Shepherd** (5' 14")
John Rutter

Beyond Christmas: Visions and legends

11 **Joseph's Carol** (4' 29")
John Rutter
Baritone solo: Jonathan Brown

12 **The Crown of Roses** (2' 30")
P. I. Tchaikovsky (1840–93), arranged by Geoffrey Shaw

13 **The Linden Tree** (2' 43")
German traditional carol, arranged by John Rutter

14 **Jesus Christ the apple tree** (2' 53")
Elizabeth Poston (1905–87)

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The Cambridge Singers

Sopranos: Sumei Bao-Smith, Grace Davidson, Alice Gribbin, Sarah Keating, Rebecca Lea, Eve McGrath, Victoria Meteyard, Imogen Parry, Daisy Walford
Altos: Amy Blythe, Lowri Bufton, Tania Murphy, Sophie Overin, Elisabeth Paul, Joy Sutcliffe
Tenors: William Balkwill, Tom Castle, Guy Cutting, Samuel Jenkins, James Robinson, Simon Wall
Basses: Jonathan Brown, Tom Butler, Gavin Cranmer-Moralee, Eoghan Desmond, Jonathan Howard, Gareth Brynmor John

John Rutter writes . . .

Cambridge has been associated with Christmas since medieval times. A manuscript roll in the library of Trinity College, dating from the early 15th century, contains the words and music of a number of carols, including *There is no rose*, a jewel among early English carols – many of which were brought to light by a Cambridge scholar, John Stevens, in his seminal 1952 volume of medieval carols. Two Cambridge musicians, Ralph Vaughan Williams (Trinity) and Cecil Sharp (Clare) went out into the byways of rural Britain in the early years of the 20th century collecting folk songs and carols before they were forgotten in a changing world. We would not have (for example) *The Sussex Carol* or *The holly and the ivy* if it had not been for their work. Meanwhile, at Gonville and Caius College, Charles Wood (choir director) collaborated with the eccentric antiquarian clergyman G. R. Woodward on four important and influential collections of carols: *Songs of Syon* (1904), *The Cowley Carol Book* (1919), *An Italian Carol Book* (1920), and *The Cambridge Carol Book* (1924). Unlike Vaughan Williams and Sharp, who collected folk carols from the lips of rural singers, Wood and Woodward found their material mainly in old manuscript or printed collections, Woodward often providing translations or writing new texts of his own. To them we owe three carols in this recording.

In 1918 the young Dean of King's College, Eric Milner-White, instituted the Christmas Eve Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, modelled on E. W. Benson's similar observance first held in 1880 in the temporary wooden shed used as Truro's cathedral while the permanent cathedral was built; Benson (later Archbishop of Canterbury) was Truro's first bishop. The King's Festival was first broadcast by the BBC in 1928, a tradition that continues to this day, with a parallel television broadcast of *Carols from King's*, a related but separate event.

The King's Christmas festivals became a model and inspiration for musical and liturgical celebrations of Christmas around the world. Successive directors of its renowned choir – Boris Ord (1929–57), David Willcocks (1958–74), Philip Ledger (1974–82), Stephen Cleobury (1982–

2018), and since then Daniel Hyde, have all arranged or composed new carols, as has an impressive roll call of composers. The commissioning of a new carol is an annual tradition instituted by Stephen Cleobury in 1983, refreshing and enriching the seasonal repertoire.

If Wood and Woodward were the leading carol anthologists of the early 20th century, Willcocks and Jacques dominated its latter years. *Carols for Choirs* was published in 1961, a collection of fifty carols including new Willcocks arrangements written for King's College Choir. Reginald Jacques, his co-editor, was conductor of the Bach Choir – a post David Willcocks was to inherit – and his contribution was of carols more associated with Christmas concerts. The book was an immediate success, leading to a call for a second volume. Jacques died in 1969, and to my astonishment, as a young graduate student, I was invited by David Willcocks to co-edit *Carols for Choirs 2*, published in 1971. This most happy collaboration cemented my lifelong association with Cambridge and with Christmas, and in calling this double album *A Cambridge Christmas* I am paying homage to that association. Some of the carols included in it were written by Cambridge authors or musicians, others were made famous by Cambridge choirs, some I have included just because I like them, and there are several carols I have arranged or composed myself, generally for friends or organisations I cherish. Carols and the music of Christmas are like a golden thread that has run through my whole life. At heart I am still that little choirboy for whom my school or church carol service was a high point of the whole singing year.

CD 1: The peace of Christmas

1 **Was I the lamb?**

Marc Bratcher is a lyricist, author, and artist whose distinctive poetry has always seemed to me to invite musical setting. In 2021 I was invited to compose a new carol for the choir of Merton College, Oxford, in celebration of the Revd Dr Simon Jones's twentieth anniversary as chaplain, and Marc immediately wrote the enchanting text of *Was I the lamb*. The carol having received an Oxford performance, I thought it only fair that it should receive a Cambridge recording – Marc is an Oxford poet, I am a Cambridge composer, our carol a truly joint effort.

Was I the lamb who woke that night
When angels sang and all was bright,
And slowly raised my sleepy head
Out of my warm and sheltered bed?

Was I the lamb who was astray
Till holy star did light my way,
And gently then the shepherds bore
Safe in their arms to the stable door?

Was I the lamb who saw the kings
Bear the first gifts that Christmas brings
To set before a baby born
That first and precious Christmas morn?

Was I the lamb who kept
His vigil as God's holy mother slept,
And as her single tear did fall
She dreamed that he would redeem us all.

Was I the lamb amid the hay
Beside the manger where he lay,
Who curled where Mary's feet had trod
And bowed my head before the Lamb of God?

Marc Bratcher (b. 1972)

2 **All the stars looked down**

The death of Sir Stephen Cleobury in 2019 after a long battle with illness, just as he had reached retirement as Director of Music at King's College, robbed us of a much-loved and respected figure in Cambridge and far beyond. I valued him hugely as colleague and friend, and wanted to remember him in some musical form. Providentially I received an invitation from his brother Nicholas to compose a carol for a charity concert he was due to conduct with London's Holst Singers, the opportunity I had been looking for. *All the stars looked down* is lovingly dedicated to Stephen's memory.

The Christ-child lay on Mary's lap,
His hair was like a light.
O weary, weary were the world,
But here is all aright.

The Christ-child lay on Mary's breast,
His hair was like a star.
O stern and cunning are the kings,
But here the true hearts are.

The Christ-child lay on Mary's heart,
His hair was like a fire.
O weary, weary were the world,
But here the world's desire.

The Christ-child stood at Mary's knee,
His hair was like a crown,
And all the flowers looked up at him
And all the stars looked down.

G. K Chesterton (1874–1936)

3 **Bethlehem Down**

Peter Warlock, maverick Welsh composer of the turbulent period during and after World War I, had two distinct sides to his musical personality: the hearty, roistering goodfellow of such songs as *Yarmouth Fair*, and the sensitive spirit who composed *Bethlehem Down*, an

introspective and exquisite example of his gift for the writing of Christmas carols (there are around a dozen of them). It was composed in 1927 and submitted to a newspaper competition, which it won. Warlock reputedly used the prize money to finance a pub crawl in the company of Bruce Blunt, the journalist and poet who wrote the text.

'When he is King we will give him the Kings' gifts,
Myrrh for its sweetness and gold for a crown,
Beautiful robes,' said the young girl to Joseph,
Fair with her first-born on Bethlehem Down.

Bethlehem Down is full of the starlight–
Winds for the spices, and stars for the gold,
Mary for sleep, and for lullaby music
Songs of a shepherd by Bethlehem fold.

When he is King they will clothe him in gravesheets,
Myrrh for embalming, and wood for a crown,
He that lies now in the white arms of Mary,
Sleeping so lightly on Bethlehem Down.

Here he has peace and a short while for dreaming,
Close-huddled oxen to keep him from cold,
Mary for love, and for lullaby music
Songs of a shepherd by Bethlehem fold.

Bruce Blunt (1899–1967)

4 **Away in a manger**

There are a number of settings of this much-loved carol text, but the one recorded here has a special place in my heart, composed as it was by my beloved high school director of music, Edward Chapman. He studied composition at Cambridge in the 1920s with Charles Wood, whose immaculate craftmanship is reflected in the beautiful voicing of the choral writing; any of the more renowned composers of Chapman's generation would have been proud to have written it. Just listen to that heart-melting final cadence!

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay–
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.
I love thee, Lord Jesus! Look down from the sky,
And stay by my side until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask thee to stay
Close by me for ever, and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,
And fit us for heaven to live with thee there.

Anon., 19th-century American

5 **Hush! my dear, lie still and slumber**

The music of this gentle, reflective carol has a complicated pedigree. It started life as a French carol, *Jésus-Christ s'habille en pauvre*, first published in 1848. In 1906 Vaughan Williams wedded the tune most unexpectedly to the solemn eucharistic hymn text *Let all mortal flesh keep silence*. Wishing no doubt to restore it to the season of Christmas, Sir David Willcocks set it in 1978 to the Isaac Watts text recorded here. His setting is quintessentially 'Willcocks' with its skilled alternation of upper and lower voices, culminating in a triumphant final verse for double choir.

Hush! my dear, lie still and slumber;
Holy angels guard thy bed!
Heav'nly blessings without number
Gently falling on thy head.
Lulla, lulla, lulla, lulla, lullaby,
Lulla, lulla, lullaby.

Sleep, my babe; thy food and raiment,
House and home, thy friends provide;
All without thy care and payment,
All thy wants are well supplied.
Lulla, lulla, lulla, lulla, lullaby,
Lulla, lulla, lullaby.

How much better thou'rt attended
Than the Son of God could be
When from heaven he descended,
And became a child like thee.
Lulla, lulla, lulla, lulla, lullaby,
Lulla, lulla, lullaby.

Mayst thou live to know and fear him,
Trust and love him all thy days;
Then go dwell for ever near him,
See his face and sing his praise.
Alleluia, alleluia,
See his face and sing his praise.

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

6 **Christ our Emmanuel**

Harpists may recognize this carol as an instrumental piece called *Lullaby for Ana Gwen*, which I wrote specially for an album project with the renowned harpist Catrin Finch in 2012. It caught the attention of my German choral conductor friend Nicol Matt, who told me 'you should make a Christmas carol out of that piece' . . . so I did.

Far away, far away shines a light,
Leading us, guiding us on through the night;
Clear in the sky and brighter than the dawn,
Pointing our way to where a child is born.
Can it be here we will find him?

In a simple stable, can it be Messiah we behold?
Softly enter, this is he;
Worship him, honour him, bow your knee.
Son of God, yet child of man,
In excelsis gloria, gloria!

Lullaby, lullaby, Jesus, sleep!
Angels over you watch will keep.
Mary will sing a tender lullaby,
Joining the song of angel choirs on high.
Morning will come, he will waken,
He will be forsaken,
Left to die alone upon the tree.
Lullaby, lullaby, holy child
Born of Mary undefiled.
Suffering, dying, death defying,
Christ our Emmanuel.
Son of God, yet child of man,
In excelsis gloria, gloria.

John Rutter

7 **Cradle Song**

I made this arrangement of a rather lovely Belgian carol melody in 1978 for *Carols for Choirs 3*, the second of the four carol collections I co-edited with Sir David Willcocks. The text is a free version of the Flemish original.

In Bethlehem, all in a stable,
Lies a new-born infant mild.
By his side a virgin mother
Watches o'er the holy child.
Jesus, lying in the manger,
Comes to us on earth a stranger:
Lullaby! O little one sleep;
Angels round you watch will keep.

Saint Joseph stands beside the cradle,
Filled with wonder, awe, and love.
See, the infant King lies sleeping,
Sent from God in heav'n above.
Ox and ass before him kneeling,
Mary's love his sorrows healing.
Lullaby! O little one sleep;
Angels round you watch will keep.

'Hosanna in the highest heaven;
Peace, goodwill to men on earth.'
Seraphim on high in chorus
Greet the Saviour's joyful birth.
Mary's voice, in descant blending,
Joins the heav'nly song unending:
Lullaby! O little one sleep;
Angels round you watch will keep.

John Rutter

8 **Lute-book Lullaby**

The best-known source of this Elizabethan lullaby is William Ballet's Lute Book in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, but the 'lute' book is mis-named, being a collection of songs with bass viol. The piece has long been a favourite in choral arrangements, and my present one restores the original bass line, adding alto and tenor parts to complete the texture.

Sweet was the song the Virgin sang
When she to Bethlem Juda came
And was delivered of a Son,
That blessed Jesus hath to name.
'Lulla, lulla, lulla, lullaby,
Lulla, lulla, lulla, lullaby sweet babe', sang she.
'My son, and eke a Saviour born,
Who hast vouchsafed from on high
To visit us that were forlorn:
Lalulla, lalulla, lalullaby, sweet babe', sang she,
And rocked him sweetly on her knee.

16th-century English

9 **O magnum mysterium**

Many composers have set the Christmas Day Responsories to music, and Palestrina's six-voiced setting, published in Rome in 1569, ranks among the finest. He uses the rich palette of voices to varied and expressive effect, reserving the full effect of all six at once for the final section of rejoicing at the words 'collaudantes Dominum, alleluia'.

O magnum mysterium, et admirabile sacramentum, ut animalia viderent Dominum natum, iacentem in praesepio. Natum vidimus, et choros Angelorum collaudantes Dominum. Alleluia.

from two Matin Responsories for Christmas Day

(O great mystery and wonderful sacrament, that animals should see the new-born Lord lying in a manger. We saw a new-born child, and choirs of angels giving praise to God.)

10 **Infant holy, infant lowly**

This setting is one of the earliest arrangements of a traditional Christmas carol I undertook – it was for my first-ever recording, made in 1966. I still retain an affection for the tranquil Polish folk-carol it is based on, with its ingenious English translation that manages to replicate the rhyme scheme of the original with just a little stretching of the accepted rules of English grammar.

Infant holy, infant lowly,
For his bed a cattle-stall;
Oxen lowing, little knowing
Christ the Babe is Lord of all.
Swift are winging angels singing,
Nowells ringing, tidings bringing,
Christ the Babe is Lord of all.

Flocks were sleeping, shepherds keeping
Vigil till the morning new;
Saw the glory, heard the story,
Tidings of a gospel true.
Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow,
Praises voicing, greet the morrow,
Christ the Babe was born for you.

E. M. Reed (1885–1933), from the Polish

11 **I sing of a maiden**

This tender, lyrical fifteenth-century poem on the theme of the Virgin Mary and the coming of Christ has been set to music by many composers. I made a setting for solo voice back in the 1970s that I laid aside, only rediscovering it while clearing my attic in 2020. I decided to rewrite it and revoice it for mixed choir, in which form it is recorded here. The new version is dedicated to Nathan and Marilyn Hayward, generous supporters of music in the United States and in Britain.

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 bower,
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.

Mother and maiden was never none but she:
Well may such a lady God's mother be.

15th-century English

12 **La Berceuse**

This carol, prizewinner in the 1975 annual Bach Choir carol competition, was written and composed by the 17-year-old schoolgirl Barbara Bell. I co-adjudicated the competition with Sir David Willcocks, the performance came and went, but I never forgot the carol's haunting melody, aptly wedded to the composer's own French text. In 2015, after a nationwide search aided and abetted by a friendly radio station, I tracked down the composer and invited her to come and hear her carol performed on its 40th anniversary by the Bach Choir and Royal

Philharmonic Orchestra in London's Royal Albert Hall. It was finally published, and is now finding a well-deserved place in the Christmas repertoire.

Ma chanson et mon coeur perdu,
L'amour de Marie et la grâce de Dieu;
Les anges dans un ciel si bleu,
Petit bébé dans le matin.
Lulla-ley-lo, lulla-ley-lo,
Doucement, doucement dors, bébé.
Lulla-ley-lo, lulla-ley-lo,
Doucement dors, je te bercerai.

Les trois rois et leurs chers cadeaux,
Sa mère et ses yeux si beaux;
Les bergers et les animaux;
Le Roi des rois dans le matin.

Barbara Bell (b. 1957)

(My heart is lost—my song is of Mary's love and God's grace.
The angels in the sky so blue, the little babe in the morning.
Lulla-ley-lo, lulla-ley-lo, sleep softly, little babe.
Lulla-ley-lo, lulla-ley-lo, sleep softly, and I shall cradle you.

The three kings and their precious gifts,
The child's clear gaze sees all: his mother,
The shepherds, and the animals;
The King of kings in the morning.
Lulla-ley-lo, &c.)

Free translation by the author

13 **Es ist ein' Ros' entsprungen**

Both the melody and text of this lovely German carol date from the late 15th or early 16th century, appearing in print in many versions, of which the best known is the simple harmonization by Michael Praetorius published in 1609. The idea for my arrangement came from the King's Singers in 2013, to form part of a Christmas album they were making jointly with

the renowned German oboist Albrecht Mayer. With only minimal adaptation for the mixed-voice choral forces of the Cambridge Singers, I have been delighted to record my arrangement – inspired by Bach's extended chorale treatments – with the equally peerless Royal Philharmonic Orchestra oboist, John Roberts.

Es ist ein' Ros' entsprungen
Aus einer Wurzel zart,
Als uns die Alten sungen:
Aus Jesse kam die Art;
Und hat ein Blümlein bracht,
Mitten im kalten Winter
Wohl zu der halben Nacht.

(Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming
From tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming
As men of old have sung.
It came, a flow'ret bright,
Amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night.)

15th-century German carol

14 **Quelle est cette odeur agréable?**

This gorgeous, floating melody with its pastoral text has had a continuous history of popularity in France since the 17th century, but only became known in the English-speaking world when an English translation, *Whence is that goodly fragrance flowing*, was made in the 1930s by the Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, A. B. Ramsay. David Willcocks's arrangement dates from the late 1960s and was first published in *Carols for Choirs 2* in 1970.

Quelle est cette odeur agréable,
Bergers, qui ravit tous nos sens?
S'exhale-t-il rien de semblable
Au milieu des fleurs du printemps?
Quelle est cette odeur agréable,
Bergers, qui ravit tous nos sens?

A Bethléem, dans une crèche,
Il vient de vous naître un Sauveur;
Allons, que rien ne vous empêche
D'adorer votre Rédempteur.
A Bethléem, dans une crèche,
Il vient de vous naître un Sauveur.

Mais quelle éclatante lumière
Dans la nuit vient frapper nos yeux!
L'astre du jour, dans sa carrière,
Fût-il jamais si radieux?
Mais quelle éclatante lumière
Dans la nuit vient frapper nos yeux!

Dieu tout-puissant, gloire éternelle
Vous soit rendue jusqu'aux cieux;
Que la paix soit universelle
Que la grâce abonde en tous lieux.
Dieu tout-puissant, gloire éternelle
Vous soit rendue jusqu'aux cieux.

French traditional carol

(Whence is that goodly fragrance flowing,
Stealing our senses all away?
Never the like did come a-blowing,
Shepherds, in flow'ry fields in May,
Whence is that goodly fragrance flowing,
Stealing our senses all away?

What is that light so brilliant, breaking
Here in the night across our eyes?
Never so bright, the day-star waking,
Started to climb the morning skies!
What is that light so brilliant, breaking
Here in the night across our eyes?

Bethlehem! there in manger lying,
Find your Redeemer, haste away,
Run ye with eager footsteps hieing!
Worship the Saviour born today.
Bethlehem! there in manger lying,
Find your Redeemer, haste away.

Praise to the Lord of all creation,
Glory to God the fount of grace;
May peace abide in ev'ry nation,
Goodwill in men of ev'ry race.
Praise to the Lord of all creation,
Glory to God the fount of grace.)

Translation: vv. 1–3 A. B. Ramsay,
v. 4 David Willcocks

15 **Blake's Lullaby**

The poem which forms the text of this carol is one of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, which were first published in 1789; it appears under the title *A Cradle Song*. Like many composers, I have always been attracted by the directness and simplicity of Blake's style, and was glad to have the opportunity to set his words to music when I was invited in 2021 to compose a carol for an Oxford concert in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support. I transcribed the original organ accompaniment for strings in 2022.

Sweet dreams, form a shade
O'er my lovely infant's head:
Sweet dreams of pleasant streams
By happy, silent moony beams.

Sweet sleep with soft down
Weave thy brows an infant crown.
Sweet sleep, angel mild,
Hover o'er my happy child.

Sweet smiles in the night,
Hover over my delight;
Sweet smiles, mother's smiles,
All the livelong night beguiles.

Sweet smiles, dove-like sighs,
Chase not slumber from thy eyes,
Sweet moans, sweeter smiles,
All the dove-like moans beguiles.

Sleep, sleep, happy child,
All creation slept and smiled;
Sleep, sleep, happy sleep,
While o'er thee thy mother weep.

Sweet babe, in thy face
Holy image I can trace:
Sweet babe, once like thee
Thy Maker lay and wept for me.

Wept for me, for thee, for all
When He was an infant small;
Thou His image ever see,
Heavenly face that smiles on thee.

Smiles on thee, on me, on all;
Who became an infant small;
Infant smiles are His own smiles,
Heav'n and earth to peace beguiles.

William Blake (1757–1827)

16 **Love came down at Christmas**

Christina Rossetti has likewise always been a poet popular with composers because of the affecting simplicity of her style. This setting is one of my earliest carol compositions, dating from 1970. It was first performed in what was then still St John's, Smith Square – before its conversion into a concert hall, where we recorded this album in 2026.

Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, love divine;
Love was born at Christmas;
Star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,
Love incarnate, love divine;
Worship we our Jesus:
But wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token,
Love be yours and love be mine;
Love to God and all men,
Love for plea, and gift, and sign.

Christina Rossetti (1830–94)

CD 2: The joy of Christmas, and beyond

1 **Up! good Christen folk, and listen**

For me, this little one-verse carol perfectly captures the sense of delight and anticipation at the start of any Christmas carol service. I probably first sang it when I was no more than nine or ten years old, and it delights me still. The melody comes from that rich source of fine carols, the Finnish collection *Piae Cantiones* of 1582, and the endearingly daft words are the work of that indefatigable caroller, the Revd G. R. Woodward. So, you may ask, was the harmonisation done by his musical collaborator Charles Wood? Actually no: clearly Woodward was musically adept (playing the euphonium was his hobby, along with bell-ringing) and he made his own version, which can never be bettered within its miniature time-span of hardly more than one minute. This carol opened the very first Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at King's College in 1918.

Ding dong ding: ding-a-dong-a-ding:
Ding dong, ding dong: ding-a-dong-ding.
Up! good Christen folk, and listen
How the merry church bells ring,
And from steeple bid good people
Come adore the new-born King.
Tell the story how from glory
God came down at Christmastide,
Bringing gladness, chasing sadness,
Show'ring blessings far and wide.
Born of mother, blest o'er other,
Ex Maria Virgine,
In a stable, ('tis no fable),
Christus natus hodie.
Ding dong ding: ding-a-dong-a-ding:
Ding dong, ding dong: ding-a-dong-ding.

G. R. Woodward (1848–1934)

2 **Hodie Christus natus est**

This joyous motet forms a counterpart to the same composer's reflective *O magnum mysterium* recorded on disc 1. It was published in Venice in 1575, and perhaps in homage to the developing Venetian tradition of antiphonal choral music where the singers are divided into two or more choirs and sing from different positions, *Hodie Christus natus est* is for two choirs, one of higher voices (heard on the left in this recording), the other of lower voices (on the right). Following a seasonal practice of the period, Palestrina substitutes 'Noe, noe' for the usual 'alleluia', to festive effect.

Hodie Christus natus est: noe, noe,
Hodie Salvator apparuit: noe, noe,

Hodie in terra canunt angeli, laetantur archangeli: noe, noe,
Hodie exultant justi, dicentes:
Gloria in excelsis Deo, noe, noe.

Magnificat antiphon for Christmas Day Vespers

(Today Christ is born, Nowell, Nowell:
Today the Saviour has appeared. Nowell, Nowell:
Today angels sing upon the earth, the archangels rejoice, Nowell, Nowell:
Today the righteous are glad and say
Glory to God in the highest, Nowell, Nowell.)

3 Hereford Carol

This rustic retelling of the Christmas story was probably handed down orally for generations, but its first appearance in print was in *Twelve Traditional Carols from Herefordshire*, collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams and Ella Leather and published in 1920, included in *The Oxford Book of Carols* in 1928. Christopher Robinson's imaginative arrangement of the tune – a tune that undulates as beguilingly as the Herefordshire hills – dates from his period as director of the choir of St George's Windsor, before his appointment to an equivalent post at St John's College Cambridge. I asked his permission, graciously granted, to orchestrate the original organ accompaniment.

Come all you faithful Christians
That dwell here on earth,
Come celebrate the morning
Of our dear Saviour's birth.
This is the happy morning,
This is the blessed morn:
To save our souls from ruin,
The Son of God was born.

Behold the angel Gabriel,
In scripture it is said,
Did with his holy message
Come to the virgin maid:
'Hail, blest among all women!'
He thus did greet her then,
'Lo, thou shalt be the mother
Of the Saviour of all men.'

Her time being accomplished,
She came to Bethlehem,
And then was safe delivered
Of the Saviour of all men.
No princely pomp attended him,
His honours were but small;
A manger was his cradle,
His bed an ox's stall.

Now to him that is ascended
Let all our praises be;
May we his steps then follow,
And he our pattern be;
So when our lives are ended,
We all may hear him call–
'Come, souls, receive the kingdom,
Prepared for you all.'

Traditional Herefordshire carol

4 The holly and the ivy

If ever there was a refreshing new take on a familiar old carol text, this is it. Matthew Owens, holder at various times of several key posts in the cathedral music world, somehow found time to contribute to *Carols for Choirs 5* with an ear-tickling tune that would stick with its hearers forever – oscillating fascinatingly between three-four and six-eight time, a device as old as a medieval dance yet made tinglingly new. Enjoy the woodwind that dances merrily above the melody like Christmas elves.

The holly and the ivy,
When they are both full grown,
Of all the trees that are in the wood,
The holly bears the crown:
O, the rising of the sun
And the running of the deer,
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweet singing in the choir.

The holly bears a blossom,
As white as any flower,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ,
To be our sweet Saviour:
O, the rising of the sun, &c.

The holly bears a berry,
As red as any blood,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ,
To do poor sinners good:
O, the rising of the sun, &c.

The holly bears a prickle,
As sharp as any thorn,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
On Christmas Day in the morn:
O, the rising of the sun, &c.

The holly bears a bark,
As bitter as any gall,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
For to redeem us all:
O, the rising of the sun, &c.

English traditional carol

5 The Colours of Christmas

Sometimes a performance situation gives rise to a new composition, and so it was with *The Colours of Christmas*. In 2010 I hosted the girl and the boy winners of the BBC Young Chorister

of the Year competition as guest soloists for one of my annual Christmas concerts in the Royal Albert Hall, and I was scratching my head for a duet they could sing to fit the moment when the hall lights focused on the two colourful Christmas trees either side of the organ. That gave me the idea for my new duet (both winners gave a superb performance, and have gone on to illustrious careers as singers), and I later prepared a version for mixed choir, the one heard here.

Green for the ivy that grows by the wall,
White for the mistletoe that hangs in the hall;
Red for the berries that shine in the snow,
Orange and yellow for morning's first glow.
These are the colours of Christmas:
Let them shine all over the earth;
These are the colours of happiness:
The joy of a new baby's birth.

Blue for the robe of his mother so mild,
Gold for the precious gifts they brought to the child;
Silver the starlight to shine through your sleep;
And a rainbow for all the sweet dreams you will keep.
These are the colours of Christmas, &c.

John Rutter

6 Sussex Carol

This lilting folk carol made a welcome appearance in the Vaughan Williams *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* in 1912, but it was David Willcocks who lit up the sky with his 1959 arrangement, written for King's College Choir and, for many listeners, still the classic version.

On Christmas night all Christians sing,
To hear the news the angels bring–
News of great joy, news of great mirth,
News of our merciful King's birth.

Then why should men on earth be so sad,
Since our Redeemer made us glad?
When from our sin he set us free,
All for to gain our liberty?

When sin departs before his grace,
Then life and health come in its place;
Angels and men with joy may sing,
All for to see the new-born King.

All out of darkness we have light,
Which made the angels sing this night:
'Glory to God and peace to men,
Now and for evermore. Amen.'

English traditional carol

7 In dulci jubilo

According to legend this lovely German carol was sung by angels to the 14th-century German mystic Heinrich Suso one Christmas night; he wrote it down so he would never forget how beautiful it was, and he was surely right. It appeared in numerous manuscript and printed

sources from then on, and many arrangements of it have been made and compositions based upon it written, notably Bach's two organ preludes, the grander of which is heard as the first concluding voluntary every Christmas Eve in King's College Chapel. The present arrangement by Hieronymus Praetorius, a Hamburg composer and organist (unrelated to the better-known Michael Praetorius), sticks closely to the melody but is enriched by its eight-voiced texture.

In dulci jubilo
Nun singet und seid froh!
Unsers Herzen Wonne
Liegt in praesepio,
Und leuchtet als die Sonne
Matris in gremio.
Alpha es et O,
Alpha es et O.

O Jesu parvule
Nach dir ist mir so weh!
Tröst mir mein Gemüte,
O puer optime,
Durch alle deine Güte,
O princeps gloriae.
Trahe me post te,
Trahe me post te.

Ubi sunt gaudia
Nirgend mehr denn da!
Da die Engel singen
Nova cantica,
Und da die Schellen Klingen
In Regis curia.
Eia, wären wir da!
Eia, wären wir da!

Old German carol

(In sweet jubilation now sing with hearts aglow!
Our heart's joy and treasure lies in a crib
And shines like the sun in his mother's lap.
You are Alpha and Omega.

O little Jesus, my heart longs for you!
Comfort my spirits, of all boys the best,
Through all your goodness, O prince of glory,
Draw me to follow you.

Where are greater joys than there?
There the angels sing new songs,
And the bells are ringing in his royal kingdom.
O that we were there!)

8 Christmas Child

In 2024 my Cambridge friend and colleague David Hill (successor to Christopher Robinson as Director of Music at St John's College) announced his retirement from his transatlantic post at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music, and I was approached by his Yale colleagues to write a composition honouring his achievement there, as a surprise retirement gift. David and I had collaborated on many a Christmas project over the years, and a new Christmas carol seemed

the most appropriate thing I could write. My home is opposite an ancient village church with a fine peal of bells; perhaps that sparked off the idea that became *Christmas Child*.

Bells ring out in the winter's stillness
Bearing news of a promised birth;
Bringing light to a world in darkness,
God's own Son revealed on earth.
Christmas child, lying at Bethlehem,
Gift of God, given this day;
Hear the bells ringing out their message:
Christus natus hodie.

Bright the star in the night sky shining
Over Bethlehem where he lies,
Born to live and to die a mortal,
Yet as King of Kings to rise.
Christmas child, &c.

Shepherds kneeling in adoration
Humbly worship the new-born King;
Angel voices in tuneful chorus
Joyful alleluias sing.
Christmas child, &c.

Sing, rejoice at our Saviour's coming,
Church bells ring, merry organs play;
Gloria in excelsis Deo,
Christus natus hodie.

John Rutter

9 King Jesus hath a garden

This traditional carol originated in the Netherlands, first appearing in print in 1633, and came to the attention of Wood and Woodward when they compiled an expanded version of the 1902 *Cowley Carol Book*, prepared just before World War I but not published until 1919. Wood's harmonisation is for unaccompanied choir, and I made the present accompanied version in 1977 for a Christmas television programme filmed in my own college, Clare – next-door neighbour to King's along the River Cam, but with a much less grand chapel that lent itself to a more intimate style of music-making.

King Jesus hath a garden, full of divers flowers,
Where I go culling posies gay, all times and hours.
There naught is heard but Paradise bird,
Harp, dulcimer, lute,
With cymbal, trump and tymbal,
And the tender, soothing flute.

The Lily white in blossom there, is Chastity;
The violet, with sweet perfume, Humility.
There naught is heard, &c.

The Crown Imperial bloometh too in yonder place,
'Tis Charity, of stock divine, the flower of grace.
There naught is heard, &c.

Yet, 'mid the brave, the bravest prize of all may claim
The Star of Bethlem–Jesus–blessed be his Name!
There naught is heard, &c.

Ah! Jesu Lord, my heal and weal, my bliss complete,
Make thou my heart thy garden-plot, fair, trim and neat.
That I may hear this music clear:
Harp, dulcimer, lute,
With cymbal, trump and tymbal,
And the tender, soothing flute.

G. R. Woodward, from the Dutch

10 The Jolly Shepherd

No musical setting seems to have been previously made of this anonymous 16th-century poem – rather a missed opportunity, because it seems to leap off the page. It tells the story of the lively young shepherd who goes to Bethlehem to pay homage to the Christ child, offering his simple belongings as gifts, a charming tale which was surely the inspiration for Gian-Carlo Menotti's Christmas opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. My setting was composed at the invitation of the director of the National Youth Choir, my Cambridge friend Ben Parry. It's a bit long for a carol, but there was nothing in the poem I would have wished to leave out, so tight and vivid is the narrative. One of my very first carol compositions was all about a piping shepherd, and I enjoyed a chance to let him pipe once more.

Can I not sing but 'Hoy,'
Can I not sing but 'Hoy,'
When the jolly shepherd
Made so much joy?

The shepherd upon a hill he sat;
He had on him his tabard and his hat,
His tarbox, his pipe, and his flagat;
His name was called Wat, jolly, jolly Wat,
For he was a good herdes boy.
Ut hoy! ut hoy!
For in his pipe he made so much joy.

The shepherd upon a hill was laid,
His dog to his girdle it was taid;
He had not slept but a little braid,
But' Gloria in excelsis' was to him said.
Ut hoy! ut hoy!
For in his pipe he made so much joy.

The shepherd he said anon right:
'I will go see yon farly sight,
Wherein the angel singeth on hight,
And the star that shineth so bright'.
Ut hoy! ut hoy!

'Now must I go there Christ was born;
Farewell! I come again to morn.
Dog, keep well my sheep from the corn,
And warn well 'Warrok' when I blow my horn!'
Ut hoy! ut hoy!
For in his pipe he made so much joy.

When Wat to Bethlehem was come,
He sweat, he had gone faster than a pace;
He found Jesu in a simple place,
Between an ox and an ass.
Ut hoy! ut hoy!
For in his pipe he made so much joy.

'Jesu, I offer to thee here my pipe,
My skirt, my tarbox, and my scripe;
Home to my fellows now will I skip,
And also look unto my sheep.'
Ut hoy! ut hoy!
For in his pipe he made so much joy.

'Now farewell mine owne herdes man Wat!'
'Yea, for God, lady, e'en so I hat;
Lull well Jesus on thy lap,
And farewell Joseph, with thy round cape!'
Ut hoy! ut hoy!
For in his pipe he made so much joy.

'Now may I well both hope and sing
For I have been at Christ's bearing;
Home to my fellows now will I fling,
Christ of heaven to his bliss us bring!'
Ut hoy! ut hoy!
For in his pipe he made so much joy.

16th-century English

Beyond Christmas: Visions and Legends

11 Joseph's Carol

In 2020, at the height of the Covid pandemic, I was asked by Marios Papadopoulos – founder and conductor of the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra – to compose a new carol as part of a filmed Christmas tribute to the Oxford Covid vaccine team. In addition to the orchestra, we had at our disposal the choir of Merton College, and Sir Bryn Terfel as star soloist. I immediately pictured him in the role of the steadfast Joseph, and *Joseph's Carol* is written from his point of view: a weary traveller on his way to Bethlehem with Mary, his doubts and fears turning to awe and wonder as he hears angel voices foretelling the miracle to come.

Long and weary was the journey,
Hard and dark the road we trod;
Deep enfolded in the stillness of the night
It seemed I heard the voice of God:
'Fear not, Joseph, weep not, Mary,
Travel onward through the darkness of night;
Bethlehem will see his glory;
Christ, Emmanuel, the Lord of light.'
Ecce miraculum, ecce miraculum,
Here in a stable lies your heav'nly King,
Ecce miraculum, ecce miraculum,
Alleluia, alleluia hear the angels sing.

Journey's end was just a stable bare,
Cold and lonely for a birth;
Ox and ass were our companions there
When God revealed himself on earth.
Shepherds came in awe and wonder,
Kneeling low beside his manger stall;
Angels singing, wise men bringing
Gifts to lay before the Lord of all.
Ecce miraculum, ecce miraculum, &c.

John Rutter

12 The Crown of Roses

Tchaikovsky composed this rather sombre and dramatic piece in 1883 as a solo song – no. 5 of his *Songs for Children*, op. 54, and the story it tells is dark indeed, prefiguring the Crucifixion. The composer made two later versions, one for solo voice with orchestra, the second, familiar one for unaccompanied choir. Arensky's masterly *Variations on a theme of Tchaikovsky*, written as a memorial to Tchaikovsky shortly after his death, takes it as its theme. The text, often thought to originate in one of the apocryphal gospels which are filled with fantastical legends surrounding Christ's early life, seems rather to have been inspired by an 1856 poem *Roses and Thorns* by the American poet Richard Stoddard, which was translated into Russian by Pleshcheyev and published in an 1878 anthology of his own poetry, where Tchaikovsky found it. The familiar English version by Geoffrey Dearmer appeared in the 1928 *Oxford Book of Carols*, and gave this piece the status of honorary carol, unconnected though it is with Christmas.

When Jesus Christ was yet a child
He had a garden small and wild,
Wherein he cherished roses fair,
And wove them into garlands there.

Now once, as summertime drew nigh,
There came a troop of children by,
And seeing roses on the tree,
With shouts they plucked them merrily.

'Do you bind roses in your hair?'
They cried, in scorn, to Jesus there.
The boy said humbly 'Take, I pray,
All but the naked thorns away.'

Then of the thorns they made a crown,
And with rough fingers pressed it down,
Till on his forehead fair and young
Red drops of blood like roses sprung.

Geoffrey Dearmer (1893–1996) from the Russian of A. N. Pleshcheyev (1825–93)

13 The Linden Tree

Both the words and the melody of this mellifluous carol date back at least to the 15th century, and in the German-speaking lands it was well known to the text *Es steht ein' Lind' im Himmelreich*, but not popularised in English-speaking countries until G. R. Woodward made one of his characteristically archaic-sounding translations for *The Cambridge Carol Book* in 1924. My *a cappella* setting was made for the Bath Camerata, and first performed by them in Bath Abbey at a Christmas concert in 2024.

There stood in heav'n a linden tree,
But, though 'twas honey-laden,
All angels cried, 'No bloom shall be
Like that of one fair maiden.'

Sped Gabriel on wingèd feet,
And passed through bolted portals
In Nazareth, a maid to greet,
Blest o'er all other mortals.

'Hail Mary!' quoth the angel mild,
'Of womankind the fairest:
The Virgin ay shalt thou be styled,
A babe although thou bearest.'

'So be it!' God's handmaiden cried,
'According to thy telling.'
Whereon the angel swiftly hied
Up homeward to his dwelling.

This tiding filled his mates with glee:
'Twas passed from one to other,
That 'twas Mary, and none but she,
And God would call her Mother.

G. R. Woodward, from the German

14 **Jesus Christ the apple tree**

Elizabeth Poston's life in music embraced composition, broadcasting, and the editing and arranging of folk songs and carols. *Jesus Christ the apple tree*, an original setting of a striking and visionary early American text, first appeared in 1967 in *The Cambridge Hymnal* under her editorship. It gained wide popularity thanks largely to its inclusion soon afterwards in the King's Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols – despite its text having no direct connection with Christmas. Sir David Willcocks clearly recognised that the music, of haunting simplicity, was perfectly suited to the acoustic of King's College Chapel, and that the text, looking forward to the Revelation, broadened the spiritual perspective of the occasion.

The tree of life my soul hath seen,
Laden with fruit and always green:
The tree of life my soul hath seen,
Laden with fruit and always green:
The trees of nature fruitless be
Compared with Christ the apple tree.

His beauty doth all things excel:
By faith I know, but ne'er can tell,
His beauty doth all things excel:
By faith I know, but ne'er can tell
The glory which I now can see
In Jesus Christ the apple tree.

For happiness I long have sought,
And pleasure dearly I have bought:
For happiness I long have sought,
And pleasure dearly I have bought:
I missed of all, but now I see
'Tis found in Christ the apple tree.

I'm weary with my former toil,
Here I will sit and rest awhile:
I'm weary with my former toil,
Here I will sit and rest awhile:
Under the shadow I will be
Of Jesus Christ the apple tree.

This fruit doth make my soul to thrive,
It keeps my dying faith alive;
This fruit doth make my soul to thrive,
It keeps my dying faith alive;
Which makes my soul in haste to be
With Jesus Christ the apple tree.

from Divine Hymns or Spiritual Songs, New Hampshire, 1784

Digipack art and design: Elaine Pamphilon
Booklet layout: Nick Findell

Recording producer for Disc 1, tracks 2, 6, 11, and 13;
Disc 2, tracks 8 and 11: Chris Hazell

All other tracks produced by Thomas Hewitt-Jones, for Vivum Music
Production consultant: Chris Hazell

Recording engineer: Mike Hatch, for Floating Earth

Recorded in Sinfonia, Smith Square, London
*Disc 1, tracks 6, 11, and 13; Disc 2, track 11: July 2021
†Disc 1, track 2, and Disc 2, track 8: January 2025
All other tracks: January 2026

*A choir list for these tracks can be viewed online: johnrutter.com/product/i-sing-of-a-maiden
†A choir list for these tracks can be viewed online: johnrutter.com/product/in-the-poets-garden

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