



## CHRISTMAS 2020 By Brian Wilson



As usual, a new batch of Christmas recordings began to appear before the end of October – at least one in early September. I'm trying to keep up with them – and adding a few from previous years that I have missed. This year's shelves are not quite as full as usual; indeed, several of these recordings only just made it before the pandemic struck, and several of them went into post-production after the lockdown. All told, it's a miracle that we have so much new material.

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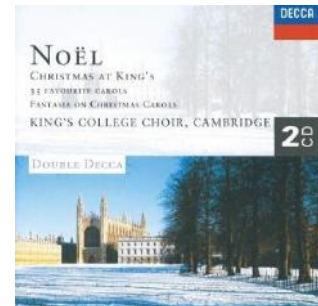


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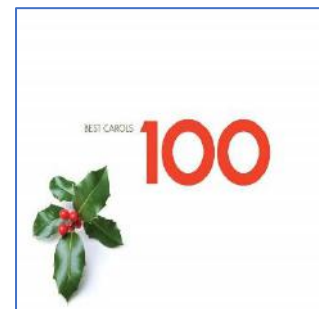
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I'm starting with the assumption that most readers already have a basic collection. If not, a budget-price Decca twofer of recordings from **King's College Cambridge** would be as good a place as anywhere to start. The recordings were made under the aegis of **Sir David Willcocks** between 1958 and 1964, ranging from the very familiar – *Hark! The herald angels sing* (track 1) and the like – via the less familiar – such as *King Jesus hath a garden* (tr.6) – and ending with Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on Christmas carols*, not over-recorded, and certainly not the usual fare on such introductory collections (*Noël: Christmas at King's College*, Double Decca 448482, 2 CDs, around £10\*). The analogue recordings have brushed up well. There's a shorter selection from the same originals on Alto ALC1190, around £6.25 – [review](#).



Bear in mind the existence of collections like this King's twofer, offering traditional singing in the best sense of the word at a very reasonable price, before choosing the more recent, more expensive, alternatives. Another very inexpensive collection, especially if you choose to download it, also contains several offerings from **King's**, under **David Willcocks** and **Philip Ledger**, **Clare College Singers** and **John Rutter**, **Taverner Consort and Players** with **Andrew Parrott**, etc.: **100 Best Carols**, over five hours of music for around £15 on six CDs or around £7.50 as a lossless download (Warner **5002452**).



\* with the all too common warning: Amazon UK offer the CD on one page for £10.29 and for £25.94 on another.

Decca CD from [Amazon UK](#) – [Presto Classical](#) – [ArkivMusic](#) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](#)  
Warner CD/download from [Presto Classical](#) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](#)

### **Alleluja Nativitas: Canti di Natale**

**ANON (CXII)** *Lylum convallium* [1:56]

**PEROTINUS (late C12-early C13)** *Alleluja Nativitas* [7:54]

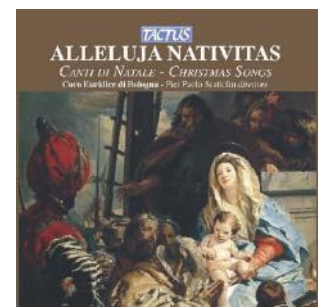
**ANON** *Verbum caro factum est* (chant) / **ANON** (Spanish CXVI) *Verbum caro factum est* [2:51]

**Tomàs Luis da VICTORIA (1548-1611)** *Magi viderunt stellam* (antiphon, 1572) [2:43]

**Giovanni Pierluigi da PALESTRINA (1525-c.1594)** *O magnum mysterium* (responsory) [3:10]

**Francesco SOTO (1534/8?-1619)** *Guidami a chiara stella* ('Il quarto libro delle laudi a 3v e 4v', Roma 1591, transcr. **Marco Gemmani**) [1:48]

**Hieronymus PRAETORIUS (1560-1629)** *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen* [1:39]



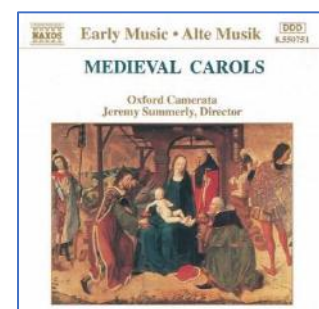
**ANON English (CXVI-XVII)** The first Nowell [2:09]  
**Giacomo Antonio PERTI (1661-1756)** *Inno, responsorio I & VI* [5:37]  
**Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)** *Weihnachts-Oratorium: Ach, mein herzliebes Jesulein* [1:04]  
**Leonardo LEO (1694-1744)** - *Pastorale* [6:06]  
**Franz Xavier GRUBER (1787-1863)** *Stille Nacht* [3:02]  
**Edvard Hagerup GRIEG (1843-1907)** *Ave maris stella* [3:00]  
**François August GEVAERT (1828-1908)** *Le message des anges* [2:50]  
**Francis POULENC (1899-1963)** *Quatre Motets pour le Temps de Noel* (1952): *Quem vidistis pastores* [2:39]  
**Franz Xaver BIEBL (1906-2001)** *Ave Maria* (for two choirs) [6:35]  
**Traditional** (harm. **Giorgio Vacchi**, 1932), *Fa la nana* [4:55]  
harm. **Luigi PIGARELLI (1875-1964)** *Nenia di Gesù Bambino* [3:05]  
harm. **Pier Paolo SCATTOLIN (1949)** *Tu scendi dalle stelle* [2:46]  
**Traditional** harm. **Pier Paolo SCATTOLIN** with electronics *Sarvi Rriggina* [4:20]  
Trio di Flauti, Andrea Macinanti (organ), Carlo Ricci (violin), Enrico Bernardi (organ)  
Latinobalkanica Ensemble, Coro Euridice di Bologna/Pier Paolo Scattolin  
rec. 16-17 June, 5-6 October 2006, Chiesa S. Martino, Casalecchio di Reno, Bologna, Italia. DDD.  
Texts included.  
Reviewed as streamed with pdf booklet from [Naxos Music Library](#)  
**TACTUS TC900002** [70:09] CD from [Amazon UK](#) – [Presto Classical](#)

I'm starting with deep catalogue and looking for something out of the ordinary. We haven't reviewed this 2006 recording, first released in 2012, which takes us in the space of an hour or so on a journey from an anonymous thirteenth-century hymn in praise of the Virgin Mary, hailed as the Lily of the valley, one of her many titles, via some obvious and some much less obvious material, to the twentieth century. Well worth investigating.

I'm sorry to pass over a recording of **Stradella** *Cantata per il Santissimo Natale*, also on Tactus, or aa a Brilliant Classics download. Reviewing the latter when it was available on CD, Derek Warby was scathing about the singing, especially the soprano, and I have to agree. Cristina Miatello's voice has potentially the clarity of Emma Kirkby, but it's hopelessly underpowered and she shows an alarmingly Foster Jenkins propensity for just missing the note. Foster Jenkins apart, she recalls a colleague from years ago who was convinced that her singing of Rusalka's *Song to the Moon* was worth an award at the local Arts Festival – it wasn't, and it was an embarrassment to be on the stage turning the pages for the accompanist.

### Medieval Carols

**Anon.** (C15 English) *Ave Maria* [2:53]  
What tidings bringest thou? [4:08]  
**Hildegard of BINGEN** *O viridissima virga* [4:45]  
**Anon.** (C15 English) *Alma Redemptoris Mater* [6:26]  
*Deo gracias Anglia* [3:58]  
Be merry be merry [2:33]  
**Trad. Spanish** *Riu, riu, chiu* [2:22]  
**Anon.** (C15 English) There is no rose [4:35]  
**Anon. French** *Planctus Guillelmus* [6:48]  
**Anon.** (C15 English) *Eya mater Stephane* [2:37]  
**Trad. English** *Gaudete Christus est natus* [1:42]  
**Anon.** (C15 English) Hail Mary, full of grace [3:43]  
Now may we singen [4:22]  
Nowell, sing we [3:21]



**Peter ABELARD** *Planctus David* [15:31]

Oxford Camerata/Jeremy Summerly

rec. 15-17 December 1992, Chapel of Hertford College, Oxford. DDD.

Texts online

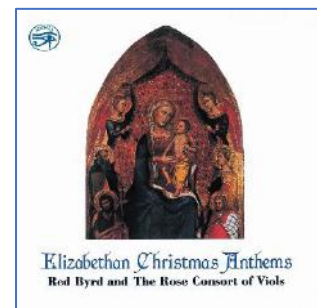
**NAXOS 8.550751** [69:50]

CD from [Amazon UK](#) – [Presto Classical](#) – [ArkivMusic](#) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](#)

More deep back catalogue; this CD has been in my collection for almost 30 years, but it's still part of my Christmas listening. It's one of a valuable series of recordings which Jeremy Summerly made with the Oxford Camerata, among the highlights of the early Naxos catalogue, way back when Naxos CDs cost £3.99 from Woolworth's, and it's still well worth searching out. It seems to have reverted to its original cover after being reissued in 2005 in a slip case – see [review by Rob Barnett](#).

Also well worthwhile is the recording which Oxford Camerata made of the **Schütz *Weihnachts-historie***, or **Christmas Story**, with other music from the composer's *Cantiones Sacrae* of 1625: Naxos 8.553514.

It's some time since Johan van Veen and I [reviewed](#) **Elizabethan Christmas Anthems** from **Red Byrd** and **The Rose Consort of Viols**, and it wasn't new even then (rec. 1989). I feel some annoyance with the supposed 'authentic' pronunciation – I really don't believe that the Elizabethans spoke with a West Country accent; in fact, Raleigh and Drake stood out at court for their Devon accents – but I find this in every other way a fascinating album. It's available now for as little as £6.46 on CD – an added incentive to snap it up if you didn't before. It costs more for the lossless download, which comes without booklet, but Naxos Music Library offers that.



The programme begins and ends with the most significant composer of the period after Tallis and Byrd, **Orlando Gibbons**: his setting of the Advent anthem *This is the record of John* and the Christmas-tide *See, see the Word is incarnate* are worth the price of the album alone. **AMON-RA CDSAR49** [59:23]. CD from [Amazon UK](#) – [Presto Classical](#) – [ArkivMusic](#) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](#)

**Per la Notte di Natale: Italian Christmas Concertos**

**Arcangelo CORELLI (1653-1713)**

Concerto Grosso in g minor, Op.6/8 'Fatto per la Notte di Natale' [14:15]

**Giuseppe TORELLI (1658-1709)**

Concerto Grosso in g minor, Op.8/6 'Concerto in forma di Pastorale per il Santissimo Natale' [5:23]

**Antonio VIVALDI (1678-1741)**

Violin Concerto in E, 'Il riposo' 'per il Santissimo Natale', RV270 [7:28]

**Francesco MANFREDINI (1684-1762)**

Concerto Grosso in C, Op.3/12 'Per il Santissimo Natale' [7:55]

**Pietro LOCATELLI (1695-1764)**

Concerto Grosso in f minor, Op.1/8 'Per il Santo Natale' [13:14]

Concerto Copenhagen/Lars Ulrik Mortensen (harpsichord)

rec. 13-15 January 2020, Garrison Church, Copenhagen. DDD.

Reviewed as streamed in 24/96 sound.

**NAXOS 8.574264** [48:17]



I've reviewed this separately. In brief, this would have been a very competitive recording of these attractive concertos, all with pastoral movements for Christmas Eve, had there been more of it – it's rather short measure – and had there not been several fine alternatives, listed in my [review](#), which also includes CD purchase links.

**Georg Philipp TELEMANN (1681-1767)**

Christmas Oratorios II

*Schmecket und sehet, wie freundlich*, TWV 1:1251 [17:44]

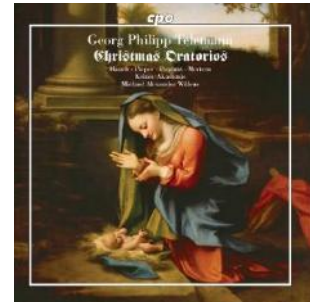
*Im hellen Glanz*, TWV 1:926 [18:17]

*Herr Gott, dich loben wir*, TWV 1:745 [25:33]

*Und das Wort ward Fleisch*, TWV 1:1431 [14:57]

Kölner Akademie/Michael Willens

**CPO 555254-2** [76:50]



Several dealers list this as 'Christmas Cantatas III' – the difference between the two genres is far from clear – and I mistakenly reviewed it with that title in [December 2019](#), where you can find the CD purchase links. The real Christmas Cantatas III recording has just been released by CPO, again with the Kölner Akademie and Michael Willens, and I've [reviewed](#) it separately (555396-2). The music and performances of the Christmas Oratorios remain just as desirable, whatever title the dealers apply to it.

**Advent Live: Volume 2**

**Jonathan DOVE (b.1959)**

I am the day: Soon to be born ... I am alpha and omega [6:35]

**Arvo PÄRT (b.1935)**

*Bogoroditse Devo* 'Rejoice, O virgin' [1:17]

**Herbert HOWELLS (1892-1983)**

A Spotless Rose (No.2 of Three Carol-Anthems) [3:30]

**Cecilia McDOWALL (b.1951)**

A prayer to St John the Baptist: *Ut queant laxis* [4:08]

**Gabriel JACKSON (b.1962)**

*Vox clara ecce intonate* [4:53]

**John McCABE (1939-2015)**

The last and great Herald [5:49]

**Anon.** 'O' Anthems:

O Wisdom [0:52]

O Adonai [0:56]

**Otto GOLDSCHMIDT (1829-1907)**

A tender shoot [2:01]

**Hugo DISTLER (1908-1942)**

*Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen* [1:23]

**Anthony MILNER (1925-2002)**

Out of your sleep arise [2:49]

**Thomas RAVENSCROFT (c.1582-c.1635) and Judith BINGHAM (b.1952)**

Hark the glad sound! the Saviour comes – Bristol [5:28]

**Elizabeth MACONCHY (1907-1994)**

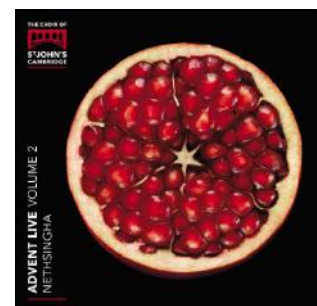
There is no rose: Alleluia [1:49]

O Antiphons: O Root of Jesse [0:51]

O Key of David [0:57]

**Georg Philipp TELEMANN (1681-1767)**

*Ach so laß von mir dich finden* [3:22]



**Paul MANZ (1919-2009)**

E'en so, Lord Jesus, quickly come: Peace be to you and grace from him [2:48]

Anonymous - traditional, arr. **Reginald JACQUES (1894-1969)**

The Linden Tree carol: There stood in heaven a linden tree [1:53]

**Benjamin BRITTEN (1913-1976)**, arr. **Julius HARRISON (1885-1963)**

*Deo gracias* (No.10 of *A Ceremony of Carols*, Op.28) [1:14]

**Hugo WOLF (1860-1903)**

*Einklang: Weil jetzo alles stille ist* (No.2 of *Sechs geistliche Lieder*) [1:59]

**Thomas OLIVERS (1725-1799)** and **Christopher ROBINSON (b.1936)**

Lo! He comes with clouds descending – Helmsley [5:09]

**Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)**

*Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*, BWV661 [3:11]

James Anderson-Besant (organ)

St John's College Choir Cambridge/Andrew Nethsingha

rec. live 2008, 2018 and 2019, St John's College Chapel, Cambridge. DDD.

Texts and translations included

Reviewed as 24/44.1 download with pdf booklet from [hyperion-records.co.uk](http://hyperion-records.co.uk).

**SIGNUM SIGCD661** [62:54] CD from [Amazon UK](http://Amazon UK) – [Presto Classical](http://Presto Classical) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](http://Naxos Music Library)

The Advent Sunday Carol service from St John's has been broadcast live by BBC Radio 3 for so many years now that it has become almost as traditional as the better-known Nine Lessons and Carols from King's on Christmas Eve, with the additional benefit that the undergraduate singers are still in residence during full term. This new album, a follow-up to the 2018 release on SIGCD535 – [review](#) – [review](#) – was recorded on three separate years. Like the earlier release, no attempt is made to follow the order of the service, which is punctuated by the Advent prose, *Rorate cæli*; instead, the album concentrates on recent works, many of them specially composed for the service. As before, the singing is well up to the standard we have come to associate with St John's under Andrew Nethsingha.

The earlier volume was available in 16-bit sound only; this second selection is also available in superior 24-bit, albeit at 'only' 24/44.1. That has reduced the price for 24-bit to just £7.85 (£6.99 for 16-bit).

**Alpha & O: Music for Advent & Christmas**

**Judith WEIR (b.1954)** My Guardian Angel [2:12]

**Hannah KENDALL (b.1984)** Nativity [4:28]

**Joanna Forbes L'ESTRANGE**: Advent 'O' Carol [6:14]

**Paul CHIHARA (b.1938)** *Magnificat anima meum Dominum* [4:31]

**Diana BURRELL (b.1948)** Green groweth the Holly \* [4:53]

Anon.: *O Sapientia* [0:54]

**Christopher FOX (b.1955)** O Antiphons: I. Alpha and O \* [2:57]

Anon.: *O Adonai* [0:56]

**Christopher FOX** O Antiphons: II. In a Flame of Fire \* [2:35]

Anon.: *O radix Jesse* [0:55]

**Christopher FOX** O Antiphons: III. Our Grace \* [1:59]

Anon.: *O clavis David* [1:05]

**Christopher FOX** O Antiphons: IV. Open the Gate \* [1:53]

Anon.: *O Oriens* [0:47]

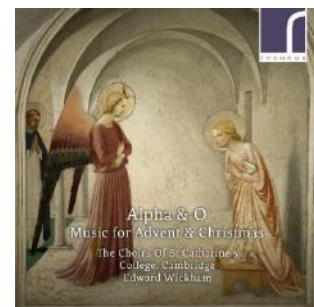
**Christopher FOX** O Antiphons: V. Morning Star \* [2:13]

Anon.: *O Rex gentium* [0:51]

**Christopher FOX** O Antiphons: VI. A Cornerstone \* [3:21]

Anon.: *O Emmanuel* [0:53]

**Christopher FOX** O Antiphons: VII. Trust Above All \* [3:51]



**Jeremy THURLOW** *Magnificat* \* [6:49]

\* World premiere recordings

Caius Lee (organ)

The Choirs of St Catharine's College, Cambridge/Edward Wickham

rec. Chapel of St Catharine's College, Cambridge, 15–17 March 2020. DDD.

Texts and translations included

Reviewed as streamed in 24/96 sound.

**RESONUS RES10268** [54:29]

This was another early release, in late September. Apart from the plainsong 'O' antiphons which mark the end of Advent, the music is all by living composers. With several world premiere recordings, this is an apt successor St Catharine's earlier Resonus recording of contemporary Christmas music, *Nova! Nova!* If, like me, you look every Christmas for new material, this could well be your choice for 2020. As heard in 24-bit sound, the recording is very good. For more details and CD purchase links, please see my separate [review](#).

We seem to have missed that earlier Resonus recording when it was released – it, too, concentrates on new works, some of them making us think again about the traditional words, as in the case of the opening setting of *The Holly and the Ivy* by Richard Rodney Bennett. Like the works marked \* on both albums, it's receiving its first recording. If you choose the new album, you will want its predecessor, too, which is just as fine:

**Richard Rodney BENNETT (1936-2012)** *The holly and the ivy* \*

**Nicola LEFANU (b.1947)** *Saint Ita's Lullaby* \*

**Matthew LARKIN (b.1963)** *Adam lay ybounden*

**Giles SWAYNE (b.1946)** *There is no rose* \*

**Tansy DAVIES (b.1973)** *Christmas Eve*

**James MacMILLAN (b.1959)** *Nova! Nova! Ave fit ex eva*

**Roxanna PANUFNIK (b.1968)** *Alma redemptoris mater* \*

**Cecilia McDOWALL (b.1951)** *Before the paling of the stars* \*

**John TAVENER (1944-2013)** *A Cradle Song* \*

**Christopher FOX (b.1955)** *A Dream of Winter* \*

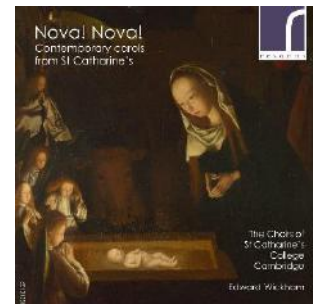
**Kerry ANDREW (b.1978)** *Hevene Quene*

**Stevie WISHART (b.1969)** *Three Carols* \*

**Sally BEAMISH (b.1956)** *In the stillness*

**RESONUS RES10159** [66:00] Texts and translations included.

CD from [Amazon UK](#) – [Presto Classical](#) – [ArkivMusic](#) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](#)



### ***Ave Rex Angelorum***

Carols and Music tracing the Journey from Christ the King to Epiphany

Jeremy Filsell, Benjamin Mills (organ)

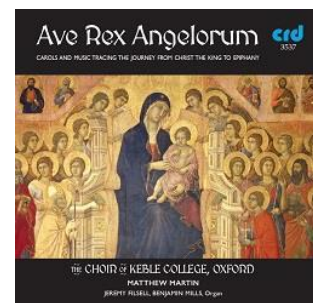
The Choir of Keble College, Oxford/Matthew Martin

rec. 18-21 July, 2019, Buckfast Abbey, Devon. DDD.

Texts and translations included

Reviewed as lossless (wav) press preview

**CRD 3537** [60:19] For CD purchase and full details please see [review](#).



Another recording of modern settings of Music for Advent and Christmas-tide which I have reviewed separately. Though it was the first to come my way, this is one of the best of this year's Christmas offerings. The other Oxford and Cambridge college choirs have some real competition on their hands from Keble.

***O Magnum Mysterium: Music for Christmas from Clifton Cathedral***

**Jacob HANDL (1550-1591)**

*Resonet in laudibus* [1:25]

**W J KIRKPATRICK arr. G Mendham**

Away in a Manger [3:10]

**English trad. arr. David Willcocks**

Sussex Carol [1:52]

**Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)**

*Wachet Auf* (BWV 645) [4:48]

**Frabcis POULENC (1899-1963)**

*O Magnum Mysterium* [3:39]

**Johann Sebastian BACH**

*Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ* (BWV 604) [1:24]

*Der Tag, der ist so freudenreich* (BWV 605) [2:00]

Coventry Carol (original 1591 version) [3:56]

**Jan P SWEELINCK (1562-1621)**

*Hodie Christus natus est* [3:22]

**Johann Sebastian BACH**

*In Dulci Jubilo* (BWV 608) [1:35]

Old German Tune arr. **R Pearsall**

*In Dulci Jubilo* [3:48]

**F GRUBER arr C Walker**

Silent Night [3:33]

**Johann Sebastian BACH**

*Kommst du Nun, Jesu, vom Himmel* (BWV 650) [3:20]

**Harold DARKE (1888-1976)**

In the Bleak Midwinter [4:25]

**Peter WARLOCK (1894-1930)**

Bethlehem Down [3:42]

**Cölnner Gesangbuch (1623) arr. David Wulstan**

Echo Carol [2:34]

**Louis-Claude DAQUIN (1694-1772)**

*Noël Suisse* [4:01]

John Gibbons (organ solo)

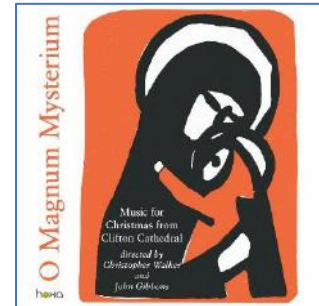
Clifton Cathedral Choir/Christopher Walker

rec. Clifton Cathedral, 23-24 October 1987. ADD.

Texts not included

Reviewed as lossless (wav) press preview.

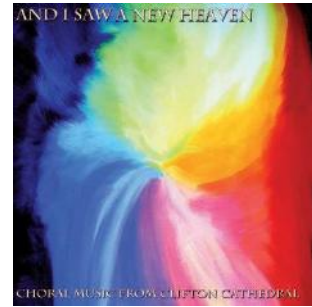
**HOXA HS071027** [52:45]



Hoxa is a new but growing independent label, based in the West of England, with several interesting recordings in its catalogue – you can try them from [Naxos Music Library](#). This mid-price Christmas recording enters a highly competitive field, but with a number of advantages: the accomplished volunteer choir of the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Clifton, near Bristol, well recorded in the friendly acoustic of this modern building, and with the three-manual Rieger organ accompanying the singing and heard solo. The recording, though made as long ago as 1987, has come up well in this digital transfer. Due for release on 27 November, I still couldn't find this from any of the regular sources when I tried on 2 December, but it's worth checking.



It's not quite an ideal introduction to the Hoxa label, however: nearly all the music can be found on many other recordings, and the lack of texts – at least in the booklet that came with my preview – is to be regretted. A better introduction to the label might be *And I Saw a New Heaven: Choral Music from Clifton Cathedral* (HOXA **HS1036-18**). That's a varied recital, with the Clifton Cathedral Choir supported by the Lochrian Ensemble conducted by David Ogden, recorded in DDD in 1999, and it comes with a booklet of notes and texts. The CD is available from [Amazon UK](#) and the album can be streamed from [Naxos Music Library](#) (mp3) and Qobuz (16/44.1), both with booklet.



**Benjamin BRITTEN (1913-76)** A Ceremony of Carols, Op.28 (1942): Procession [1:45]; Wolcum Yole! [1:25]

**William MATHIAS (1934-92)** Alleluya, a new work is come on hand [2:05]

**Henry John GAUNTLETT (1805-76)** arr. **David WILLCOCKS** Once in Royal David's City [3:57]

**Francis POULENC (1899-1963)** *Hodie Christus natus est* [2:21]

**William James KIRKPATRICK (1838-1921)** arr. **David WILLCOCKS** Away in a manger [2:27]

**J.S. BACH (1685-1750)** *Gott, durch deine Güte*, BWV 600 [1:07]

*Herr Christ, der ein'ge Gottes-Sohn*, BWV601 [1:32]

**Arthur SULLIVAN (1842-1900)** arr. **David WILLCOCKS** It came upon the midnight clear [3:22]

**Benjamin BRITTEN** A Ceremony of Carols, Op.28: There is no rose [2:43]; This little Babe [1:27]

**Johannes BRAHMS (1833-97)** *Schmücke Dich, O Liebe Seele*, Op.122/5 [2:19]; *Es ist ein' Ros' Entsprungen*, Op.122/8 [2:51]

**Benjamin BRITTEN** A Ceremony of Carols, Op. 28: Balulalow [1:16]; Interlude [4:30]

Trad. *Gaudete* [1:52]

**John GARDNER (1917-2011)** Tomorrow shall be my dancing day [1:59]

**J.S. BACH** *Der Tag, der ist so freudenreich*, BWV605 [1:45]

*Von Himmel kam der Engel Schar*, BWV607 [1:11]

Trad 16th century French Tune arr. **David WILLCOCKS** Ding Dong! Merrily on high [2:01]

**Felix MENDELSSOHN (1809-47)** Hark! the herald angels sing, arr. **Richard Jeffrey-Gray** [3:01]

**Benjamin BRITTEN** A Ceremony of Carols, Op. 28: *Deo Gracias* [1:15]; Recession [1:49]

Ian Bell (organ), Catherine Snelson (harp)

Clifton Cathedral Choir/David Ogden

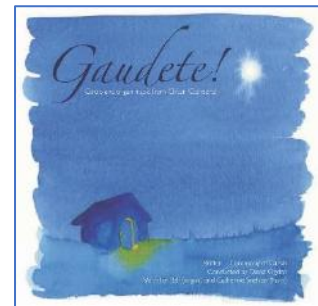
rec. 1997, Clifton Cathedral, Bristol. DDD.

Texts not included

Reviewed as lossless (wav) press preview

**HOXA HS970802** [50:08]

CD from [Presto Classical](#) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](#)



This more recent Clifton Cathedral recording, threaded through with sections of Britten's *Ceremony of Carols*, caught John France's attention: 'a beautifully performed CD which explores a wide range of seasonal music. The numinous atmosphere, so often lost in the commercial noise of Christmas, is present here in every bar' – [review](#). My only reservation is that you may have, or intend to obtain, a favourite recording of the complete *Ceremony of Carols*, some of the best of which I've included in a separate section below. As before, the Rieger organ is as much a star of this recording.

**Christmas in Puebla**

**Juan Gargía de ZÉSPEDES (1619-1698)**

*Convidando está la noche* [4:03]

*Hodie scietis* [2:09]

**Juan Gutiérrez de PADILLA (1590-1664)**

*Joseph fili David* [4:51]

*Missa 'Joseph fili David':*

*Kyrie* [3:05]

*Gloria* [4:00]

**Francisco de VIDALES (c.1630-1702)**

*Los que fueren de buen gusto* [5:54]

*Alleluia: Crastina die* [1:31]

**Juan Gutiérrez de PADILLA**

*A la xácara, xacarilla* [9:39]

*Missa 'Joseph fili David':*

*Credo* [6:50]

*Tollite portas* [1:03]

**Joan CEREROLS (1618-1676)**

*Marizápalos a lo Divino (Serafin que, condulce harmonía)* [7:42]

*Missa 'Joseph fili David': Sanctus* [1:41]

*Benedictus (Mode VII)* [0:30]

**Francisco López CAPILLAS**

*Cui luna, sol et omnia* [2:58]

**Giovanni Pierluigi da PALESTRINA (c.1525-1594)**

*Missa 'O admirabile commercium': Agnus Dei* [5:00]

**Juan Gutiérrez de PADILLA**

*3 Cuadernos de Navidad: No. 1, Christus natus est* [1:56]

**Gaspar FERNANDES**

*Tleycantimo choquiliya* [2:16]

**Juan Gutiérrez de PADILLA**

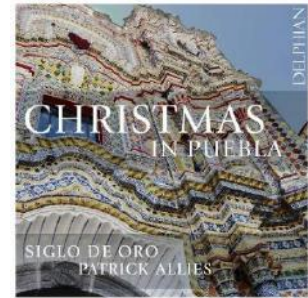
*Deus in adiutorium meum intende* [2:21]

Siglo de Oro/Patrick Allies

rec. 8-10 January 2020, All Hallows' Gospel Oak, London

Reviewed as streamed in 24/44.1 sound (no booklet).

**DELPHIAN DCD34238** [67:29] For CD purchase links please see [review](#) by Johan van Veen.



Some of the music here has been recorded before, notably and very successfully, by Ex Cathedra and Jeffrey Skidmore for Hyperion – the opening *Convidando está la noche*, for example, on *New World Symphonies* (CDA67380 – [review](#)). The programme on that album is based around a Mass by Juan de Padilla, who emigrated to New Spain (Mexico) in the early 1620s, *Missa Ego flos campi*. Siglo de Oro and Patrick Allies here adopt a similar programme, this time based around another Padilla Mass, celebrated as it might have been on Christmas Eve in the new, unfinished, cathedral at Puebla de los Angeles. There is no other current version of the *Missa Joseph fili David*.

Those Hyperion recordings – the other volumes are CDA67524 and CDA67600 – were the well-deserving recipients of many awards. There are a few SACD copies of the third volume – [review](#). The new Delphian deserves the same level of praise; if the performances are slightly less vigorous than those of Ex Cathedra – or a little more refined, whichever way you put it – there's very little in it. (But see Johan van Veen's review – link above – for a more critical response. Mike Parr's [review](#) is more in agreement with mine).

The 24-bit streamed version from Qobuz is very good, but there's no booklet with that or with the mp3 from Naxos Music Library: there should be.

**A Spanish Nativity**

- VICTORIA:** *O Magnum Mysterium* [4:27]
- GUERRERO:** *Beata Dei genitrix Maria* [6:57]
- A un niño llorando* [2:43]
- Alonso LOBO:** *Kyrie from Missa Beata Dei genitrix Maria* [4:03]
- Gloria from Missa Beata Dei genitrix Maria* [4:49]
- FLECHA el Viejo:** *El jubilate* [6:53]
- LOBO:** *Credo from Missa Beata Dei genitrix Maria* [7:38]
- FLECHA el Viejo:** *Ríu, ríu, chíu* [2:56]
- LOBO:** *Sanctus & Benedictus from Missa Beata Dei genitrix Maria* [5:42]
- RIMONTE:** *De la piel de sus ovejas* [3:53]
- LOBO:** *Agnus Dei from Missa Beata Dei genitrix Maria* [2:51]
- MORALES:** *Cum natus esset Jesus* [11:18]
- Stile Antico
- rec. March 2019, All Hallows' Church, Gospel Oak, London. DDD.
- Texts and translations included
- Reviewed as 24/88.2 download with pdf booklet from [eclassical.com](http://eclassical.com).
- HARMONIA MUNDI HMM902312** [64:17]
- For details and CD purchase links, see review by [Simon Thompson](#).



This recording is just as valuable as when ST reviewed it last year and dubbed it indispensable. It's the only current recording of the Alonso Lobo Marian Mass. The download is actually 24/88.2, not 24/96, as stated, but that hardly detracts from the quality of the sound.

**Sacred Treasures of Christmas**

A sequence of music for Christmas, Epiphany and Candlemas

- Jan Pieterszoon SWEELINCK (1562-1621)**
- Hodie Christus natus est* [3:52]
- Giovanni GABRIELI (c.1554/7-1612)**
- O Magnum Mysterium* [4:34]
- Anon.**
- Alleluia. Dies sanctificatus* [2:23]
- Hans Leo HASSLER (1562-1612)**
- Verbum caro factum est* [3:30]
- Jean MOUTON (before 1459-1522)**
- Nesciens Mater* [6:08]
- Samuel SCHEIDT (1587-1654)**
- Puer natus in Bethlehem* [2:23]
- Francisco GUERRERO (1528-1599)**
- Pastores loquebantur* [4:02]
- Orlande de LASSUS (1530/2-1594)**
- Resonet in Laudibus à 5* [4:36]
- Tomás Luis de VICTORIA (1548-1611)**
- O magnum mysterium, motet* [4:32]
- Alma redemptoris Mater a 5* [8:06]
- Giovanni Pierluigi da PALESTRINA (1525/6-1594)**
- Surge, illuminare, Jerusalem* [2:57]
- Orlande de LASSUS**



*Omnes de Saba* [3:03]

**John SHEPPARD (c.1515-1558)**

*Reges Tharsis et insulæ*<sup>1</sup> [6:01]

**Jacobus CLEMENS non Papa (c.1510/15-1555/56)**

*Magi veniunt ab oriente* [6:12]

**Giovanni NANINO (1543/4-1607)**

*Diffusa est gratia* [2:41]

**Thomas TALLIS (c.1505-1585)**

*Videte miraculum*<sup>1</sup> [11:23]

Xavier Ferros (tenor)<sup>1</sup>

The London Oratory Schola Cantorum/Charles Cole

rec. March 2020, St Augustine's Church, Kilburn, London

Texts and translations included.

Reviewed as 24/96 download with pdf booklet from [hyperion-records.co.uk](http://hyperion-records.co.uk).

**HYPERION CDA68358** [76:24]

CD from [Amazon UK](http://Amazon UK) – [Presto Classical](http://Presto Classical) – Stream from Naxos Music Library

It's good to hear the London Oratory Schola Cantorum on this and another new recording from Hyperion: *Sacred Treasures of Spain* (CDA68359) – we haven't heard much of them recently, and this is, I believe, their first appearance on Hyperion. They sing the Saturday vigil Mass in term time and the School Mass on the major feast days, so the music of the Roman rite is in their blood and Latin texts hold no problems for them. The majority of the music here comes from Catholic composers, though there are some ecumenical concessions. Sweelinck was a Dutch Calvinist, so his setting of *Hodie* on the opening track would not have been sung in church, but that doesn't prevent it from being an ideal opening, nor does it prevent the Schola Cantorum from beginning as they mean to go on, giving the music the full works.

The same applies to Scheidt's *Puer natus in Bethlehem*, the work of a Lutheran influenced by the Venetian composers and a student of Sweelinck, though it doesn't *quite* go with the same swing as the fleet-footed account on Vox Luminis' album of Scheidt's *Cantiones Sacrae* (RIC301) or Paul McCreesh's performance of Prætorius' setting of the same text, in Latin and German, on my absolutely essential Christmas CD for my Desert Island (now DG Archiv 4791757, mid-price – [review](#)).

The final item, Tallis's six-part *Videte miraculum*, rounds off the programme most appropriately – the work of a composer who clung to his pre-reformation roots, without seeking unduly to disguise them, yet was almost equally at home in the Latin repertoire, as here, and in setting English texts for the reformed liturgy. Here, again, you may prefer an early music specialist group, The Cardinal's Musick; you trade off a cleaner texture on that older Hyperion recording for the more incense-laden tones of the London Oratory. As the older album is currently offered for £5.00 on CD or as a 16-bit download, with even 24-bit only £5.65, why not have both? (CDA68026, *Missa Puer natus est nobis*, etc., with pdf booklet, from [hyperion-records.co.uk](http://hyperion-records.co.uk)). Another recording by Tudor specialists can be found on Volume 4 of the Tallis Complete Works from Chapelle du Roi (SIGCD010: Music for the Divine Office 1 – also available to download, with booklet, from [hyperion-records.co.uk](http://hyperion-records.co.uk)).

The recording of Victoria's *O magnum mysterium*, too, lingers a little longer and its textures are denser than on the Stile Antico recording (above). Ideally, I'd be loth to do without either; pushed to an invidious choice, it would have to be the new Hyperion.

***Machet die Tore weit***

*Weihnachtsmusik an der Thomaskirche* (Christmas Music at St Thomas' Church, Leipzig)

**Johann SCHELLE (1648-1701)**

*Machet die Tore weit a12, Geistliches Konzert zum 1.Adventssonntag* [10:56]

**Tobias MICHAEL (1592-1657)**

*Machet die Tore weit, Musicalischer Seelenlust Ander Theil, No.42 \** [6:29]

**Anon (C14) Hymnus Dies est lætitiæ** (14. Jhd.) [1:06]

**Sebastian KNÜPFER (1633-1676)**

*Dies est lætitiæ a22, Geistliches Konzert zum Weihnachtsfest \** [15:46]

**Johann Caspar HORN (1636-1722)**

*Es begab sich aber zu der Zeit, Geistliche Harmonien über die gewöhnlichen Evangelia No.5* [11:43]

**Johann KUHNAU (1660-1722)**

*Frohlocket ihr Völker a12, Geistliches Konzert zum Weihnachtsfest* [29:43]

Antonia Bourvé, Simone Schwark (soprano)

Johanna Krell (alto)

Florian Cramer, Hansjörg Mammel (tenor)

Markus Flaig (bass)

Kammerchor der Erlöserkirche Bad Homburg

Johann-Rosenmüller-Ensemble/Susanne Rohn

rec. 16 - 18 January 2020, Erlöserkirche, Bad Homburg (Germany)

German and Latin texts and German translations included

World premiere recordings

Reviewed as streamed from [Naxos Music Library](#).

**CHRISTOPHORUS CHR77449** [75:55]

CD from [Amazon UK](#) – [Presto Classical](#) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](#)



Baroque German music can usually be relied on to lift the spirits. The opening setting by Schelle of music associated with the first Sunday in Advent, 'Fling open the gates', should be no exception, but these performances don't quite hit the spot. Much of the solo singing is less than ideal and the recording doesn't open out quite enough for the music to make its effect. I'm prepared to accept that hearing the album as streamed in mp3 may be partly at fault in the latter respect – I couldn't find a lossless or 24-bit version to stream – but the main problem lies with the rather flat performances and less than sprightly tempos. For the Schelle, you can do better with a CPO recording of *Baroque Christmas Cantatas from Central Germany* (777333-2 – [review](#)). Even in mp3 from [NML](#), that sounds much more the ticket, better still in 16-bit sound.

All of which is a shame because there are two world premiere recordings here. The longer of these, the Knüpfer *Dies est lætitiæ*, is well worth hearing, but, again, I can imagine a more joyous performance – the Latin text means 'This is a day of joyfulness'. The lack of an English translation of the texts is another disappointment, not good enough for a full-price release.

Another Christophorus release *Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her* is billed as a Christmas Concert from Leipzig, where all the composers served as Thomaskantors before Bach:

**Johann SCHELLE (1648-1701)**

*Vom Himmel kam der Engel Schar* [8:05]

**Sebastian KNÜPFER (1633-1676)**

*Ach mein herzliebtes Jesulein* [7:09]

**Johann SCHELLE**

*Actus Musicus auff Weyh-Nachten: Weihnachtsoratorium nach Lukas* (Christmas Oratorio according to Luke) [23:47]

**Johann KUHNNAU (1660-1722)**

*Magnificat* in C with Christmas interpolations [28:07]

Monika Mauch, Hanna Zumsande (sopranos), Franz Vitzthum (alto), Sebastian Hübner (tenor), Ekkehard Abele (bass)

Kammerchor der Christuskirche Karlsruhe; L'arpa festante/Peter Görtner  
rec. live 22 December 2019, Christuskirche Karlsruhe. DDD.

German and Latin texts included; no translations

**CHRISTOPHORUS CHR77448** [67:07]

CD from [Amazon UK](#) – [Presto Classical](#) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](#)



The title *Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her* is appropriate for this collection of Christmas music by Bach's predecessors as St Thomas Kantor; it appears in all four works, including the Kuhnau *Magnificat* with the Christmas verses interpolated, a practice followed by Bach, whose own setting of the Vespers canticle comes with or without the seasonal additions. The recording is more than a memento of a concert: the Schelle short narration of the Christmas story is very rarely performed and there is only one other recording, which also features Monika Mauch, a performance directed by Michael Alexander Willens (CPO555155-2 – [review](#) – [Winter 2019-20/1](#)).

**Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)**

*Weihnachts-Oratorium* (Christmas Oratorio) BWV248

Soprano - Lynda Russell

Contralto - Catherine Wyn-Rogers

Tenor, Evangelist - Mark Padmore

Bass, Herod - Michael George

Angel, Echo - Libby Crabtree

The Sixteen

The Symphony of Harmony and Invention/Harry Christophers

rec. c.1992?

Texts and translations included

Reviewed as lossless (flac) download with pdf booklet from [thesixteenshop.com](#)

**CORO COR16017** [76:52 + 70:47]

CD from [Amazon UK](#) – [Presto Classical](#) – [ArkivMusic](#) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](#)



The two hinges which open the doors of Christmas for many music lovers are the Bach *Christmas Oratorio* and Handel's *Messiah* (below). I'm not sure when this recording was made – Robert Hugill [reviewed](#) a reissue on the TFL label in 2003. I've referred to it several times for comparison, but never reviewed it directly.

There are recordings of this work to suit all tastes. To name only a few of the best: Karl Richter for lovers of the old style (DG Archiv 4272362\*); Philip Ledger with King's College Choir, the ASMF and some fine soloists including Elly Ameling and Janet Baker, for the slightly less traditionally minded and

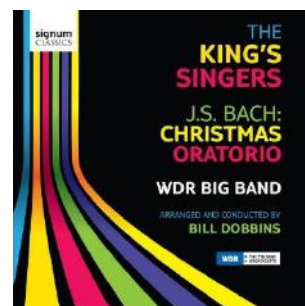
bargain lovers (Warner Gemini 2176252, super-budget); Stephen Layton for modern instruments with historic sensitivity (Hyperion CDA68031/2: Recording of the Month – [review](#) – [review](#) – [DL News 2013/15](#)), John Butt for those seeking period-instrument performance (Linn CKD499: Recording of the Month – [review](#) – [review](#) – [Christmas 2016](#)).

The Sixteen and Harry Christophers are closer to the period end of that spectrum, but that doesn't translate into breakneck speeds: at 7:56, for example, they are only slightly faster in the opening chorus than Ledger (8:16) and Richter (8:17). There's even something to be said for Richter's fuller treatment of the Part II *Sinfonia*, almost half as long again as from Christophers and Butt.

Texts and translations are included, but not adjacent to one another, so awkward to follow for non-German-speakers. I enjoyed this Coro recording; overall, however, my top choices remain the Butt and Layton recordings, both available in 24-bit sound – from [Hyperion](#) and [Linn](#). Linn also offer, free of charge, 22 minutes of bonus tracks – [here](#).

\* Also, appropriately, on three vinyl LPs: 4839176.

I've resisted a jazzed-up Signum recording of the *Christmas Oratorio* from the **King's Singers**, the **WDR Big Band** and **Bill Dobbins** for ten years now, at least in part because Nick Barnard deemed it an early Christmas turkey ([SIGCD215](#) – [review](#)). This year I decided to screw my courage to the sticking place – after all, I like the Swingle Singers in Bach – and streamed it in lossless sound. I could have downloaded it inexpensively from [Hyperion](#), but thought I'd try it first before committing it to a place on my hard drives – unbelievably, my 5TB drive is almost full and the 8TB is filling rapidly. In the end, I found myself, like my colleague, preferring to pass on this one.



### George Frideric HANDEL (1685-1759)

*Messiah*, HWV56 (Dublin version, 1742)

Julia Doyle (soprano), Tim Mead (countertenor), Thomas Hobbs (tenor), Roderick Williams (bass)

RIAS Kammerchor Berlin

Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin/Justin Doyle

rec. Jesus-Christus-Kirche, Berlin-Dahlem, January 2020. DDD

Texts included.

Reviewed as streamed in 24-bit sound.

**PENTATONE PTC5186853** [50:33 + 83:55] For CD purchase please see **Recording of the Month** [review](#). Stream from [Naxos Music Library](#).



Another Christmas, another *Messiah*, this time from Pentatone, who, I'm surprised to see, didn't have a recording in their catalogue. I've had time only to dip into this new release, especially the Christmas music in Part 1, since I'm including it with recordings for that season.

The opening *sinfony* prepares us for what promises to be a fine interpretation, much like the Berlin Akademie's recent Handel forays in the form of his Op.3 and Op.6 concertos, also for Pentatone. I've been listening to several Italian Christmas concerto recordings recently (see above); the Akademie's account of the all-too-short *Pastoral Symphony* ranks with the best of them.

I always feel sorry for the tenor in a live performance; he has to set the tone for the rest of the performance, when *Comfort ye* contains passages which lie rather low for the voice. Fortunately,

Thomas Hobbs is well up to the task, achieving an almost baritone tone in those lower notes. When he comes to *Ev'ry valley*, we really do feel exalted along with those valleys. If you follow the old Ebenezer Prout score, which most of us have on a bookshelf somewhere, you will note that he adds just a modicum of ornamentation, which is much better than overdoing it as some recordings tend to do.

The chorus in *And the glory of the Lord* and elsewhere is not undernourished, but it's not exactly the Huddersfield Choral Society with everything thrown in. Talking of which, the ultra-traditional Sargent recording (still available complete or highlights on Classics for Pleasure) takes almost a minute longer for this chorus and sounds really arthritic by comparison – not that the Akademie choir make it sound rushed. If anything, *And he shall purify* is even punchier, and in *O thou that tellest*, the urge to dance is as great as it sometimes is in the best performances of Bach cantatas. *For unto us a child is born* is also light and dancing, with the words *Wonderful, Counsellor* delivered loud and crisp.

Roderick Williams may not have quite the power of some of the grand old basses who have sung Handel, but there's plenty of power in his *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts*. Conversely, he makes *The people that walked* with its range between baritone high and deep bass on the word 'darkness' sound like a piece of cake.

What would Sargent have made of a counter-tenor *But who may abide?* Set Tim Mead beside Elsie Morison on the Huddersfield recording and, even though she is much less plummy than the contraltos who sang for Sargent in earlier years, we experience a very different view of *Messiah*. In *Behold, a virgin shall conceive / O thou that tellest*, his tone is almost soprano light. As with the other soloists, the ornamentation is never overdone.

My ideal Handel soprano is Emma Kirkby, who recorded *Messiah* with Christopher Hogwood and the Academy of Ancient Music (4304882). Julia Doyle here, with another equally distinguished Akademie, albeit differently spelled, comes very close to matching her for purity – and maybe with greater strength in *And lo, the angel of the Lord*, while *He shall lead his flock* is as tender as you could wish. There's more ornamentation in the latter than is usual in this recording, but it's never overdone.

None of the rest of the work, on CD2, makes me change my generally very high opinion of this recording. With first-rate sound, as heard in 24-bit, this is another *Messiah* well worth considering, but there are so many equally fine accounts. I'm surprised that not all dealers seem to stock John Butt's recording, also of the Dublin 1742 version (Linn CKD285: Recording of the Month – [review](#); Download of the Month – [DL Roundup November 2009](#)), but it can be obtained from [linnrecords.com](#) on [SACD](#) and in [download formats up to 24-bit](#).

One major disappointment: this is the first Pentatone recording that I've encountered in some time that isn't available on SACD – another label marching away from the best technology, though the availability of a 24/96 download compensates, albeit at a price – a third more than the 2-CD set. ([Eclassical.com](#) are offering the 24-bit for no extra cost for a limited time, at \$24.08). It seems to be the start of another label following the likes of Harmonia Mundi and Linn in a retreat from SACD; the recent Pentatone Brahms Symphony No.1 is likewise CD only – [review](#) – [review](#).

If you want a version of *Messiah* on SACD that pushes the boundaries, read William Hedley's [review](#) of a new recording from Jordi Savall with Capella reial de Catalunya and Le Concert des Nations (Alia Vox AVSA9936).



**Christian Friedrich RUPPE (1753-1826)**

Christmas Cantata [30:48]

Easter Cantata [21:55]

Francine van der Heyden (soprano), Karin van der Poel (mezzo), Otto Bouwknecht (tenor), Mitchell Sandler (bass)

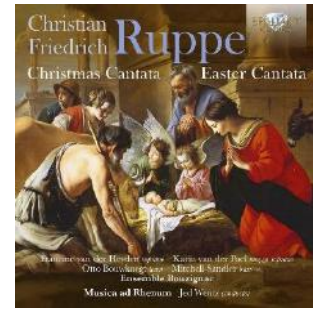
Ensemble Bouzignac

Musica ad Rhenum/Jed Wentz

rec. 28-30 June 1995, Andries Kerk, Amerongen, The Netherlands. DDD.

Dutch texts included

Reviewed as streamed in lossless sound

**BRILLIANT CLASSICS 96108** [52:43]CD from [Amazon UK](#) – [Presto Classical](#) – [ArkivMusic](#) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](#)

Take a Lutheran composer who was a contemporary of Mozart, transplant him to Leiden, where he became musical director of the university and organist of the Lutheran church, give him music to compose for Christmas and Easter, and the result is less purely unbuttoned in joy than Bach or Telemann, more akin to Haydn's church music. The only other recording of these cantatas is ... this recording with its original catalogue number NM92067, download only, but that's no problem because these are attractive performances with an accomplished conductor of music of the baroque and classical periods in the chair. Put it out at an attractive price – £7 or less on CD, a little less as a lossless download, with booklet, if you shop around, and what's not to like? Well, the texts in the booklet are in Dutch only, so better brush up your linguistic skills.

**Exaltatio:**

European Christmas and Advent songs

Christmas and Advent songs from Baroque hymnbooks

Advent and Christmas songs from an 1863 hymnbook

Traditional Christmas songs and carols of Bohemia and Moravia

Arranged with intermezzos by Jaroslav Krček

Dagmar Pecková (mezzo), Vincenc Ignác Novotný (tenor)

Musica Bohemica/Jaroslav Krček (voice)

rec. Domovina Studio, Prague, April and May 2020. DDD.

Original texts included, no translations.

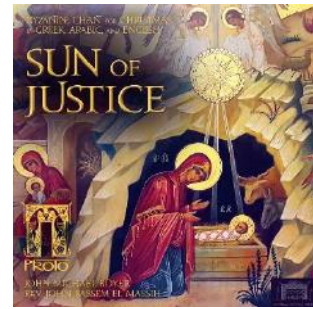
Reviewed as streamed in 24-bit sound.

**SUPRAPHON SU4285-2** [67:46]CD from [Amazon UK](#) – [Presto Classical](#)

You may fare rather better with the Dutch texts for the Ruppe recording than with the Czech and Polish words here – there are some German, French and English texts, but the rest could well be something of a closed book, though you may manage some of the titles, such as *Legenda o Marii* (track 4). Everything is rather tranquil – some of the more familiar works, such as *Ein Kind geboren zu Bethlehem* (track 5), could do with more oomph. Dagmar Pecková, too, sounds a little too contralto-ish and plummy in that piece and *Noël nouvelet* (tr. 7), though I enjoyed her singing on the other tracks, where she has the lion's share.

I enjoyed listening to this – perhaps just the thing on a quiet Christmas Eve with a mince pie and a glass of wine – but I'm not sure that I would consider buying the CD or download. It wasn't yet available from Naxos Music Library when I checked, but they have the earlier *Nativitas* from the same team (Supraphon [SU4244-2](#)).

If you prefer to look further East, there's a recording of Orthodox music for Christmas: ***Sun of Justice*** on the Cappella Romana label: John Michael Boyer sings the Greek texts, Deacon John Rassem El Massih the Arabic on CD1. CD2 offers the music with English texts. The recording was made at St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church, Portland, Oregon, USA, in October 2016. Texts (Greek, Arabic and English), transliterations of the Greek – in modern pronunciation – and Arabic, and English translations are included, together with some notes on the music. **CR417-2CD** – from [Presto](#) (download only, with booklet) – [Amazon UK](#) (2 CDs) stream from [Naxos Music Library](#) (with booklet).



### ***Be all merry***

**Anonymous** - Medieval, arr. **Robert Lucas PEARSALL (1795-1856)** & **Matthew CULLOTON (b.1976)**

*In dulci jubilo* [3:34]

**Eoghan DESMOND (b.1989)**

Be all merry [3:20]

**Anonymous** - traditional, arr. **John HØYBYE (b.1939)**

God rest ye merry, gentlemen [1:54]

**Elaine AGNEW (b.?)**

*Curoo curoo*: Full many a bird did wake and fly [3:15]

**Timothy STEPHENS (b?)**, arr. **Desmond EARLEY (b.1974)** & **Anonymous** - traditional Irish prayer and **William Butler YEATS (1865-1939)**

The Adoration of the Magi: *Seacht bpaidreacha fo' seacht* [5:53]

**Fiontán Ó CEARBHAILL (1922-1981)**

*Suantraí: Seo thó, seo thú-ló* [2:34]

**Anonymous** - traditional, arr. **Desmond EARLEY**

Wexford Carol: Good people all, this Christmas time [4:52]

**Andrej MAKOR (b.1987)**

*O magnum mysterium* [4:33]

**Ivo ANTOGNINI (b.1963)**

*Christe redemptor omnium* [5:24]

**Adhamhnán Mac DOMHNAILL (b?)**

*Cró na Nollag* [2:37]

**Mykola LEONTOVYCH (1877-1921)**, arr. **Desmond EARLEY**

Carol of the bells: Hark how the bells, sweet silver bells [2:09]

**Hugh MARTIN (1914-2011)** & **Ralph BLANE (1914-1995)**, arr. **Desmond EARLEY**

Have yourself a merry little Christmas [2:57]

**Linda KACHELMEIER (b.1965)**

We toast the days: When the clock strikes twelve [2:53]

**Anonymous** - traditional, arr. **Desmond EARLEY**

Auld lang syne: Should old acquaintance be forgot [3:52]

University College Dublin Choral Scholars

Irish Chamber Orchestra/Desmond Earley

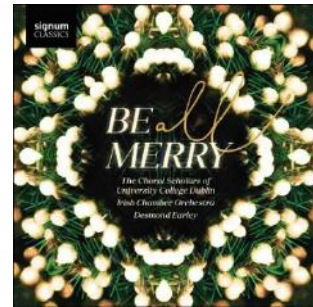
rec. March 2020, Blackrock College, County Dublin, Ireland

Reviewed as 24/96 download with pdf booklet from [hyperion-records.co.uk](#).

Texts and translations included.

**SIGNUM SIGCD643** [49:47]

CD from [Amazon UK](#) – [Presto Classical](#) – [ArkivMusic](#) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](#)



This is another useful collection of the familiar and unfamiliar. Even the familiar is sometimes presented in unusual garb, as in Matthew Culloton's arrangement of the well-known Pearsall arrangement of the opening *In dulci jubilo*. I – we – seem to have missed the University College Dublin Scholars' earlier Signum recording in 2019, but it was well received elsewhere (**SIGCD558**) and there's much to enjoy on their new Christmas release. That includes the title track Eoghan Desmond's *Be all merry* (track 2) and the other unfamiliar material. Even the more familiar, such as John Høybye's arrangement of *God rest ye merry* (tr.3) is delivered with lots of spirit, and the unfamiliar is often evocative – try Adhamhnán MacDomhnaill's *Cró na Nollag*. (tr.10). I have to take the pronunciation of the Gaelic words on trust; I'm sure it's all accurate. Several members of the choir shine in solos.

Short playing time, but the Hyperion download compensates with a price reduction: £5.99 for 16-bit, £9.00 for 24-bit.

### ***A Winter's Night***

Christmas Music for Choir, Brass Quintet and Organ

English traditional arr. **Philip MARSHALL**

I saw three ships come sailing in [2:11]

**Cecilia McDOWALL (b.1951)**

Christmas Cantata: A Winter's Night [18:46]

**Philip LEDGER (1937-2012)**

Adam lay ybounden [2:22]

**Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872-1958)** arr. **Oliver TARNEY**

O little town of Bethlehem [3:47]

**Samuel SCHEIDT (1587-1641)**

*Puer natus in Bethlehem* [2:15]

**John GOSS (1800-1880)** arr. **David WILLCOCKS (1919-2015)**

See amid the winter's snow [5:10]

**Gustav HOLST (1874-1934)** arr. **Timothy JACKSON**

In the bleak midwinter [2:13]

**William James KIRKPATRICK (1838-1921)** arr. **Robert QUINNEY**

Away in a manger [3:08]

**John RUTTER (b.1945)**

What sweeter music [4:44]

English traditional arr. **David WILLCOCKS**

Tomorrow shall be my dancing day [2:19]

**John Francis WADE (1711-1786)** arr. **David WILLCOCKS**

O come, all ye faithful [3:38]

Traditional, arr. **Roger HARVEY**

Past three o'clock [2:34]

**Jonathan WILLCOCKS (b.1953)**

The holly and the ivy [4:17]

**Charles WOOD (1866-1926)** arr. **Harrison OXLEY**

*Mater ora filium* [3:34]

**Felix MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)** arr. **Oliver TARNEY**

Hark! the herald angels sing [3:49]

French traditional arr. **Mack WILBERG (b.1955)**

Ding dong! merrily on high [2:40]

Benjamin Cunningham (organ)

Winchester College Chapel Choir

Onyx Brass/Howard Ionascu

rec. January 2020, Merton College Chapel, Oxford. DDD.



Reviewed as 24/96 download with pdf booklet from [hyperion-records.co.uk](http://hyperion-records.co.uk).

Texts and translations included.

**SIGNUM SIGCD646** [67:36]

CD from [Amazon UK](http://Amazon UK) – [Presto Classical](http://Presto Classical) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](http://Naxos Music Library)

You probably wouldn't buy this for the more familiar music – it's likely that you have recordings of that a-plenty, though the brass quintet spices things up and the singing certainly is attractive enough. Nor would you choose it for the Scheidt – already well covered by The London Oratory Schola Cantorum on Hyperion (page 11) and, even better, by specialist groups such as Vox Luminis on Ricercar – see page 12 – but Cecilia McDowell's Christmas cantata, which gives its name to the collection, makes the album particularly worthwhile. It's not original material, but the five sections are set in a distinctive new way.

In the Scheidt I'm surprised that the brass remain silent; if there's one musical genre where brass is given full play, it's in the celebratory sacred works of Scheidt and his contemporaries, but that's the only (slight) misfire.

It's a sad sign of these Latin-ignorant times that twice in the booklet a meaningless comma is inserted in the title of *Mater ora filium* between *ora* and *filium* (Pray to your son, mother).

### Christmas Night

Carols of the Nativity

*In dulci jubilo* (arr. R.L. Pearsall for Choir) [3:13]

#### Boris ORD

Adam lay ybounden [1:08]

Christmas Night (arr. J. Rutter for Choir & Orchestra) [4:01]

Once, As I Remember (arr. C. Wood for Choir) [2:29]

#### Herbert HOWELLS

A Spotless Rose [2:45]

#### Harold DARKE

In the Bleak Midwinter (arr. for Choir & Orchestra) [4:34]

#### John RUTTER

There Is a Flower (Version for Mixed Choir) [4:04]

The Cherry-Tree Carol (arr. **D. Wilcocks** for Choir) [1:50]

#### J J NILES

I Wonder as I Wander (Arr. J. Rutter for Choir) [2:51]

Rutter

Candlelight Carol (Version for Mixed Choir & Orchestra) [4:06]

*O Tannenbaum* (arr. **J. Rutter** for Choir) [1:59]

Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day (arr. **D. Wilcocks** for Choir) [1:56]

A Virgin Most Pure (arr. **C. Wood** for Choir) [2:40]

#### Patrick HADLEY

I sing of a maiden [2:55]

#### William BALLETT

Lute-Book Lullaby (arr. **G. Shaw** for Choir) [2:06]

#### Peter CORNELIUS

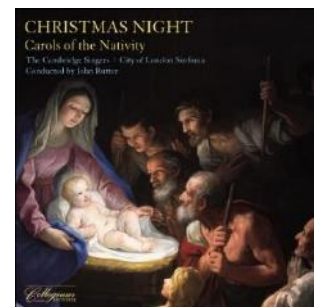
The Three Kings (Arr. **I. Atkins** for Choir) [2:19]

#### Richard R. TERRY

Myn Lyking [2:36]

#### Johann Sebastian BACH

*O Jesulein süß*, BWV493 [3:16]



**J G EBELING**

All my heart this night rejoices [2:13]

I Saw a Maiden (arr. **E. Pettman** for Choir) [2:53]

**W J KIRKPATRICK**

Away in a Manger (arr. J. Rutter for Choir) [2:14]

**John RUTTER**

Nativity Carol (Version for Mixed Choir) [4:22]

The Cambridge Singers/John Rutter

rec. January 1987, Great Hall, University College School, London.

Texts and translations included.

Reviewed as lossless download with pdf booklet from [hyperion-records.co.uk](http://hyperion-records.co.uk)

**COLLEGIUM CSCD526** [62:06]

CD from [Amazon UK](http://Amazon UK) – [Presto Classical](http://Presto Classical) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](http://Naxos Music Library)

There are any number of recordings of John Rutter's Christmas music, performed both by his own performers and by others, but this has always been one of the composer's favourite recordings. The Cambridge Singers are at their best, with some fine solos from the likes of Gerald Finley; it now receives a wash and digital brush-up as it makes a very welcome reappearance.

**Chanticleer sings Christmas**

**Anon.:** *Quem terra, pontus æthera* [3:11]

**Jacobus GALLUS (HANDL) (1550–1591)** *Canite tuba in Sion* [1:42]

**Tomás Luis de VICTORIA (1548–1611)** *Ne timeas, Maria* [3:01]

**Hans Leo HASSLER (1564–1612)** *Dixit Maria* [3:03]

**Peter PHILIPS (c.1560–1628)** *Gaudens gaudebo* [2:52]

**Anon.** *Away in a Manger* (arr. **Robert SHAW 1916–1999 & Alice PARKER b.1925**) [1:37]

**William BYRD (c.1539–1623)** *Ecce virgo concipiet* [1:54]

**Jacob REGNART (1540s–1599)** *Ave regina cœlorum a4* [3:35]

**Lewis REDNER (1831–1908)** (vv. 1–2), **William Fred SCOTT (b.1953)** (v.3) & **Ralph VAUGHAN**

**WILLIAMS (1872–1958)** (v.4) *O Little Town of Bethlehem* [3:42]

**Anon.** *D'où viens-tu, bergère?* [3:34]

*Hacia Belén va un burrico* [2:23]

*La Virgen lava pañales* [2:12]

**Nicolas SABOLY (1614–1675)** arr. **Robert SHAW & Alice PARKER** *Touro-louro-louro!* [1:58]

**Michael PRÆTORIUS (1571–1621)** arr. **Harry CHRISTOPHERS (b.1953)** *Quem pastores laudavere* [1:46]

**Pierre de MANCHICOURT (c.1510–1564)** *Reges terræ* [6:01]

**Anon.** arr. **Robert SHAW & Alice PARKER** *Susanni, Susanni* [1:38]

**Jaakko MÄNTYJÄRVI (b.1963)** *Staffan var en stalledräng* (commissioned 2016 by Chanticleer) [4:10]

**Trond KVERNO (b.1945)** *Corpus Christi Carol* [4:04]

**Steven SAMETZ (b.1954)** 2 Medieval Lyrics: *Gaudete* (commissioned 1995 by Chanticleer) [2:19]

**Rosephanye POWELL (b.1962)** *A Christmas Medley* (commissioned 2017 by Chanticleer) [9:08]

**Anon.** Trad. / arr. **Piotr NAWROT (b.1955)** *Dulce Jesús Mío* [3:28]

Chanticleer/William Fred Scott

rec. January 2020, Skywalker Sound

Reviewed as streamed in 24/96 sound. Also available to stream in mp3 from [Naxos Music Library](http://Naxos Music Library).

Texts and translations included

**WARNER CLASSICS 9029522888** [67:18]

CD from [Amazon UK](http://Amazon UK) – [Presto Classical](http://Presto Classical) – [ArkivMusic](http://ArkivMusic) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](http://Naxos Music Library)



Look at the *Sacred Treasures of Christmas* cover (Hyperion, p.11) and this Chanticleer equivalent: which seems the more likely to contain music from the renaissance and baroque? Unfeasible as it may seem – both. Chanticleer’s earlier albums *Christmas with Chanticleer* (Warner 857385552), *Sing we Christmas* (4509945632, CD; 4509945636 download) and *Psallite! A Renaissance Christmas* (CR-8806 – [December 2011/1](#)) went for a more traditional Nativity scene on the cover; I’m not sure what target this cover is aimed at. If it’s intended to attract a more ‘pop’ audience, they are likely to be off the mark. I found *Psallite!* a little dull, and the new album is hardly likely to appeal to a general audience.

This time, too, there’s no attempt to jazz up the music; this is more a contemplative Christmas album than a knees-up. That’s not to say that it’s po-faced; after the opening *Quem terra, pontus æthera*, delivered sedately, comes a lively account of Jacob Handl’s – he latinized his name to ‘Gallus’ to be fashionable – invocation to blow the trumpet in Sion, followed by another quiet rendition of Victoria’s *Ne timeas, Maria*, and that’s the general pattern.

The later tracks take us from renaissance and baroque to more recent compositions, several of them commissioned by Chanticleer, none of them ‘difficult’, all of them attractive. A traditional text keeps Trond Kverno’s setting of the mysterious *Corpus Christi* carol – the mysterious text remains unexplained despite the gallons of ink spilled on it – sounding timeless rather than modern, while Steven Sametz’s *Gaudete* keeps the traditional tune in our minds. Rosephanye Powell’s Medley on the penultimate track is more like hot gospel, but the arrangement of *Dulce Jesús Mío* rounds off the programme as it began, in contemplative mode.

It’s all well sung and well recorded, especially as heard in 24-bit. The booklet contains plenty of information about Chanticleer, nothing about the music, but it does contain the texts and translations.

### All Things Are Quite Silent

The Pembroke College Girls’ Choir;

The Chapel Choir of Pembroke College, Cambridge/Anna Lapwood  
rec. St George’s Church, Chesterton, Cambridge, 3-5 October 2019.

Texts and translations included

Reviewed as 24/96 download with pdf booklet from [hyperion-records.co.uk](http://hyperion-records.co.uk).

**SIGNUM SIGCD642** [56:44]

CD from [Amazon UK](#) – [Presto Classical](#) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](#)



This collection of music mainly by, or arranged by female composers, qualifies for inclusion in the Christmas reviews by virtue of the second track, Elizabeth Poston’s *Jesus Christ the Apple Tree*, the third, Anna Lapwood’s setting of *O nata Lux de lumine* and Sally Beamish’s *In the Stillness* (track 4). Several other tracks are not inappropriate, including Imogen Holst’s *Agnus Dei* (tr. 14) John Tavener’s *Hymn to the Mother of God* (tr. 15) and Rebecca Clarke’s *Ave Maria* (tr. 12); rather less appropriate is the opening track, the traditional *All Things are quite silent*, arranged by Kerry Andrew, which gives its name to the collection – not at all seasonal, despite the promise of the title.

This marks the recording debut of the Pembroke College Choirs and of the Pembroke Director of Music, Anna Lapwood. Not so long ago. King’s and St John’s had a near monopoly in Cambridge; that monopoly is long past, and this new recording marks another nail in its coffin. Similarly, Keble, Merton and Queen’s are challenging the more established Oxford musical foundations.

**A Minstrel Christmas**

Selected hymns, old and new from the *Straßburger Gesangbuch* (1697)

Regina Kabis (soprano)

Freiburger Spielleyt

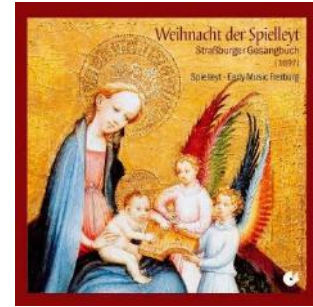
rec. 11-13 June 2010, Martinskirche Müllheim, Germany.

Reviewed as streamed in 24/96 sound.

Texts included – no translations

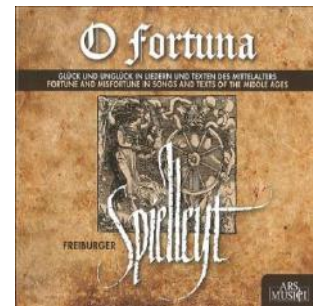
**CHRISTOPHORUS CHE0218-2** [59:53]

CD from [Presto Classical](#) – [ArkivMusic](#) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](#)



First released in 2010 as CHR77335 (still available, download only), and reissued with a snazzier cover in 2019, this recording by Freiburger Spielleyt seems to have passed me by both times. Most of the music is by our old friend Anon., and much may well date back to the medieval period with which this ensemble is mainly associated – the title of the collection, preserved in Cologne, describes it as *Uhralt*, very old. One or two pieces are by known composers such as Prætorius and Susato, and the whole collection has the attractive tripping quality, often improvisatory, associated with their dance collections, respectively *Terpsichore* and *Danserye*. These charming performances deserve to be as well known as David Munrow's advocacy of their music with his Early Music Consort (Erato Veritas 3500032, 2 CDs super-budget price). One small complaint; only the Early New High German and Latin texts are included, without translations; not a problem for me – I'm told that my German sounds at least 60 years old.

Also worth seeking out, though not Christmassy, a recording by Freiburger Spielleyt of excerpts from *Carmina Burana* – the medieval original, not the Carl Orff – and other music of the period from Oswald von Wolkenstein and the deliciously named Walther von der Vogelweide, on the Ars Musici label (AMS232240: Fortune and Misfortune in Songs and Texts of the Middle Ages).



That can be streamed from [Naxos Music Library](#) (no CD), but there's no booklet at all this time, so your medieval Latin and Middle High German needs to be pretty sharp for full appreciation, especially as on some of the tracks poetry is declaimed over the sung text. Even if medieval languages are not your thing, there's plenty to enjoy here, however.

**Christmas in Europe****Anonymous**

*Veni, veni Emmanuel* [4:15]

**Traditional**

*Le Message des Anges / Les anges dans nos campagnes* [3:17]

**Camille SAINT-SAËNS (1835–1921)**

*Tollite hostias* from *Oratorio de Noël* Op. 12 [2:35]

**Niels Wilhelm GADE (1817–1890)**

*Barn Jesus i en krybbe lå* [3:00]

**Jòrunn VIÐAR (1918–2017)**

*Það á að gefa börnum brauð* [1:51]

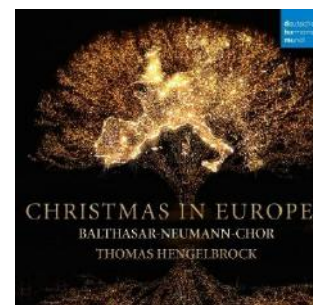
**Knut NYSTEDT (1915–2014)**

*En stjerne klar* [2:37]

**Traditional**

*Gammal Julvisa / Guds Son är född* [3:55]

*Pótnoc juz' była* [2:11]



*Mizerna, cicha* [3:16]

*Nesem vám noviny* [1:48]

**Sergei RACHMANINOFF (1873–1943)**

*Bogoroditse Devo* from All Night Vigil, Op.37 [2:54]

**Pavel CHESNOKOV (1877–1944)**

*Cherubim-Hymn*, Op. 42/9 [4:13]

**Traditional**

*E la don don, Verges Maria* [3:24]

*En Belén tocan a fuego* [3:08]

*Sou Cigana* [0:51]

*Natal de Elvas* [3:26]

*El Noi de la Mare* [2:54]

*O suver maecht van Ysrahel* [3:04]

**Gustav HOLST**

*In the Bleak Mid-Winter* [5:01]

**Arthur SULLIVAN**

*It Came upon the Midnight Clear* [3:04]

**Traditional**

*Dormi, dormi, bel Bambin* [4:18]

**Anton BRUCKNER (1824–1896)**

*Virga Jesse* [3:58]

**Max REGER**

*Es kommt ein Schiff geladen* [2:36]

Balthasar-Neumann-Chor & -Solisten/Thomas Hengelbrock

rec. 14–20 August 2020, Konzerthaus Dortmund, Germany

Texts and translations included

Reviewed as streamed in 24/96

**DEUTSCHE HARMONIA MUNDI G0100044432740** or **19439813992** [71:59]

CD from [Amazon UK](#) – [Presto Classical](#)

There's plenty of unfamiliar mixed in with the more familiar here – and in almost every European language, including even Icelandic, possibly the oddest contribution to the Christmas story, indeed, with more to do with the pre-Christian Norse *Jul*, celebrating the death of the Grendel-type monster Grýla. Overall, I was less excited than I expected to be, but it's an attractive and wide-ranging collection, well performed. And what a good way to brush up your language skills. Some of the music will be more familiar to English-speaking listeners than may appear: *Les anges dans nos campagnes* is better known as 'Angels from the realms of glory'.

**Jonas Kaufmann – It's Christmas!**

**Trad.:** *Engel haben Himmelslieder / Gloria in excelsis Deo* [2:50]

**MENDELSSOHN:** *Hark! the herald angels sing* [3:07]

**Trad.:** *Süßer die Glocken nie klingen* [3:13]

**WADE, J F:** *Adeste fideles* [2:27]

**ADAM:** *Cantique de Noël (Minuit, Chrétiens) / O Holy Night* [5:22]

**PRAETORIUS, M:** *In dulci jubilo* [2:27]

**Trad.:** *Kommet, ihr Hirten* [1:38]

**HANDEL:** *Tochter Zion* [3:07]

**Christoph von SCHMID:** *Ihr Kinderlein, kommet* [2:42]

**Traditional, Ralph GREAVES, Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS:** *What Child is This?* [3:06]

**Franz GRUBER:** *Silent Night* [3:25]

**Trad.:** *Es wird scho glei dumpa* [2:54]





*Still, still, still* [2:33]  
*Maria durch ein' Dornwald ging* [2:53]  
**Franz Xaver RAMBOLD:** *Im Woid is so staad* [2:08]  
**SILCHER:** *Alle Jahre wieder* [2:15]  
**Irving BERLIN:** *White Christmas* [3:30]  
**PIERPONT:** *Jingle Bells* [2:22]  
**Trad.:** *Was soll das bedeuten?* [2:14]  
*Vom Himmel hoch, ihr Englein, kommt!* [2:43]  
**YON:** *Gesu bambino* [4:07]  
**Josef ANNEGARN:** *Lasst uns froh und munter sein* [2:48]  
**Trad.:** *Leise rieselt der Schnee* [1:45]  
**Carl Gottlieb HERING:** *Morgen, Kinder, wird's was geben* [2:06]  
**Trad.:** *Entre le bœuf et l'âne gris* [2:01]  
**Gustav HOLST:** *In the Bleak Mid-winter* [3:47]  
**PRAETORIUS, M:** *Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen* [2:13]  
**Trad.:** *Macht hoch die Tür* [3:08]  
**Johann Sebastian BACH, Martin LUTHER:** *Ich steh an deiner Krippen hier, BWV469* [3:48]  
**Trad.:** *O du fröhliche* [2:18]  
*O Heiland, reiss die Himmel auf* [1:17]  
*Kling, Glöckchen, klingelingeling* [2:29]  
**Martin LUTHER:** *Vom Himmel hoch, da komm' ich her* [1:40]  
**Trad.:** *O Tannenbaum* [1:57]  
**Emmy KÖHLER:** *Nu tandas tusen juleljus* [3:23]  
**Franz GRUBER:** *Stille Nacht* [4:22]  
**Trad.:** *Still, still, still* [3:33]  
**Hugh MARTIN:** *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas* [4:22]  
**BERNARD, F:** *Winter Wonderland* [2:18]  
**Mel TORMÉ:** *Chestnuts roasting on an open fire* [2:56]  
**STYNE:** *Let it snow* [2:42]  
**Mariah CAREY, Walter AFANASIEFF:** *All I Want for Christmas is You* [3:45]  
 Jonas Kaufmann (tenor)  
 Florian Pedarnig (harp), Till Brönner (fluegelhorn, trumpet)  
 St. Florianer Sängerknaben; Bachchor Salzburg  
 Mozarteum Orchestra Salzburg/Jochen Rieder  
 Cologne Studio Big Band/Wieland Reissmann  
 rec. Orchesterhaus Salzburg, 2-5 December 2019, Munich, August 2020, HansaHaus-Studio, Bonn,  
 12–16 July 2020. DDD.  
 Reviewed as streamed in 24-bit sound.  
 Texts not included.  
**SONY 19439786762** [1:59:41]  
 CD from [Amazon UK](#) – [Presto Classical](#) – [ArkivMusic](#)

If you were a little disappointed that *Chanticleer sings Christmas* didn't quite offer the popular programme that you were expecting, this Jonas Kaufmann album will be more to your liking. Both the German and English-texted music steers just clear being over-sentimentalised. The lack of texts is disappointing; I happen to know the Tyrolean dialect words of *Es wird scho glei dumpa* – an Austrian friend learned them in school and remembered them when I came across this piece on another anthology some years ago – and most of the traditional texts, but I had to check the Swedish *Nu tandas tusen juleljus* (now are lit a thousand Christmas candles). Maybe the de-luxe edition has the texts. It's unnecessary for me to commend this to Kaufmann's many fans – they probably have already bought it – but there's plenty for the rest of us to enjoy, too.



### Benjamin BRITTEN: A Ceremony of Carols, Op.28 – selected recordings



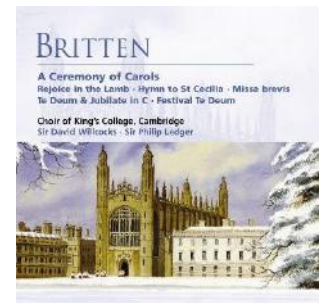
Almost every Christmas brings forth at least one new recording of Britten's *Ceremony of Carols* (1942); it has become almost as symbolic of the season as the King's College, Cambridge, Nine Lessons and Carols. Before I look at this year's offerings, a brief résumé of some of the best of the past – by no means an exhaustive list of this much-recorded music – seems in order.

Though it wasn't the first (there was a 1946 set of 78s) the grand-daddy of all recordings of this work comes from **Britten** himself, with the **Copenhagen Boys' Choir** and **Enid Simon** (harp). Recorded in 1953, that's still available as a Decca download, but it's rather expensive, at over £11 for the least expensive lossless version that I can find. The mono recording quality is rather dry and the singing of the Danish boys raised some questions even when it was first released on its own on a 10" LP. It's coupled with another Christmas work, *A Boy was born*, (recorded 1957) *Friday Afternoons* (recorded 1966) which includes *A New Year Carol* and Psalm 150 (also from 1966) (**E4363942**, from [Presto](#)).

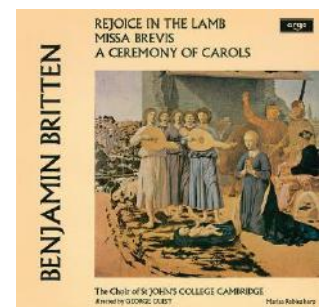


There's also an absurdly inexpensive transfer on the Documents label – a 9-CD set of Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears, *If Music be the Food of Love* (23114, around £22). Also on a Heritage CD, *Britten conducts Britten* (**HTGCD232**).

If you wish to combine two Christmas traditions, **Sir David Willcocks'** recording with **King's College Choir**, from 1972, remains available very inexpensively on Classics for Pleasure, with the Hymn to St Cecilia, *Missa Brevis* in D, and slightly later King's recordings with **Philip Ledger** of *Festiva Te Deum*, *Rejoice in the Lamb*, *Te Deum* and *Jubilate* in C (9689492). This reminder of the traditional Cambridge way with the Britten *Ceremony of Carols* – something of a contrast to the new Harmonia Mundi recording (below) from Clare College, could be around £6 or so well spent – CD from [Amazon UK](#), CD and lossless download from [Presto](#). It would be the perfect complement to the inexpensive 2-CD set of slightly earlier Willcocks Christmas recordings from Decca: *Noël – Christmas at King's College* (see p2, above).

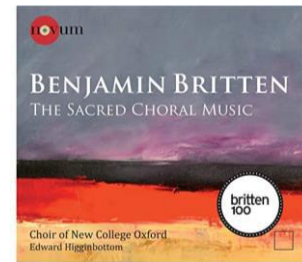


If King's under Willcocks and Ledger is not quite to your liking, you may prefer to go back further to **George Guest's** tenure at nearby **St John's**, another Decca recording, from their Argo subsidiary: as well as the *Ceremony of Carols*, the all-Britten programme consists of *Rejoice in the Lamb* and the *Missa Brevis*. That's download only, a little more expensive, around £8 in lossless sound, and there's no booklet. Recorded in 1964, this recording was, I think, the first *Ceremony of Carols* to be recorded in stereo, and the fresh and brisk performances still sound well, hardly revealing their age. If anything, this is an even better example of Britten from a Cambridge college choir, with Robert Tear sounding uncannily like Peter Pears in *Rejoice in the Lamb* – not necessarily a good thing except in Britten (**4832434**).

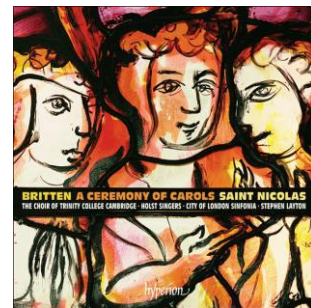


I can't allow the 'other place' to have all the publicity when there are (though fewer) worthwhile recordings from Oxford. A new recording from The Queen's College is listed below.

**Edward Higginbottom** recorded the Ceremony with **New College Choir** for CRD (**CRD3490**) and again for their own in-house label, Novum (Britten: *The Sacred Choral Music*, **NCR1386**). Michael Cookson, who made the latter a Recording of the Month, thought that a 'stunning release' and couldn't 'imagine the music being sung better' – [review](#). The 2-CD set can be obtained from [Presto](#) (CD, mp3, 16- and 24-bit download with pdf booklet). Beware of other dealers who are asking £40.60 for the CD set and £18.49 for mp3.

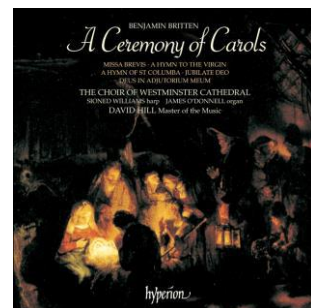


Hyperion offer two very fine recordings, one taking us to Cambridge again, the other, coming from Westminster Cathedral Choir, reminding us of Britten's Roman Catholic roots. On CDA67946 **Trinity College Choir** and **Stephen Layton** couple the *Ceremony of Carols* with *St Nicolas*. The modern commercialisation of Christmas has roped in St Nicholas, who traditionally gives out gifts and forfeits on his feast day, December 6<sup>th</sup>, in Holland and North Germany, and has turned a corruption of his Dutch and Low German name into Santa Claus, but that's the only connection between the two works.



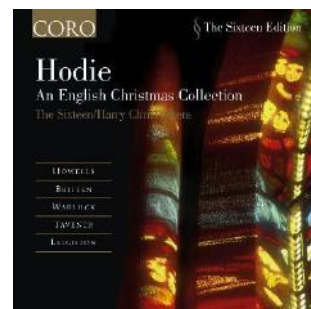
Michael Greenhalgh made that a Recording of the Month – [review](#) – and it's good to have an all-female account of the *Ceremony of Carols*. Geoffrey Molyneux also thought highly of this recording – [DL News 2012/24](#) – but my one reservation is that I still don't find that *St Nicolas* grabs my attention; I'm told it's more fun to sing than to hear. CD and lossless download, with pdf booklet, are each currently offered for £8 from [hyperion-records.co.uk](#).

There's an older Hyperion recording which I prefer. **Westminster Cathedral Choir**, directed by **David Hill**, are used to giving a 'continental' feel to their singing. Their album containing the *Ceremony of Carols* also includes the *Missa brevis*, composed for this choir, *A Hymn to the Virgin*, *A Hymn of St Columba* and the *Jubilate Deo* in E-flat. (**CDA66220**, currently £5 on CD or lossless download with pdf booklet from [hyperion-records.co.uk](#)). I see that I am not alone in liking this Westminster recording: it's the only version of the *Ceremony of Carols* listed in the sadly truncated Penguin Guide to the 1000 finest classical Recordings. The only reason not to place it high on your list of choices is that it's not exclusively

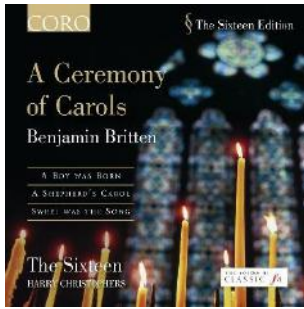


themed around Christmas.

If you are looking for 'the product of some canny programming' around Christmas music, with the Britten *Ceremony of Carols* and *Hymn to the Virgin* at its heart, a recording by **The Sixteen** and **Harry Christophers** could be just right. Jonathan Woolf, from whom I've borrowed the quotation, thought that outstanding (*Hodie: A Christmas Collection*, Coro **COR16004** – [review](#)). As well as the Britten, the album includes music by English composers from Herbert Howells to Peter Hayward.



I originally reviewed that in mp3 from the now defunct classicsonline.com, but subsequently obtained it in lossless flac from The Sixteen's own shop – [here](#). It can be streamed from [Naxos Music Library](#). There's an alternative coupling of the *Ceremony of Carols* with *A Boy was*

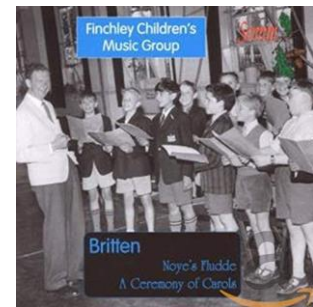


*born*, the *Missa brevis*, and the *Shepherd's Carol* (Coro **COR16034**). CD or download from [thesixteenshop.com](http://thesixteenshop.com) or stream from [Naxos Music Library](http://Naxos Music Library).

Mention of Naxos reminds me that bargain lovers have a very worthwhile alternative to the King's/Willcocks recording on that label: a *Ceremony of Carols* well worth considering concludes a recording which opens with *Friday Afternoons*, including the New Year Carol, and contains other short pieces (Naxos **8.553183**). That costs around £7.50 on CD, but can be downloaded in lossless sound for less, with digital booklet, from [Presto](http://Presto). Stream from [Naxos Music Library](http://Naxos Music Library). The **New London Children's Choir**, directed by **Ronald Corp**, may be less famous than King's or St John's choirs, but this is bargain basement only in terms of price.



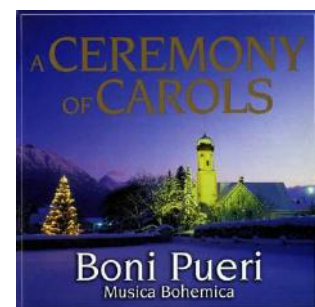
If, as I've suggested, *St Nicolas* is less enjoyable to hear than to sing, a Somm recording couples the *Ceremony of Carols* with another work both to participate in and to hear: Britten's adaptation of the medieval Chester mystery play *Noyes Fludde* is sung by the **Finchley Children's Music Group** directed by **Nicholas Wilkes** (**SOMM212**). No big names here, but Dominy Clements was quite right to think that 'This recording can hold its own in any catalogue, and deserves as much recognition as any around' – [review](#). CD from [Presto](http://Presto) or [Amazon UK](http://Amazon UK).



I mentioned that Somm recording with approval in reviewing a recording from the **National Youth Choir of Scotland** and **Christopher Bell**, with **Claire Jones** (harp) on Signum **SIGCD228** – [review](#). Though the performance there is good, I found myself at the end of my review less than enthusiastic, perhaps because Elizabeth Poston's *An English Day Book* did little to appeal to me.

I did, however, take the opportunity to sum up the situation as it stood for me up to the date of that release in 2010. As well as the Willcocks, Higginbottom and Christophers recordings, I also mentioned Trinity College Choir and Richard Marlow (Conifer or Sony, download only and no longer inexpensive).

There are a few recordings which, instead of an all-boys or all-female ensemble, make use of Julius Harbison's arrangement for a mixed-voice choir. One of these is to be found on an Arco Diva recording, intermittently available in the UK; indeed, I understand it was a best-seller when it could be obtained directly from MusicWeb. It was very well received by Gwyn Parry-Jones (**Boni Pueri, Musica Bohemica/Jacob Martinec, UP0070-2231**: Recording of the Month – [review](#)). The coupling is a fresh and lively set of arrangements by Jaroslav Krček of Old European Christmas Carols. It's not one of the Arco Diva recordings which can be streamed from Naxos Music Library, but it can be streamed and downloaded from [Qobuz](http://Qobuz) and downloaded in mp3 and lossless from [Presto](http://Presto).



I was rather less impressed than my colleague by the up-front recording at the beginning – no sense of a procession approaching – and by the rather forthright singing of Boni Pueri. Indeed, the Harbison arrangement itself divides opinion; my own preference for the original is clear, but the texts stem from the middle ages and you may feel that the Boni Pueri sound more 'medieval'. Certainly the arrangements of the other Christmas music make even the familiar works sound unfamiliar, with more than a nod to the Bohemian tradition of weaving vigorous secular music into the liturgy, as in Ryba's

*Czech Christmas Mass* (Naxos **8.554428**, with *Missa Pastoralis* – [December 2009](#) – or Arco Diva **UP0155CD** – [review](#)). Qobuz have the Arco Diva Ryba to download for a very inexpensive £3.99, but it's a short album at 42 minutes.



That leads me into the first of the **new 2020 recordings**, one which uses the Harbison arrangement:

**Benjamin BRITTEN (1913-1976)**

*Venite Exultemus Domino* (1961) [4:13]

*Te Deum* in C (1934) [7:42]

*Jubilate Deo* in C (1961) [2:32]

*Deus in adjutorium meum* (1944/45) [4:38]

A Hymn to the Virgin (1930, 1934) [3:25]

A Hymn of Saint Columba (1962) [2:03]

Hymn to St. Peter, Op.56a (1955) [5:59]

**John IRELAND (1879-1962)**

The Holy Boy (version for mixed choir *a capella*, 1941) [2:52]

**Frank BRIDGE (1879-1941)**

Music, when Soft Voices Die (1904) [3:28]

**Gustav HOLST (1874-1934)**

This have I done for my true love, H128, Op.34/1 (1916) [5:27]

**Benjamin BRITTEN**

The Sycamore Tree (1930, 1967) [1:32]

**Anon. arr Benjamin BRITTEN**

The Holly and the Ivy (1957) [3:38]

**Benjamin BRITTEN**

Sweet the Song (1931) [2:47]

A Ceremony of Carols, Op.28 (1942, 1943) [version for mixed choir and harp arranged by **Julius**

**HARRISON (1885-1963)**] [22:11]

A New Year Carol, Op.7/5 (1933-35) [2:17]

Tanya Houghton (harp); Eleanor Carter, Ashley Chow (organ)

Choir of Clare College, Cambridge/Graham Ross

Reviewed as 24/96 download with pdf booklet from [eclassical.com](#).

**HARMONIA MUNDI HMM905329** [74:56]

CD from [Amazon UK](#) – [Presto](#) – [ArkivMusic](#) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](#)



See [review](#) by John Quinn: 'Another excellent example of the work of The Choir of Clare College, Cambridge and Graham Ross'.

The programme opens with Britten's setting of three of the constants of the Anglican morning service; very welcome because now mostly to be heard only at rare celebrations of Choral Mattins, and the three Hymns which also appear on some other recordings. It's not until we reach the choral version of Ireland's *The Holy Boy* that we settle into seasonal music, and the *Ceremony of Carols* rounds off the programme – wisely, I believe, leaving the best till last. Apart, that is, from the charming little New Year Carol from *Friday Afternoons* on the final track, which carries over the harp accompaniment.

If any recording is going to reconcile me to the Harbison TrATB arrangement, it's this. The singing is much less rough and ready than from *Boni Pueri* – you wouldn't expect otherwise from Clare College and Graham Ross. This is by no means a prim account but just as lively as the Arco Diva, with Ross keeping the singers on their toes and the music moving at a pace. A little of the sense of awe is perhaps lost in the process – I would have liked a greater sense of procession at the opening – but I can't fault

the sense of mystery in *There is no rose*; it's even given a little more time to breathe than by Willcocks, and almost as much as by Guest. Nor can I complain when they go hard at *This little babe*, but do so without coming off the rails.

The rest of the programme, too, is treated in a lively fashion. Holst's *This have I done* really dances, but the upper voices tend to get a little lost in the acoustic, and the more contemplative works, like the beautiful little *A Hymn to the Virgin*, might, perhaps, be a little more ... contemplative. Overall, though, I don't want to seem to be talking this recording down – just be sure that the Harbison arrangement of the *Ceremony of Carols* is to your liking. Subscribers to Naxos Music Library can try it out [there](#), though without the full benefit of the 24/96 recording quality, available from [eclassical.com](http://eclassical.com) for a limited time at the same price as 16-bit.

### **A Ceremony of Carols**

**Judith WEIR (b.1954)**

Drop down, ye heavens, from above [1:49]

**Michael PRÆTORIUS (1571-1621)**

*Es is ein Ros entsprungen* [2:31]

**David BLACKWELL (b.1961)**

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming [3:42]

**Michael PRÆTORIUS**

*Resonet in laudibus* (à 6) [3:15]

**John DOVE (b.1959)**

The three Kings [4:30]

**Benjamin BRITTEN (1913-1976)**

A Ceremony of Carols, Op.28 [23:15]

**Michael PRAETORIUS**

*In dulci jubilo* [2:54]

**Dobrinka TABAKOVA (b.1980)**

Good-will to men, and peace on Earth [2:27]

**Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1175)**

*O virga ac diadema* [5:18]

**Michael PRÆTORIUS**

*Geborn ist Gottes Söhnelein* [1:00]

**Toby YOUNG (b.1990)**

The Owl [1:54]

**Michael PRAETORIUS**

*Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern* [1:21]

**Celia McDOWALL (b.1951)**

Now may we sing [3:15]

**Michael PRÆTORIUS**

*Puer natus in Bethalem* [5:17]

The Choir of the Queen's College Oxford/Owen Rees

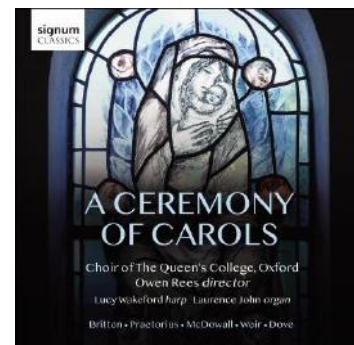
rec. July 2019, The Church of St Michael and All Angels, Summertown, Oxford. DDD.

Reviewed as 24/96 download with pdf booklet from [hyperion-records.co.uk](http://hyperion-records.co.uk).

Texts and translations included.

**SIGNUM SIGCD627** [62:41]

CD from [Amazon UK](http://Amazon UK) – [Presto](http://Presto) – [ArkivMusic](http://ArkivMusic) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](http://Naxos Music Library)



One thing that I especially approve of here: you can't go far wrong with a Christmas recording that contains lots of music by Michael Prætorius. There's only one thing better – an all-Prætorius Christmas album, such from The Parley of Instruments, Westminster Cathedral Choir and David Hill (Hyperion

CDH55446 – [review](#) – [DL Roundup 2011/2](#)). That costs around £8.50 on CD, but the lossless download, with pdf booklet, can be yours for only £5.99 from [hyperion-records.co.uk](http://hyperion-records.co.uk). Better still, the Prætorius Christmas Mass as reconstructed by Paul McCreesh, the Gabrieli Consort and Players, one of my perennial Christmas favourites, now at mid-price, even less as a download (DG Archiv **4791757** (CD) or **4399312** (lossless download) – [review](#) of original release).

It was a good idea to frame the *Ceremony of Carols*, not with other music by Britten, but with Christmas fare as entrées and afters, old and new, with the new mostly underpinned by the older tradition, like the *Ceremony* itself. I've already written that the established Oxford and Cambridge colleges now have strong competition from the newer entrants, and that's especially true of Owen Rees' Queen's College. The acoustic of St Michael's, Summertown, adds to the appeal, especially as heard in 24-bit sound.

### **Benjamin BRITTEN (1913-1976)**

St Nicolas, Op.42 (1948) [47:57]

A Ceremony of Carols, Op.28 (1942/3) [23:03]

Mark LeBrocq (tenor)

Sally Pryce (harp)

Hannah Brine Choirs, Coldfall Primary School Choir, Zachary Almeida-Rosser, Mark le Brocq

Crouch End Festival Chorus

BBC Concert Orchestra/David Temple

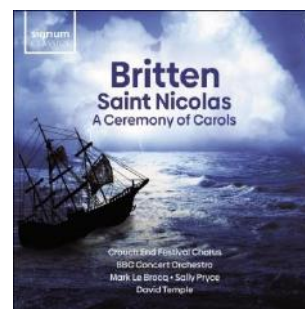
rec. January 2020, All Saints' Church, East Finchley, London, and March 2020, Alexandra Palace Theatre, London. DDD.

Reviewed as 24/96 download with pdf booklet from [hyperion-records.co.uk](http://hyperion-records.co.uk).

Texts included.

**SIGNUM SIGCD649** [71:09]

CD from [Amazon UK](#) – [Presto](#) – [ArkivMusic](#) – Stream from [Naxos Music Library](#)



With these two recordings, Signum now have at least three albums containing Britten's *Ceremony of Carols* – also included on **SIGCD228** – [review](#). I was a little less than enthusiastic about that earlier recording because of the less than appropriate coupling with Elizabeth Poston's *An English Day Book*, but it's worth looking at that review for consideration of the alternative recordings of the Britten. Among the other options is one coupled, like SIGCD649, with *St Nicolas*, from Trinity College, Cambridge and Stephen Layton; I've mentioned that above (p.27). For all the good things on the new Signum recording, my own feeling remains that *St Nicolas* is more fun to perform than to listen to.

If you disagree with me, however, this new recording offers a very fine alternative to the Hyperion. In fact, these lively performances almost reconcile me to the work, and the rest of the programme comes over really well.