

The Cantilena Singers

Daniel Spreadbury – Director

Christus natus est



Saturday 9 December 2023

St Luke's Church, Lode

Programme

William Byrd (c. 1540–1623)

Mass for Four Voices

Kyrie • Gloria • Credo • Sanctus • Benedictus • Agnus Dei



Interval



Peter Warlock (1894–1930)

Benedicamus Domino

Richard Allain (b. 1965)

Balulalow

Richard Rodney Bennett (1936–2012)

Coventry Carol

Lillie Harris (b. 1994)

Christmas Silence

Richard R. Terry (1864–1938)

Joseph and the Angel

Lennox Berkeley (1903–1989)

In Wintertime

Robert Pearsall (1795–1856)

In dulci jubilo

Harold Darke (1888–1976)

In the bleak midwinter

Michael Head (1900–1976)

The little road to Bethlehem

Trad., arr. Bob Chilcott (b. 1955)

The gift



About tonight's programme

In 2023 we commemorate the four hundredth anniversary of the death of William Byrd, one of the great composers of the Tudor age and a pivotal figure in the history of English music.

Byrd was probably a chorister at the Chapel Royal, where he would have sung under the direction of Thomas Tallis, the other great figure of English Tudor music. It is certain that, after his voice broke, he worked as assistant to Tallis, beginning a partnership that would continue to bear fruit for decades to come.

After a spell as organist and master of the choristers at Lincoln Cathedral, Byrd was appointed as a gentleman of the Chapel Royal in 1572, which brought him into the orbit of Queen Elizabeth I. In 1575, Byrd and Tallis were awarded a joint monopoly on the printing of sheet music in England, and produced their collection of Latin motets dedicated to the Queen, *Cantiones sacrae*, but this grandiose project was a commercial failure, and the two composers had to beg their Queen for financial aid, particularly since Tallis was by this time very elderly.

Byrd turned to Catholicism in the 1570s, but as Catholicism became increasingly identified with sedition in the 1580s, and his association with prominent Catholics greatly strained his relationship with the Chapel Royal and with the Queen. Byrd continued to write music not only for the Anglican church – including his four sets of canticles for the evening service – but also increasingly for the Catholic church, and in the 1590s he wrote three Latin mass settings, for three, four, and five voices. The *Mass for Four Voices*, which we perform tonight, was probably the first to be written.

Despite his many brushes with the authorities, Byrd was a rich man when he died in 1623. Although his Anglican music continued to be performed into the 18th century, changing tastes in the Catholic church meant that many of his greatest works became nearly forgotten. It was the advocacy of figures like Edmund Fellowes and Richard Terry in the latter half of the 19th century that finally saw his work revived. The first modern performance of the *Mass for Four Voices* is thought to have taken place at the London Oratory on Advent Sunday in 1890.

The second half of our programme this evening focuses on the great mystery of Christmas, with works from English composers from the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries.

Several of the texts will be familiar, but the settings perhaps less so: we have tried to choose pieces that are a little off the beaten track, both to provide an interesting challenge to our singers, but also so that you, our audience, can hear these well-worn words anew.

We hope you will enjoy this final concert of our 40th anniversary year. We wish you and your loved ones a very happy and restful Christmas, and a prosperous New Year.

Daniel Spreadbury, Director

The Cantilena Singers

Soprano

Hilary Burton
Alison McRobb
Cath Stubbs
Ana Sugarman-Banaszak
Caille Sugarman-Banaszak

Tenor

Steven Aronson
Tony Jolley
Sam Spreadbury

Alto

Kate Clark
Miriam Craddock
Evelyn Payne
Judy Rowland
Amelia Spreadbury
Janet Stevens

Bass

Chris Fell
Mike Gait
Tim Rowland

The Cantilena Singers is a well-established chamber choir that performs regularly in Cambridge and the surrounding villages. 2023 is the choir's 40th anniversary, having been founded in 1983, and the choir remains committed to promoting the joy of choral singing.

We are always looking for new members. If you would like to join us, please get in touch.



Daniel Spreadbury read for a degree in music at University College, Oxford, where he studied singing with Alastair Thompson, founder member of the King's Singers, and sang with and directed a variety of college and chapel choirs around the city. Daniel has been the director of Cantilena since 2001.



For more details of future performances by the Cantilena Singers, please visit www.cantilenasingers.org.uk/next-concert