

# Salisbury Choral Society

## NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor!

I hope the newsletter continues to find you well.

Today is the final edition of the newsletter in 2020, as next week is the carolling session on zoom. Please refer to the attachments that went out with last week's newsletter, which are also available on the choir website. Keep an eye out for next week's zoom link, which will be sent out via email.

Here is this week's newsletter. Comments, suggestions welcome!

---

### Graham's Christmas Playlist

I thought I might direct you to some of my favourite Christmas choral music. Some original compositions, some arrangements, some you might recognise, some which might be new to you! As it turns out, all of the music I'm choosing has been written in the last 70 years!

The **Quatre motets pour le temps de Noel** were composed in 1952 by the French composer **Francis Poulenc (1899 - 1963)**. Poulenc began composing religious music in 1936, following his return to Catholicism. His choral output includes several motets, a mass, a stabat mater and a wonderful setting of the Gloria (do listen to the Gloria if you don't know it). The "Christmas Motets" depict four scenes from the nativity story. Listen out for...



- The growing intensity in [O magnum mysterium](#) ...
- The shepherds seeking the baby in [Quem vidistis pastores dicite](#) ...
- The wise men on their journey in [Videntes stellam](#) ...
- The exuberant [Hodie Christus natus est](#) where you can imagine the champagne corks being popped, especially at the end!

I have decided not to include any Rutter in this article, although he could've easily got in through his many Christmas arrangements, but I will give **Bob Chilcott (b.1955)** a mention. Bob Chilcott is very well-known as a composer of choral music and I wrote about him quite a bit in a previous newsletter six months ago. My "Chilcott Christmas choice" is **The Shepherd's Carol** which was composed for the late Stephen Cleobury and the choir of King's College, Cambridge for their BBC TV broadcast "Carols from King's" in 2000. The theme of the service was the



shepherds as part of the Christmas story and the beautiful anonymous text of the piece was suggested by Dr. George Pattison who was Dean of King's at the time. [Click here to have a listen.](#)



From Bob Chilcott to another English contemporary composer. **Jonathan Dove (b.1959)** was born in London and studied Music at Cambridge. Jonathan Dove is best known for his compositions for choirs and operas and was awarded a CBE in the 2019 Birthday Honours for services to music. I'd like to point you in the direction of two Christmas works that he has composed.

**"The Star-song"** was commissioned by Plymouth Congregational Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA in celebration of their organist and choirmaster being in post for 40 years. The text is a poem by Robert Herrick (1591 - 1674).

**"Run, shepherds, run!"** was composed for the 2001 Spitalfields Festival run by Spitalfields Music, which is a creative charity based in East London. The text this time is a poem called "The Angel's Song" by William Drummond of Hawthornden (1585 - 1649). This is a Christmas anthem with audience participation, which gets quite complex as the audience part turns into two parts, then four parts. As Jonathan Dove says in the preface of the score: *"The four-part division presents the audience with quite a challenge: it may result in a degree of happy chaos, but this is all part of the fun"*.

Alas, YouTube does not have either work by Jonathan Dove, so instead, I will point you in the direction of this excellent recording by the choir of Wells Cathedral, where you can hear both works: [Dove: Choral Music CD and MP3](#) (Going off Christmas for a moment, I also highly recommend the Missa Brevis on this recording, which was commissioned for the Cathedral Organists' Association conference in May 2009 at Wells. It was first performed by Wells Cathedral choir and after the first performance, 25 Cathedral organists signed up at the conference to perform the new work, with many others following soon afterwards).

From Jonathan Dove to another English contemporary composer! **Philip Stopford (b.1977)** began his musical life as a chorister at Westminster Abbey and was organ scholar at Truro Cathedral. He studied Music at Oxford and was organ scholar at Keble College. After graduating, Philip Stopford was organ scholar at Canterbury Cathedral, then Assistant Organist at Chester Cathedral, before becoming Director of Music at St. Anne's Cathedral, Belfast from 2002 until 2010, when he worked as a freelance composer and conductor before moving to the USA to be Director of Music at Christ Church, Bronxville, New York.



Have a listen to his Lully, Lulla, Lullay, a setting of the Coventry Carol which he composed in 2008. The music is very different from the Coventry Carol that you may know, but incredibly simple and effective. Here are Voces8 to convince you that this version works! [VOCES8: Lully, Lulla, Lullay - Philip Stopford - YouTube](#)

I haven't been to a carol service at Winchester Cathedral since (I think) 2016, mainly because



I've been on duty for carol services at Portsmouth Cathedral for the last couple of years. But when I did manage it, I always looked forward to hearing **God is with us** by **John Tavener (1944 - 2013)**. Composed in 1987, the text of this work is an adaptation of part of the service of compline as celebrated on Christmas Eve in the

Orthodox Church. Listen out for the tenor soloist, acting as a cantor... and try not to jump when the organ comes in, which is what everyone who doesn't know it's coming does at the Winchester Cathedral carol services, especially as the lights have been turned off and the choir generally sing a gentle carol before this one. It's possibly the best moment in the service when the organ comes in and then the lights come back on for "O come all ye faithful".

Sadly, I haven't found a Winchester version on YouTube, but there is one from King's College, Cambridge: [King's College Cambridge 2014 God is with us](#). However, you can have a listen to a version by Winchester Cathedral choir on their CD of Tavener's music, which was released last year: [Tavener: Angels & other choral works Hyperion Records](#) One of the trebles on the Winchester CD is one Orlando Tavener, son of the late John Tavener.

A quick trip to the US for the music of the American composer and conductor **Mack Wilberg (b.1955)**. Mack Wilberg studied music at Brigham Young University and the University of Southern California. Since 1999, he has worked with the Chorale at Temple Square, firstly as associate director and then director in 2008. Mack Wilberg is perhaps best known for his arrangements; and here are two for the price of one!



Mack Wilberg's arrangement of **Ding dong merrily on high** was originally written for the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and received greater attention when it was programmed by King's College Cambridge. [Click here to listen](#). Mack Wilberg's arrangement of **O holy night** was for the men's voices of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and the King's Singers. This version has since been revised for SATB as on this recording: [O holy night \(SATB\)](#) but if you would like to hear the original arrangement featuring the King's Singers, you can listen to it here: [O Holy Night \(King's Singers and Mormon Tabernacle Choir\)](#).



Finally, back to the UK for a lovely version of "We three Kings" by **Alan Bullard (b.1947)**. Alan Bullard grew up in London and studied at the Royal College of Music and Nottingham University. From 1975 until 2005, he was a lecturer at Colchester Institute in Essex. I was very lucky to have Alan as a lecturer when I was at Colchester, especially as I graduated in 2005, just when he retired! Alan Bullard has been writing music all his life and frequently composes to commissions from a range of musical ensembles, including choral societies and church choirs. His sacred and secular choral music has been performed in a wide range of venues in the UK, the USA and elsewhere. "**Star of Wonder**" was composed in 2007 and it beautifully contrasts the cold journey of the travellers with the joy of the birth of the Christ-child. You can have a listen to the carol here: [Star of Wonder version 1](#) or (if you don't mind paying 99p for it) you can have a listen to the carol here: [Star of Wonder version 2](#).

---

That's all for 2020 folks, I hope you're still enjoying the newsletters.

Hopefully, 2021 will see a safe return to singing / rehearsals (remember we used to have them?) but until then, I hope the newsletter (and maybe one or two online singing projects) will keep you occupied for at least the first part of next year.

I hope to see (alas not hear) some familiar faces at the zoom carols!

Stay safe and keep singing!

*Graham*