

Bollington Festival Choir The Promise of Advent

Sunday 27 November 2022 St Oswald's Church

Soloists: Dot Graham & Olwyn Bloor *soprano*: Mary Halloran *alto*: Steve Thorpe *tenor*: Paul Yandell & Mike Bell *bass*

Readers: Richard Murphy & Geraldine Yandell

String quintet led by Nicola Bright

Continuo: Rosalind Hall

Bollington Festival Choir, conductor: Donald Judge

Each half of the programme runs for approximately 30 minutes with little or no break between the musical numbers. Please reserve your applause for the end of each sequence.

The first half tells of the Annunciation and of Mary's response to the Angel in the motet *Dixit Maria* by the 17th century German composer Hans Leo Hassler, who based his Mass setting on the turns of the motet. The medieval carols and movements of the mass are interspersed with short string interludes composed by Donald Judge. Their starting point is the surrounding early music, but there's no attempt to match the style: they are contemporary and more akin to the improvisations an organist might make in response.

The second half charts choral and instrumental treatments of a hymn by Martin Luther, beginning with its origins in Plainsong, ending with J S Bach, and almost if not completely in chronological order. The string pieces are arrangements of Baroque organ works that use the same tune.

Historical perspectives. Donald Judge, who compiled the sequence, writes: Planning this concert gave new insights into a time when musicians, musical material and musical influences crossed borders far more freely than might be imagined. They were often turbulent times, when many composers had to be adaptable or risk losing their livelihoods, liberty or even lives for their adherence to different branches of the Christian faith.

That all started with demands all over (mainly Northern) Europe to translate the Bible into, and to hold church services in, the vernacular – the language congregations spoke – rather than Latin. Jan Hus in Bohemia was one of the first: his reforms resulted in violence and death for many, including Hus. The short readings in tonight's concert are from the late 14th century Wycliffe's Bible, one of the earliest (and illegal) translations into English. In the 1530s Henry VIII's intended divorce from Anne Boleyn created a schism with Rome, resulting in the establishment of the Church of England, the dissolution of the monasteries, and many decades of strife, intolerance, persecution and death. Elizabeth I was more tolerant, but with Anglicanism the official religion, Catholic musicians often trod a fine and dangerous line. Hassler's contemporary William Byrd, had to worship in secret and wrote music with Latin texts for performance in the houses and private chapels of wealthy Catholics, who often had a resident priest and a priest's hole where he could hide if the authorities descended. As the acknowledged greatest composer of his age, who lived a long life, Byrd's settings of English texts were widely performed, even though he himself was regularly fined as a recusant – ie refusing to attend compulsory Anglican services. Others were less lucky (and less favoured by Elizabeth.) Peter Philips and John Bull were among those who escaped to The Netherlands or to Rome, where their movements were tracked by spies on the lookout for plots against Elizabeth's life. Some English musicians may themselves have been spies. The differences in music for the different churches was mainly down to the language being set rather than the musical styles or techniques. Rich polyphony – the combining of several independent vocal lines – abounds in both traditions.

In the 1650s, when some of the German music in part two was being composed, the victorious Parliamentarians in the English Civil War banned music almost entirely from churches, as well as closing theatres. Polyphony was declared the Devil's work. In many churches and cathedrals, organs were destroyed, along with stained glass, paintings and sculptures. Henry Purcell arrived just in time, but all too briefly, to witness the Restoration not only of the monarch but of theatre and "proper" church music, to which he made such a glorious contribution, paving the way for Handel less than half a century later.

All composers of the Renaissance and Baroque, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant, were greatly influenced by Italian music, including that of Palestrina. Musicians either went to Italy to study – as Handel did – or they soaked up the sheet music, as Purcell and Bach did. French influences too – Charles II imported hundreds of French dancing masters to enliven the Court and theatres, and this was reflected in the music of Purcell and others. Operas like *Dido and Aeneas* and masques like *the Fairy Queen* and *King Arthur* were in English but by the time Handel arrived, opera in the Italian

style and language was all the rage, with Handel a leading composer of it. When that fell out of fashion, Handel reinvented himself and the genre. His Oratorios are essentially Italian operas with Biblical stories and English words, culminating in *Messiah*. That masterpiece had to be premiered in a theatre in Dublin, not least because operatic divas of alleged dubious morals sang the arias.

In Germany, throughout these times, musical life seems to have been a bit easier. The various principalities and courts were either Protestant or Catholic, but tended to co-exist in relative harmony. Composers often worked for both, regardless of their own religion. This concert features settings by Praetorius of both Latin and German words of the equivalent texts and melodies. Bach, a Lutheran, worked in Leipzig and set mainly German words, but also wrote settings of the Latin Mass including the towering one in B minor. The Czech Catholic Jan Dismas Zelenka held the equivalent post in Dresden, setting Latin texts. But both once applied for the same position, with Bach being pipped at the post. As in the previous century, the music in both traditions shares rich polyphony and glorious sound worlds, with strings, winds, trumpets and timpani often involved in mass settings. Music in all its forms was intended to glorify aristocratic or episcopal nobility almost as much as God, and the tradition passed on to Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven.

Life as a musician, perhaps especially for a composer, and especially for a female or person of colour, has never been easy, though it's now becoming a bit more egalitarian. The most dangerous times since the 17th century have been under the tyrannies of Fascism and Communism. Jewish musicians who didn't escape in time often ended up in Hitler's gas chambers. Maybe only Stalin's death in 1953 saved Shostakovich when he'd just offended the dictator's musical "taste" once too often. In 2022, Russian musicians risk violence or imprisonment if they speak out against Putin's war, or are sidelined in the West if they support him. Only last month, a Ukrainian conductor was murdered in Kherson after he refused to conduct a concert of Russian music.

It's a happier situation in Britain, where "classical" music has perhaps never been so diverse and so excellent. But many musician and music institutions are squeezed financially, especially after Covid, with some audiences slow to pick up. Many musical institutions are in a perilous financial state, begging audiences for donations over and above ticket prices. Musicians rail, sometimes silently or secretly, about the very patchy music provision in state schools, and about the new constraints on, and increased cost of, working or touring in the EU. Musicians have always had to be adaptable and pragmatic to some degree, if only to keep the wolf from the door: being too outspoken may disadvantage them, or attract online trolling for being "liberal lefties." In the past century, Elgar felt his career was hampered by being a Catholic. He was misunderstood by imperialists, and loathed the words inflicted on one of his greatest tunes. The irony is that his music is firmly in the German tradition, having taught himself most of what he knew by studying Wagner. Vaughan Williams studied with Ravel but was accused of being of the "cowpat school" for his use of English folk music. He couldn't be too forthright about his agnosticism, especially as he compiled *The English Hymnal*, and he was as reticent as Shostakovich about the meaning behind his symphonies. RVW turned down both a knighthood and the post of Master of the King's / Queen's Music, while former avant-garde firebrand and outspoken critic of government music and education policy, Peter Maxwell Davies, accepted both in later life. Tudor composers weren't afforded such honours, but they did rely on not offending their royal or aristocratic patrons. Between the wars, Geoffrey Bush was sidelined for being a communist. Malcolm Arnold battled mental illness and alcoholism: only his lighter works are well-known at the expense of some of the finest 20th century symphonies. Britten and Tippett had to be very discreet about their homosexuality. Britten and Pears spent the early war years in the USA, while Tippett served a prison term as a pacifist. Women composers wrote wonderful music that is only now coming into the public eye (or ear!) but it's telling that we hear far more from Hildegard of Bingen than from Ethel Smyth or Ruth Gipps. No critic would now dare to say of a composition: "not bad, for a woman." Ironically, for contemporary composers, this greater equality coincides with a massive new input of less well-known but very worthwhile historical ones. It's a long time since mainstream concerts consisted mainly of new music, but no longer are women considered too feeble to play brass or percussion instruments (or any instrument!) in our major orchestras. Many women now grace the podium as conductors, though very recently, an acclaimed male conductor (who may not have been joking) thought that might distract male musicians.

Before anyone raises an issue about tonight's programme, an effort was made! But although there were plenty of women composers in earlier centuries, often nuns, sadly no music by them could be found to fit the themes that are explored.

The Promise of Advent

Part 1: The Annunciation

Reading

Luke 1:26-28

Wycliffe Bible

²⁶ But in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, whose name was Nazareth ²⁷ to a maiden wedded to a man, whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the name of the maiden was Mary. ²⁸ And the angel entered to her, and said, Hail, full of grace; the Lord is with thee; blessed be thou among women.

Angelus ad Virginem

Anon arr DJ

Choir, Strings

Originating in the 13th century, possibly in France, this song spread round Europe and was brought to Britain by Franciscan friars. A true carol, with its dancing 6/8 rhythm, the original had 27 verses: we will sing one in Latin and one in Early English.

Jig super Angelus ad Virginem

Strings

Carols were originally dances and derived from folk music. Many, like Angelus ad Virginem, had the rhythm of a jig, a sprightly dance common to almost all European cultures. Like all the string interludes in part one, it was composed by Donald Judge.

Hail, blessed Virgin Mary

14th century Italian

Choir, strings

A hymn with a harmonisation by Charles Wood, and English words by G R Woodward, added in the 19th century.

Fuga super Ave Maria

Strings

The tunes of the two carols share the same opening notes in very different rhythms. Here, those notes are used to create a short fugue.

Reading

Luke 1:38

Wycliffe Bible

³⁸ And Mary said, Lo! the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me after thy word.

Hans Leo Hassler 1564-1612

Motet: Dixit Maria

Choir

Hassler was born in Nuremberg and died in Frankfurt. He was one of the most important and respected German composers in the century before Bach and Handel were born. He wrote melodies for many of Martin Luther's hymns, most famously the one we know as *O Sacred Head, sore wounded*, which Bach used in both his *Passions*. Like his near contemporary William Byrd, Hassler set texts in both Latin and his native language: unlike Byrd and other English composers, Hassler and his countrymen had greater "freedom of movement" to divide their time between Protestant and Catholic states, courts and churches. It's clear that Hassler, like Byrd, was influenced by Italian masters of polyphony such as Palestrina. Though the German style may be less complex than much English music of the time, Hassler demonstrates a dazzling facility and imagination as he manipulates the gently rising initial melody to create both this motet – with a text based on Luke 2:38 – and the mass setting the traditional Latin words. A particular feature is that the rising melody is often mirrored at the ends of sections by a descending phrase.

Jig super Dixit Maria: a scherzo for Cheeky Cherubim

Strings

For artistic representations of the Annunciation, much more plentiful than musical ones, turn principally to Italy. Among the myriad images of Gabriel delivering his message is a glorious triptych by the Sieneese master, Simone Martini, 1284-1344. Saints occupy the outer sections of an ornately gilded interior, the architecture contemporary, and the landscape beyond Italian. An aristocratic Mary sits on a throne, clad in blue (previously, artists showed Mary wearing red, but a new blue pigment more expensive than gold superseded it.) She recoils in horror from the unexpected messenger, who looks no less anxious as he kneels before her. He's come armed with symbols of peace: an olive branch and crown of

olive leaves, and lilies he's placed in a vase. This piece imagines the glee of young cherubs (offscreen!) who have accompanied Gabriel and are enjoying his discomfort.

Hans Leo Hassler

Mass super Dixit Maria: Kyrie

Choir

From the earliest polyphonic settings, it was common to base Masses on a well-known tune: *l'Homme armée* being one. This was "held" by the tenor voice (from the Latin *tenere*, to hold) and the other parts were woven around it. By Hassler's time, the four (or sometimes more) voices had equal status, but this entire work derives from the melodies of the motet.

The music was intended to be performed *a capella* ie by unaccompanied SATB voices. In our performance, strings and continuo, which always double the voices, sometimes at higher or lower octaves, are used to create more variety and richness of texture.

Sarabande super Kyrie Eleison

Strings

A sarabande is a slow dance of French origin in triple time, often with a stress on the second beat of the bar. As well as Bach including one in almost every suite he wrote, the closing mourning choruses of both his Passion settings are sarabandes. This one by Donald Judge presents the *Kyrie's* melody in the minor key as it reflects on the plea for mercy.

Gloria / Credo

Choir, strings

It remained common until Haydn's day for movements of the Mass to begin with the plainchant intonation of the initial words. These movements are the longest of the Mass, and both fall into several contrasting sections. Solo voices performing certain passage is an editorial decision, again to vary the texture.

Jig super Et vitam venturi

Strings

This interlude reflects on Hassler's tune for the words that look forward to the joyous everlasting life to come – itself a variant of the descending phrase he uses, more sedately, many times.

Sanctus – Benedictus – Osanna

Choir, strings

It became common – for example in Mass settings by Haydn and Mozart – for the *Benedictus* to showcase the solo voices. In this case the decision is editorial and provides an intimate contrast.

Pastorale super Agnus Dei

Strings

A prelude to the concluding movement of the Mass that references the Lamb of God. The *pastorale*, with its lilting rhythm that denies the privations of tending flocks in all weathers (a parallel with painters' idyllic depictions) probably originated from Italian folk bagpipers (often shepherds, or the bags made from sheep!) and became a popular feature in music for Christmas. Many Czech composers wrote pastoral Christmas Masses, sometimes with folk-inspired carols inserted into the Latin texts. Bach included a *pastorale* in one of the cantatas that form his Christmas Oratorio, as did Corelli in his *Christmas Concerto*. Maybe the best known one is the *Pifa* that opens the section of Handel's *Messiah* where the Angels appear to the Shepherds.

Agnus Dei

Choir, strings

Despite pleading to the Lamb of God to bear our sins and grant peace, this movement often becomes one of triumph: an uplifting conclusion in all but a Requiem Mass. Haydn wrote several such, as his Masses often celebrated the peace that followed a military victory. Hassler's is brief but in similar vein, a glorious celebration of both peace and his own musical invention.

INTERVAL

Refreshments are available.

Part 2: Variations on Nun Komm, der Heiden Heiland – *Now come, Saviour of the Nations*

Every item in the second half reflects on Martin Luther's great hymn for the first Sunday in Advent. Bach wrote two complex Cantatas – 61 and 62 – featuring it: they also include texts by Erdmann Neumeister. Telemann used the same words for his Cantata. Most pieces set just the first of Luther's several verses, or are instrumental fantasies upon the melody. They span more than three centuries and give an insight into how musical style and compositional form changed: from single line plainchant, to voices weaving round a melody "held" by the tenor: to a sequence of almost operatic choruses, recitatives and arias with contrapuntal writing and virtuosic solos. Throughout the Renaissance and Baroque eras, German church music made use of Lutheran hymns which were as familiar to congregations as the best-known Hymns Ancient and Modern are to Anglicans. The music would have been part of the liturgy and the Sunday Service. A typical service would have lasted three hours, and its core would not be the cantata but the sermon, the word of God preached from magnificent elevated pulpits.

Luther's words and "his" tune did not come from his head. Far from eschewing Latin texts, Luther translated many of the writings of the 4th Century St Ambrose of Milan. He adapted the plainchant for *Veni, redemptor gentium* to fit the words of his translation *Nun Komm, der Heiden Heiland*. It's a curious and enigmatic tune that seems neither triumphant nor melancholy. Its irregular metre and uncertain minor / modal character make it a challenge for any composer, but as you will hear, it was one they rose to with relish, succeeding in combining the longing for Christ's coming with the expectation of the glory it would bring.

Reading for Advent 1

Romans 13:11–14

Wycliffe Bible

¹¹And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹²The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. ¹³Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

Einsiedeln Plainchant

Veni, redemptor gentium

Tenors and basses

Martin Luther's textual and musical inspiration. Einsiedeln is a Benedictine monastery in Switzerland.

Michael Praetorius 1571-1621

**Veni, redemptor gentium
Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland**

**Choir
Strings / Choir**

Praetorius was born in Creuzberg, who died in Wolfenbüttel. As well as church and dance music (*Terpsichore*) he produced a catalogue of all the musical instruments known to him. He and many German composers were free to set both Latin and German texts to cater for different courts and their churches. These two chorales highlight both the similarities and the differences between the "Latin" and the "German" melodies.

Balthasar Resinarius 1483-1544

Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland

Choir

The earliest named composer represented, and the first of two settings that give the melody to the tenors, while the other voices weave elaborate parts around it. Resinarius, a clergyman and composer, was the first Lutheran Bishop in largely Catholic Bohemia. He was born in Dečín and died in Česka Lipa, now Czech cities north and east of Prague.

Andreas Raselius 1562-1602

Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland

Choir

Again, the tenors take the melody, but several decades on, it's a very different treatment. Raselius was born in Hahnbach, Germany, and served as Cantor in Regensburg and then Heidelberg, where he died.

Johann Hermann Schein 1586-1630

Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland

T/B, SS solo, strings, bc

Schein was born in Grünhain and died in Leipzig, where he was cantor at the Thomasschule, a post J S Bach was to hold, and where he wrote his 200 Church Cantatas. Schein, Heinrich Schütz and Samuel Scheidt were key figures of the early German Baroque. They were keen to incorporate modern Italian influences into their church music – as Bach and Handel would too, a hundred years later. Schein's life was blighted by family tragedy and ill health, but this joyous and

inventive treatment of *Nun komm* will surely raise a smile. The tenor “holds” the melody (here sung by baritone Mike Bell) but Schein forces it into his rhythmic and harmonic plan. In the spaces between the lines of the verse, two sopranos play contrapuntal games of chase with snippets of melody.

Johann Pachelbel 1653-1706

Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland

Strings

If ever a composer suffered from writing a single work that became hugely popular, one must be Pachelbel: and even that didn't happen until a certain very beautiful sheep crossed people's TV screens to advertise wool in the 1970s. He was born and died in Nuremberg, but worked in Regensburg, Stuttgart and Vienna among other cities – and as organist in Erfurt where almost all the town's organists were a sort of mafia called Bach. Pachelbel was highly regarded as a performer and composer, and wrote a vast amount, especially keyboard and instrumental music. This organ prelude arranged for strings features the melody in the bass (ie organ pedals), and includes the use of “double” in which increasingly fast notes are used in variations, as in the famous *Canon*.

Thomas A Schneider

Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland

Unis Chorale, strings, bc

The composer's name could be German. The music could be Bach at his most wildly imaginative. Only a couple of moments perhaps give the game away. This is a chorale prelude for organ, written in 2010 by an American organist, published in the public domain, who wins A* for daring and for capturing the style. The melody in this performance is given to the singers in unison, while the anguished accompaniment arranged for strings and continuo underscores the longing for Christ's coming.

Johann Sebastian Bach 1685-1750

Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland BWV 661

Strings

Here's the genuine JSB: in this virtuoso organ prelude, three upper voices play Italianate games with the melody, the running quavers and octave leaps making it very suitable for a string arrangement. Into this whirlwind of relentless dancing, the *Nun komm* chorale enters at intervals in the bass.

There's a further comparison with Bach in this concert. A difficulty some find with his celebrated *Goldberg Variations* is that over an hour of music is almost entirely in G major: the *Aria* framing thirty variations with just three in G minor. Much the same can be said of this sequence: many pieces almost all in G, though G minor predominates in the *Nun Komm* settings. For the *Goldberg Variations*, Bach, unusually, specified a two manual harpsichord – ie allowing different degrees of volume and richness – though they are often performed on the piano, an instrument Bach never knew. It's also worth mentioning that in the final variation, the *Quodlibet*, Bach manages to quote some popular folk melodies audiences would have known as well as they knew Luther's hymns. The work is full not only of dazzling virtuosity but dazzling counterpoint. Hopefully the persistent tonality of this sequence is lifted by the sheer variety of styles and textures.

Gottfried August Homilius 1714-1785

Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland

Violin solo, alto solo, bc

This treatment could hardly be more of a contrast to the preceding two pieces. An intimate version, almost a trio sonata, the lilting violin solo above a walking bass line, and every so often, the chorale melody sung by a solo alto. Born in Rosenthal, Homilius died in Dresden, where he was a successor to the Czech, J D Zelenka, holding posts at three of the city's great churches: the Kreuzkirche, Sophienkirche, and Frauenkirche.

Wilhelm Friedemann Bach 1714 – 1784

Fughetta: Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland

Strings

J S Bach's second child and eldest son was a supremely gifted composer, keyboard player, and improviser, but had a chequered career, moving frequently between posts in numerous German cities and often falling out with other musicians or employers. Despite his talents, he died in poverty. His father would have been proud of one aspect of his character: this little piece suggests he followed solid rules of form and counterpoint, and didn't indulge in modernist Gallant or Rococo flights of fancy like some of the 20 sons, C P E in particular. This piece is in D minor (the first not in G) and closes on the dominant (A) to make the perfect lead into:

Georg Philip Telemann 1681-1767

Cantata: Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland

**SATB soli / choir
Strings, bc**

Born in Magdeburg four years before Bach and Handel, Telemann outlived both of them and can claim to be the 3rd greatest composer of the age. Like his two contemporaries, he soaked up French and Italian influences. In the days when being prolific was an expectation, Telemann put everyone to shame, with over 3000 compositions, including operas. He held posts in Frankfurt and then Hamburg, where he died. So far, most of the composers represented have all emphasised the rather austere, minor key, aspect of the melody: the anguish of longing for Christ's coming rather than the joy it will deliver. But Telemann launches violins in D major like fireworks (very popular in Baroque times!) into the sky. The dotted rhythms bounce along: the chorale, still in G minor, is now foursquare and triumphant. So far the only words to be sung since the Interval are the first verse of the hymn (in Latin or German) but this work uses the texts Bach also chose for his two cantatas, BWV 61 and 62. The movements all progress towards triumph. A bass recitative is followed by a tenor da capo aria in D major: *Come Jesus*, essentially a graceful minuet with two violins interweaving their melodies. An alto recitative introduces a joyful soprano aria also in D major: *Open my whole heart*. The final chorus begins *Amen* and reaches a resounding conclusion.

It seemed only right to allow J S Bach, the greatest advocate for Luther's texts and melodies, the final word, but first we hear from one of Bach's heroes:

Dietrich Buxtehude 1637-1707

Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland

Strings

Born in Helsingborg, now in Denmark, Buxtehude died in Lübeck, the city where the young Bach famously walked 200 miles to hear his idol, almost 50 years his senior, play, and to copy some of his scores for study. His compositional output is fairly modest, and largely organ works, though the Festival Choir performed a splendid short cantata of his in a previous Christmas concert. This graceful, gentle piece hides the melody more successfully than anything else in tonight's concert, and allows the organist's right hand – here represented by the violinist's left, to enjoy some virtuosic decorations.

Johann Sebastian Bach

Final chorus from Canatata 61: Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland

All

Bach takes that virtuosity head on as the solo violin launches into a flurry of semiquavers, beneath which the sopranos sing a different chorale melody to fit the same words as Telemann's finale. Notice the setting of *Amen* which uses precisely the same two notes as in the Telemann. Alto and tenor have elaborate counterpoint: the vocal and orchestral basses drive everything forward in a blaze of glory as the first violin soars to heights many composers would have been too timid to expect. This is just one movement from one of the 200 cantatas Bach completed in 4 years in Leipzig, a new one written, rehearsed and performed each week, only to be put in a drawer for posterity. Pick any movement from any of them, and like this one, there's music of profound depth, artistically and aurally challenging, perfectly capturing the special quality of the texts and that day in the church's year. Stravinsky considered them the greatest body of music in existence.

Bollington Festival Choir wishes the audience all the very best for Christmas and 2023, and hopes to see you at the Carol Service here at St Oswald's on Sunday 11 December at 3 pm, and in the Arts Centre for *Messiah for All* at 7.30 on Tuesday, 13 December.

What's coming up in 2023 follows. If you aspire to sing, why not join the Choir in January?

Future concerts from BFC

Musical forms, ideas and inspirations evident in this concert are a feature of those that will begin and end 2023. The Spring concert will include a beautiful cantata Mendelssohn based on the chorale *O Sacred Head*. A passionate enthusiast for Bach, who introduced his *Passions* to England, perhaps even Mendelssohn didn't realise the melody was not Bach's, but by Hans Leo Hassler. Choral treatments of the hymn tune frame a beautiful solo aria. The concert opens with Donald Judge's setting of G K Chesterton's Palm Sunday poem *The Donkey*, which includes and is influenced by another well-known hymn melody that is never actually sung or even played uninterrupted. The concert will conclude with some of the most triumphant music from Handel's *Messiah*. Once again, Nicola Bright's quintet and Rosalind will accompany, to be joined by guests Kerry Firth, soprano, and John Bush, trumpet.

The Choir moves to France (at least musically) in the summer of 2023, with Gounod's *St Cecilia Mass*.

The Advent Concert for 2024 will have two halves like this one, but they contrast secular and sacred celebrations of the season, not only choral music but solo songs and instrumental music, performed by Choir members, in the Arts Centre, with piano accompaniment by Rosalind Hall. Winter's snow and ice are in the capable hands of Henry Purcell. There's a rare appearance, in both halves, of St Martin – a Roman soldier who refused to kill anyone, tore his cloak in half to give to a beggar, became a monk, and is patron saint of beggars, soldiers and vintners. He's especially celebrated in Germany and Czechia, with parades, services, roast goose and new wine, sadly not available at the concert, though the licenced bar will be open. In part two, Donald Judge takes five European carols as the starting point for a new work: *Missa Brevis: Carols, Canons and Chorales*. The festivities conclude with a reprise of *Gloria*, the joyful setting of the Angels' appearance to the Shepherds by the Baroque Italian composer and nun Isabella Leonardo.