

HUGH BENHAM

A TRIUMPH SONG
MUSIC FOR CHOIR & ORGAN

CONVIVIAM SINGERS
NEIL FERRIS CONDUCTOR
MICHAEL HIGGINS ORGAN

The logo for Convivium Records is a circular emblem. The word "CONVIVIAM" is written in a serif font along the top inner edge of the circle, and "RECORDS" is written along the bottom inner edge. Small dots separate the two words at the top and bottom of the circle.

CONVIVIAM
RECORDS

CONVIVIUM SINGERS PERFORM A WIDE VARIETY OF VOCAL

and choral music for recordings and recitals. Established in 2009 by Adrian Green and Alexander Norman, the group aims to provide opportunities for young singers at the early stages of their performing careers, as well as for talented musicians who have chosen not to pursue careers in music, but wish to continue singing to a high standard. They currently comprise singers from many established choirs, including Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir, Ex Cathedra, Armonico Consort, Portsmouth Cathedral, the Choir of Royal Holloway, Genesis Sixteen, and York Minster. The Singers specialise in undiscovered or little known British music and in the music of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Recent recitals have been in the Cathedrals of Coventry, Birmingham and Portsmouth, as well as in and around London. The ensemble continues to be involved with Portsmouth Cathedral's Chorister outreach programme, delivering and facilitating workshops and performances at schools within the Diocese of Portsmouth.

HUGH BENHAM IS ORGANIST AND CHOIR DIRECTOR AT ST. BONIFACE ANGLICAN CHURCH IN CHANDLER'S FORD, HAMPSHIRE, AND ACTIVE IN THE GUILD OF CHURCH MUSICIANS. HE IS A WRITER OF ACADEMIC AND EDUCATIONAL ARTICLES AND BOOKS, AND A CHAIR OF EXAMINERS FOR GCE MUSIC.

Some of the choral items on this disc were composed for St Boniface Church Choir, a mixed choir of about 20 voices, and are intended to be useful to other parish choirs including quite small ones, to chapel choirs in schools and colleges, and in such joint events as

diocesan choral festivals. Four pieces (*A Triumph Song*, *Love's redeeming work*, *Ave verum corpus* and *Divinum mysterium*) are in particular suitable for larger forces and larger buildings. The music was composed between 2005 and 2011 unless otherwise stated.

A TRIUMPH SONG

A hymn of thanksgiving and rejoicing for Ascensiontide and general use, with verse 1 in unison, unaccompanied harmony for verse 2, and unison plus descant for the final verse.

*To God, with heart and cheerful voice,
A triumph song we sing;
And with true thankful hearts rejoice
In our almighty King;
Yea, to his glory we record,
Who were but dust and clay,
What honour he did us afford
On his ascending day.*

*Each door and everlasting gate
To him hath lifted been;
And in a glorious wise thereat
Our King is entered in;
Whom if to follow we regard,
With ease we safely may,
For he hath all the means prepared,
And made an open way.*

*Then follow, follow on apace,
And let us not forgo
Our Captain, till we win the place
That he hath scaled unto:
And for his honour, let our voice
A shout so hearty make,
The heavens may at our mirth rejoice,
On his ascending day.*

George Wither *Hymnes and Songs of the Church* (1623), last line altered

LOVE CAME DOWN AT CHRISTMAS

Unlike *A Triumph Song*, this is a setting of a very well-known text. The music of verse 1 is repeated, varied, in verse 3; verse 2, which begins in the tonic minor key, is partly for unaccompanied voices.

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

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

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

Christina Rossetti (1830–94)

LOVE'S REDEEMING WORK

An anthem for Eastertide and general use, largely based on the modal melody of verse 1. This melody is mainly Dorian, but ends with a more ambiguous pattern of interlocking thirds (G E flat F D) that is later given contrapuntal treatment.

*Love's redeeming work is done;
Fought the fight, the battle won:
Lo, our Sun's eclipse is o'er!
Lo, he sets in blood no more!*

*Vain the stone, the watch, the seal!
Christ has burst the gates of hell;
Death in vain forbids his rise;
Christ has opened Paradise.*

*Lives again our glorious King;
Where, O death, is now thy sting?
Dying once, he all doth save;
Where thy victory, O grave?*

*Soar we now where Christ has led,
Following our exalted Head;
Made like him, like him we rise;
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies.*

*Hail the Lord of earth and heaven!
Praise to thee by both be given:
Thee we greet triumphant now;
Hail, the Resurrection thou!*

Charles Wesley (1707–88)

CHORALE

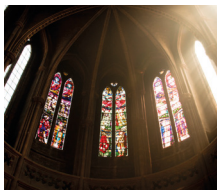
Chorale, for organ, is a miniature suitable for performance before or during the distribution of Holy Communion. After an introduction, the first three phrases of its simple chorale- or hymn-like melody are soloed; the fourth phrase is more densely harmonised with parallel chords over a low pedal note.

LET MY PRAYER RISE BEFORE YOU

A responsory for Evening Prayer which has, for several years, formed part of the Advent Liturgy at St Boniface, Chandler's Ford. The unison refrain 'Let my prayer' is sung three times, a tone higher each time as the prayer rises; the verses are for solo male cantor. *Text from Psalm 141 (Common Worship).*

EVENING VOLUNTARY

Evening Voluntary has various comfortable English echoes and associations, but there are ambiguities and uncertainties, as in the middle section where a serene C major is soon compromised.



O SACRUM CONVIVIUM

Composed in the 1970s as a short Communion motet (or introit) for unaccompanied voices in simple chordal style. The opening and closing sections in B flat major are separated by a passage of strong tonal contrast, with a climactic soprano F sharp as the worshippers look forward to 'future glory'.

O sacrum convivium! In quo Christus sumitur: recolitur memoria passionis ejus:

mens impletur gratia: et futurae gloriae nobis pignus datur.

Translation:

O sacred banquet! In which Christ is consumed: the memory of his Passion is recalled:

the mind is filled with grace: and the pledge of future glory is given to us.

St Thomas Aquinas (1225-74)

MYSTERIUM FIDEI

The title of this meditative organ voluntary was suggested by the 'mystery of faith' proclaimed in the Eucharist.

AVE, VERUM CORPUS

A longer motet, also for Communion, following the same structural scheme as Elgar's setting. After an enigmatic organ introduction (minor key, although the overall tonality is major) a section for women's voices with organ is repeated in harmony, followed by a second section similarly repeated. The coda ('O clemens, O pie...') is chiefly for solo voices. Dissonance underlines references to pain and suffering, notably at 'Vere passum...'; a reference to Christ's Passion, with parallel sevenths in the organ.

*Ave, verum corpus natum
De Maria Virgine:*

*Vere passum, immolatum
In cruce pro homine.*

*Cujus latus, perforatum,
Unda fluxit sanguine;
Esto nobis praegustatum,
Mortis in examine.*

*O clemens, O pie,
O dulcis Jesu, fili Mariae.*

Translation: Hail, true body, born from Mary the Virgin, that truly suffered, sacrificed on the cross for man. From his pierced side flowed blood. Be to us a foretaste in death's trial. O kind, O loving, O sweet Jesus, son of Mary.

14th-Century, anonymous

BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD

A unison hymn composed in 1984. It is suitable also for use as a simple anthem at the Eucharist, especially in Passiontide. The melody is largely pentatonic (with the notes D E F sharp A B) but G is strongly asserted for contrast in the middle.

*Behold the Lamb of God!
O thou for sinners slain,
Let it not be in vain*

*That thou hast died:
Thee for my Saviour let me take,
My only refuge let me make
Thy pierced side.*

*Behold the Lamb of God!
All hail, incarnate Word,
Thou everlasting Lord,
Saviour most blest!
Fill us with love that never faints,
Grant us with all thy blessed saints
Eternal rest.*

*Behold the Lamb of God!
Worthy is he alone
To sit upon the throne
Of God above;
One with the Ancient of all Days,
One with the Comforter in praise,
All Light and Love.*

Matthew Bridges (1800–94) and Compilers
of *Hymns Ancient and Modern Revised*

MELODY WITH VARIATIONS

For organ and modelled in structure on 'Complainte', no. 3 of Vierne's *24 Pièces en Style Libre*. A self-contained melody is repeated with variations of texture and harmony, and then inverted; there are some prominent pedal points. The quiet conclusion is intended to lead into a short period of silence before the choir enters at the start of a service.

BLEST ARE THE PURE IN HEART

Similar in structure to *Ave verum corpus* but more straightforward in style. It is suitable as a short anthem or introit, either at the Eucharist or Evensong.

*Blest are the pure in heart,
For they shall see our God;
The secret of the Lord is theirs,
Their soul is Christ's abode.*

*Lord, we thy presence seek;
May ours this blessing be;
Give us a pure and lowly heart,
A temple meet for thee.*

First verse: John Keble (1792–1866);
second verse: anonymous

THE LORD'S PRAYER

For unison voices, using the modern text beginning 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name'. It may be accompanied by piano instead of organ.

DIVINUM MYSTERIUM

Named after a melody familiar from many hymn books (for the hymn 'Of the Father's love') and originally from *Piae Cantiones* of 1582. The opening solo and the following verses hint at this melody; it is more clearly foreshadowed in the organ part, and then is sung in full towards the end. The final C sharp major chord suggests something of the divine mystery, especially as the principal keys are G major and E major. This anthem was composed with Christmas in mind, but is suitable for other occasions including Epiphany and feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

*There is no rose of such virtue
As is the rose that bare Jesu.
Alleluia.*

*For in this rose contained was
Heaven and earth in little space,
Res miranda. [A wonderful thing.]*

ALLEGRO SCHERZANDO

Much of this is based on the three-note motif heard twice at the start (falling, then rising). Two pitches a semitone apart are embedded in the dissonant chordal textures a little further on: they form the basis of the brief lyrical interludes that immediately follow.

*By that rose we may well see
That he is God in persons three,
Pari forma. [Of like nature.]*

*The angels sang the shepherds to:
'Gloria in excelsis Deo!' [Glory in the highest to God!]
Gaudeamus. [Let us rejoice.]*

*Leave we now this worldly mirth,
And follow we this joyful birth:
Transeamus. [Let us cross over (from earth to heaven).]*

Anon. 15th-century

*O that birth for ever blessed!
When the Virgin, full of grace,
By the Holy Ghost conceiving,
Bare the Saviour of our race,
And the Babe, the world's Redeemer,
First revealed His sacred face,
Evermore and evermore.*

Prudentius (c. 400) tr. J. M. Neale

NEIL FERRIS studied at Royal Holloway, University of London and the Royal College of Music. Now establishing a reputation as a conductor equally at home with choirs and orchestras, Neil combines his conducting engagements with his teaching post as Head of Choral Conducting at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. Neil has been Music Director of Cardiff Polyphonic Choir since 2006, and in that time they have broadcast for BBC Radio 2, 3 and 4. He is also the Music Director of Wimbledon Choral Society, which enjoys a reputation as one of London's leading amateur choruses. Neil also works regularly as a guest conductor with other choirs; he is Principal Guest Conductor of Birmingham Bach Choir and he is also guest conductor of the

MICHAEL HIGGINS studied piano with Margaret Newman at the Birmingham Conservatoire, and at the Royal Academy of Music, London, with Julius Drake. Abroad, Michael has toured with singers and instrumentalists in Germany, Hungary, Italy, Australia and New Zealand and regularly performs throughout the United Kingdom. Recent performances include the European premiere of Eric Whitacre's *Animal Crackers, Volume II* with the National Youth Choir of Great Britain conducted by the composer, concerto performances with the New London Soloists Orchestra at St Martin in the Fields, recitals at Glasgow's City Halls and accompanying a choir of Olympians live on BBC television. Michael studied organ with Andrew Fletcher and is Director of Music

Whitehall Choir, Convivium Singers and the award-winning Joyful Company of Singers. As a chorus master Neil has prepared choirs for conductors including Richard Hickox, Thierry Fischer, Owain Arwel Hughes, Grant Llewellyn, Adrian Partington and David Atherton. Work with orchestras includes the Brandenburg Sinfonia, Midland Sinfonia, Haydn Chamber Orchestra, Salomon Orchestra, and the New Queen's Hall Orchestra. In May 2011 he was invited to conduct the NQHO in the presence of HRH Prince Charles. Future projects with Convivium Singers include a release on the Naxos label of an album of the choral music of Jonathan Dove.



Left to Right: Michael Higgins, Neil Ferris, Hugh Benham

at the Church of St John the Baptist, Wimbledon, where he has founded two thriving choirs for adults and children. He accompanies the Wimbledon Choral Society, the National Children's Choir of Great Britain and regularly works on projects with Gareth Malone from the BBC series 'The Choir', with whom he recently filmed for BBC Comic Relief. As a composer, he has answered a number of commissions, including songs for a set of educational books published in Singapore, and many of his choral and organ works are published worldwide by Kevin Mayhew Publishers. Michael was awarded the Joseph Weingarten Memorial Trust Scholarship and completed his studies with Kálmán Dráfi at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, Budapest.

CONVIVUM SINGERS

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