

Matthew Coleridge

The Breath of Life



Rupert Gough *directs* The Choir of Royal Holloway
with Southern Sinfonia • Simon Earl • Maxim Calver • Lionel Handy

Tracklist

The Breath of Life

THE BREATH OF LIFE

1	i	Rejoice In God, O Ye Tongues	4.02
2	ii	Benedicite	2.50
3	iii	Arise, The Breath, The Life	2.25
4	iv	Awake, My Glory	1.53
5	v	Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow	5.40
6	vi	For Thunder Is The Voice of God	3.49
7	vii	These Great Trees Are Prayers	5.28
8	viii	The Breath Of Life Is In The Sunlight	5.22

REQUIEM MOTETS

9	i	In Paradisum	3.52
10	ii	The Heart's Affections	2.36
11	iii	Take Him, Earth, For Cherishing	3.42

SONGS OF LIGHT

12	i	In Your Light, I Learn How To Love	3.55
13	ii	A Thousand Windows	3.39
14	iii	Where Shadow Chases Light	2.08

Total running time 51.25

Introduction

Both a celebration of life and a deeply spiritual reflection,

The Breath of Life is Matthew Coleridge's radiant follow-up to his acclaimed *Requiem*. "I wanted to write something full of life and positivity," Coleridge explains,

"something that would scream joy, vitality and rhythm – quite the opposite of a Requiem."

Though inspired by sacred traditions,

The Breath of Life is a vibrant cantata for choir and orchestra that explores human wonder, nature and the divine across a tapestry of texts

from psalms and hymns to the writings of mystics and scientists.

Oliver Condy

Programme Note

THE BREATH OF LIFE

1 Rejoice In God, O Ye Tongues

The work opens in shimmering stillness, as if slowly awakening. “I imagined the choir processing in, the sound gradually coming into focus,” says Coleridge. The text is taken from Christopher Smart’s *Jubilate Agno*, famously set by Benjamin Britten in his own cantata *Rejoice in the Lamb*. “This movement is full of fleeting dissonances,” adds Coleridge. “Major chords, but usually with the twist of a fourth or ninth to colour them.” Towards the end of the movement, the music explodes in jubilation, hallelujahs building to the fundamental proclamation: “Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.” This is, after all, the movement that lends the cantata its name. “*The Breath of Life* is the perfect title. I love Smart’s language: ‘Let man and beast appear before him and magnify his name together.’ It’s just so visual.”

2 Benedicite

With rhythmic vitality and syncopated energy, the second movement bubbles into

life, adapting words from the Christian canticle, the Benedicite, asking everything that the Lord has created to bless and praise Him. “I started this movement in lockdown,” says Coleridge, “during which I wanted to write as much positive music as I could.” Anchored by a motoric, flowing figure, the piece builds like a spring becoming a river – gathering strength and brightness as it moves forward. Then percussion, with its unexpected crashes and off-beat accents, suggests the chaos of lightning and thunder, and gives the movement an elemental feel. The music reaches its climax with lines, again, from Christopher Smart.

3 Arise, The Breath, The Life

If the first two movements grow steadily from quiet beginnings, “Arise, the breath, the life” begins with immediate, blazing force. Drawing on a passage from the ancient Sanskrit text, the *Rig Veda*, Coleridge says he wanted this movement to be “a big statement right from the start.” And so the voices ring out in bold declamation, only to diminish towards the end

to a gentle whisper. It’s a striking contrast to the earlier architecture, leading us seamlessly into the serenity of the following movement.

4 Awake, My Glory

This gently flowing movement sets verses from Psalm 57 in music that is lyrical and lightly dancing, its rhythmically playful character a result of its rocking 7/8 time signature. Coleridge describes discovering the core of the movement through improvisation: “I was just letting my fingers wander on the piano and this flowing ostinato appeared.” The result is a serene river of sound, quietly propulsive, and filled with light.

5 Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow

Originally commissioned for Trinity Sunday by Christchurch Priory in Dorset, this hymn-inspired anthem forms the Christian heart of the cantata. “I began writing a set of three anthems for them, but only this one felt special, so I expanded it,” he says. The music draws from traditional hymnody, and sets

texts by a variety of English hymnists. “There’s no deep theology here,” Coleridge says. “The faith is very simple, like a school assembly – something a ten year-old would understand.” The movement’s heart is its warmth and immediacy, culminating in a majestic acclamation of the lines: “Ye holy twelve, ye martyrs strong; All saints triumphant, raise the song: Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah.”

6 For Thunder Is The Voice Of God

This movement is a dramatic, pulsating setting of more from Christopher Smart’s *Jubilate Agno*. “I’d been wanting to set these words for years,” says Coleridge, “but you need music that matches the power of the text.” Built around a repeated rhythmic drive and deep, throbbing bass textures, the music stirs up images of thunder, an ethereal, otherworldly organ part and trilling string motifs providing flashes of almost gentle, benign lightning. Soon the choir explodes into overlapping repetitions of the words “For matter is the dust of the earth” in chaotic exultation. The effect is theatrical and electrifying.

Programme Note

Programme Note

7 These Great Trees Are Prayers

A lyrical cello solo opens “These great trees” with a theme that was originally intended as an introduction to the fifth movement. The movement sets two short, evocative texts that reflect on divinity in nature. “It was a joy to just let the choir grow,” he says. “Four pages of sustained chords, building and building.” The expressive simplicity of the texts – one by Nikos Kazantzakis, the other attributed to Rabindranath Tagore – allowed Coleridge to revel in slow, radiant musical expansion. “You can just enjoy the rhythm of the words,” he adds.

8 The Breath Of Life Is In The Sunlight

The finale weaves together seven authors – including Kahlil Gibran, Albert Einstein and John Muir – into a single, luminous meditation. “I wanted something that would resonate with everyone, regardless of faith,” says Coleridge. The movement explores humanity’s shared wonder in creation and consciousness, culminating in a glowing setting of Tallis’s Canon, gilded by a rich

orchestral accompaniment. Around it, spoken lines from John Muir drift like wind through trees. “I wanted an ending that surprised people,” he says. “Something simple and timeless – an epilogue, almost.” The piece concludes with text written by Coleridge himself: “And shining with the stars above, We swim through seas of ceaseless love. Amen.”

REQUIEM MOTETS

Two sets of choral motets lead on from *The Breath of Life*. In his three *Requiem Motets*, the eight-part a cappella choir is joined by an obbligato cello solo, echoing Coleridge’s earlier setting of the Requiem. In the first of these, *In Paradisum*, Coleridge combines a section from the Requiem mass with words from Horatio’s moving speech in the final scene of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*: “May flights of angels sing thee to thy rest”. The solo cello line, played here by Maxim Calver, weaves above and below the voices, which rise to a central climax before coming to rest. In the final bars, a solo soprano echoes the melody of the *In Paradisum* from Fauré’s *Requiem*.

Programme Note

The Heart’s Affections sets new words by the Welsh-Scottish poet and librettist Euan Tait. The music started off life as a Sanctus, before Coleridge realised its multi-layered textures might be more suited to a modern setting. “I sent the score to Euan,” says Coleridge, “and he conjured up some beautiful, beautiful imagery, inspired by a line of Keats: ‘I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart’s affections and the truth of Imagination.’” Tait’s short poem, a short meditation on love, mirrors the Sanctus’ opening recitation, “Holy, Holy, Holy”.

Many listeners will know the words “Take him, Earth, for cherishing” from Herbert Howells’ choral setting commissioned for a 1964 memorial service for John F. Kennedy. Here, Coleridge’s melody-led eight-part motet uses a small section of Helen Waddell’s translation of part of fourth-century Roman poet Prudentius’ *Hymn for the Burial of the Dead*.

SONGS OF LIGHT

Composed in 2025, Coleridge’s *Three Songs of Light* set texts by Rumi, Rabindranath

Tagore and John Muir, two of whom also feature in *The Breath of Life*. Composed as a gift for his wife on their wedding anniversary, *In Your Light, I Learn How To Love* sets Rumi’s ravishing, exultant love poem to music of slow-moving intensity.

In *A Thousand Windows*, the great naturalist John Muir glimpses God in the surroundings of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Coleridge’s music, composed for the vocal octet Hemiola, is appropriately hymn-like, an extended chorale mirroring the devotional character of Muir’s words.

Finally, *Where Shadow Chases Light* sets an adaptation of Rabindranath Tagore’s ode to the passing of time from his Nobel Prize-winning 1910 collection of poems, *Gitanjali*. Coleridge uses moments of silence to emphasise the poem’s central idea of waiting, before the word “wait” itself melts away to nothing.

Oliver Condy

Texts

THE BREATH OF LIFE

1 Rejoice In God, O Ye Tongues

Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues;
Give glory to the Lord and the Lamb.
Nations, and languages, and every Creature
In which is the Breath of Life.
Let man and beast appear before him,
And magnify his name together.

Christopher Smart

Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah.

Let everything that hath breath
praise the Lord.

Psalm 150

2 Benedicite

For my children, Sebastian and Beatrice

Let the rivers and the mountains
bless the Lord,
And let the fire and the water
bless the Lord;
Let the breeze upon the meadow
bless the Lord,
And let the sunlight and the shadow
bless the Lord.

Let the silence of the mountains
bless the Lord,
And let the murmur of the forest
bless the Lord;
Let the whisper of the desert
bless the Lord,
And let the echo in the valley
bless the Lord.
Let the moonlight and the darkness
bless the Lord,
And let the storm upon the ocean
bless the Lord;
Let the tempest and the lightning
bless the Lord,
And let the rolling waves of thunder
bless the Lord.
Let the quiet clouded morning
bless the Lord,
And let the gentle light of evening
bless the Lord;
Let the fading glow of sunset
bless the Lord,
And let the shining stars of heaven
bless the Lord.
Amen.

Adapted from Benedicite

Texts

5 Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow

*Dedicated to Simon Earl and
The Choir of Christchurch Priory*
Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heav'nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Bishop Thomas Ken

Let all things their creator bless;
And worship God in humbleness.
Praise the Father, praise the Son,
And praise the Spirit, three in one.
William H. Draper

From all that dwell below the skies,
Let songs of faith and hope arise.
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah.
Isaac Watts

O friends, in gladness let us sing
Supernal anthems echoing;
Respond, ye souls in endless rest,
Ye patriarchs and prophets blest.

Hallelujah from the heart of God,
And from the hand of the artist inimitable.
Christopher Smart

3 Arise, The Breath, The Life

Arise! The Breath,
the Life again has reached us.
The darkness is gone.
The light is come. Arise!

Rig Veda, hymn 113

4 Awake, My Glory

Awake, my glory!
Awake, awake both psaltery and harp,
I will awaken the dawn.

Psalm 57

Texts

Ye holy twelve, ye martyrs strong;
All saints triumphant, raise the song:
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah.

Althelstan Riley

To God the Father, heavenly light;
To Christ revealed in earthly night.
To God the Spirit, let us raise
one heart and voice in ceaseless praise.
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah.

Charles Coffin

6 For Thunder Is The Voice of God

*In memory of Gloria Rodríguez Saura -
"you'll too find my kiss in the thunder of
the rains, and the light of the stars"*

For Thunder is the voice of God
direct in verse and musick.
For Lightning is a glance
at the Glory of God.

For Matter is the dust of the earth,
Every atom of which is the life.

Christopher Smart

7 These Great Trees Are Prayers

*Dedicated to Prebendary Reverend John and
Rebecca Good, by their daughter Lydia -
'for giving me the roots from which to blossom'*

Be still, my heart,
these great trees are prayers.

Rabindranath Tagore

I said to the trees: "show me God",
And they blossomed.

Nikos Kazantzakis

8 The Breath Of Life Is In The Sunlight

*For Tessa Mobbs, celebrating sixty years
of science, music and nature*

The breath of life is in the sunlight,
and the hand of life is in the wind.

Kahlil Gibran

And our bodies are the instruments
through which our souls play their music.

Albert Einstein

Texts

REQUIEM MOTETS

9 In Paradisum

May flights of angels
Sing thee to thy rest.

In paradisum deducant te angeli.
Chorus angelorum te suscipiat.

*William Shakespeare
(Hamlet, Act 5, Scene 2)*

& text from the Requiem Mass

10 The Heart's Affections

Holy, holy human eye,
Bearer of sadness and light!
Heart answers,
cries out:

Hear me, oh beloved, hear!

© *Euan Tait (used with permission)*

11 Take Him, Earth, For Cherishing

Take him, Earth, for cherishing,
To thy tender breast receive him.
Body of a man I bring thee,
Noble even in his ruin.

Once was this a spirit's dwelling,
By the breath of God created.

Echoing with the stars,
singing and shining together as one.

John Muir

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heav'nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Bishop Thomas Ken

Beauty beyond thought everywhere;
beneath, above; made, and being made forever.

John Muir

Thou flowing water, pure and clear,
Make music for thy Lord to hear.

William H. Draper

And shining with the stars above
We swim through seas of ceaseless love.
Amen.

Texts

High the heart that once was beating,
Christ the prince of all its living.
Take, O take him;
Take him, earth, for cherishing.
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THREE SONGS OF LIGHT

12 In Your Light, I Learn How To Love

For Ellen

In your light, I learn how to love.
In your beauty, how to make music.
You dance inside my heart,
You dance inside my soul.
You dance where no-one sees you.
But sometimes I see you,
And that sight becomes this music.
Adapted from a poem by Rumi

13 A Thousand Windows

Oh, these vast, calm,
measureless mountain days,
Inciting at once to work and rest!
Days in whose light
everything seems divine,

Opening a thousand windows
to show us God.
Nevermore, however weary,
should one faint by the way
Who gains the blessings
of one mountain day.
Whate'er his fate -
short life or long,
stormy or calm,
He is rich forever.
Adapted from a passage by John Muir

14 Where Shadow Chases Light

This is my delight,
To wait and watch at the wayside,
Where shadow chases light,
And the rain comes
in the wake of summer.
Rabindranath Tagore

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Oliver Condry, Val Withams and Euan Tait.

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Performers

THE CHOIR OF ROYAL HOLLOWAY

Soprano

Amelia Blackburn
Esmé Ellis
Ciara Harman
Grace Hindle
Lucy Mitten *
Emily Oxtoby
Dimitra-Eftychia Sotiropoulou
Sophie Vines
Pascale Walker

Alto

Annenora Benians
Alicia Hunt
Kate Pinnell
Kristin Polman
Irina Temerel
Hannah Waterfield

Tenor

Daniel Ayers
Luke Cherry
James Edgeler
Luke Gore
Robert Murray John
Sequoia Ralph

Bass

Thomas Allen
Peter Evans
James Gooding
Dominic Kwan
Charlie Maggs
Henry Smith
Brooklyn Storey

* soloist on track 9

Performers

SOUTHERN SINFONIA

Cello

Steve Collisson
Claire Constable
Juliet McCarthy

Double Bass

Kate Addis
Dawn Baker

French Horn

Dave Oxley

Trumpet

Gavin Wells

Trombone

Alex Stewart

Percussion

Tim Farmer
Tom Peverelle
Peadar Townsend

Organ

Simon Earl

Solo cello

Maxim Calver
(tracks 9-11)
Lionel Handy
(track 7)

Handbell

Cathy Beeby



Biographies

Matthew Coleridge

Matthew Coleridge has emerged as one of the UK's most exciting new choral composers, being hailed as "a great force for good in the choral world" by radio presenter Alexander Armstrong.

His *Requiem*, written in 2015, has become an essential part of the 21st century choral repertoire, with regular performances around the world. In 2025 it was voted into the top 100 of Classic FM's annual 'Hall of Fame' for the third successive year, making Matthew one of the youngest composers to make the chart, and the radio station dubbing the work "a modern choral classic".

Matthew has written music for ensembles including the Choir of Royal Holloway, Papageno, The Queen's Six, Marlborough College Chapel Choir, Jervaulx Singers, Portsmouth Cathedral Choir and Christchurch Priory Choir.

He is in increasing demand as a choral workshop leader, offering singers a chance to explore and perform his works in stunning venues around the UK and Europe.

www.matthewcoleridge.com

Biographies

Rupert Gough

Rupert Gough has been director of Choral Music and College Organist at Royal Holloway, University of London since 2005. He is also Organist and Director of Music at London's oldest surviving church, Saint Bartholomew the Great, which maintains a professional choir. At Royal Holloway, Rupert has developed the choral programme to include weekly choral recitals, choral conducting courses for undergraduates, frequent new choral commissions and transformed the Chapel Choir into an elite group of 24 choral scholars.

The Choir has come to particular prominence through their series of recordings for Hyperion Records and travels widely for concert performances. Rupert was a chorister at the Chapel Royal, St. James's Palace, and won a scholarship to the Purcell School. He received (with distinction) a Master's degree in English Church Music from the University of East Anglia whilst Organ Scholar at Norwich Cathedral.

For 11 years he was Assistant Organist at Wells Cathedral during which time he made around 30 CD recordings as accompanist and



director. A prize-winning organist, he has performed widely including Moscow, Hong Kong and across the USA.

Biographies

The Choir of Royal Holloway

The Choir of Royal Holloway is considered to be one of the finest mixed-voice collegiate choirs in Britain, with their recordings attracting top reviews from all major music publications. Created at the time of the foundation of Royal Holloway in 1886, the choir was originally only for women's voices. The mixed choir now comprises 24 Choral Scholars who undertake a busy schedule of weekly services, as well as concerts, international tours, recordings, and TV and radio broadcasts. They are the only college choir to give a weekly concert performance and during an average year give around 40 - 50 concerts with a particular specialism in

contemporary music.

The choir has one of the busiest recording schedules of any collegiate choir with an extensive discography with Convivium, Decca, Hyperion, Naxos and Signum, amongst others. The choir is renowned for its performances of Nordic and Baltic music and has recorded works by Vytautas Miškinis, Rihards Dubra, Bo Hansson, Tõnu Kõrvits, and Ola Gjeilo to great acclaim. The choir's recording of Matthew Coleridge's *Requiem* is already in the top 50 of Classic FM's "Hall of Fame". Other recent projects include two recordings of the music of Dan Locklair.

www.chapelchoir.co.uk



Biographies

Southern Sinfonia

Founded in 1995, Southern Sinfonia is the professional chamber orchestra of the South of England, bringing inspiring live music to audiences across the region.

Based in Somerset, the orchestra performs with leading soloists and has a long tradition of working with major choral societies in both sacred and secular repertoire, under the direction of John Warner. Its specialist period-instrument ensemble, the Southern Consort, reflects historic links with Founder Patron Sir Roger Norrington (1934–2025),

one of the great pioneers of historically informed performance.

At the heart of Southern Sinfonia's work is a commitment to community. The orchestra seeks to share the joy of live music as widely as possible, from large-scale concerts in cathedrals and concert halls to more intimate recitals in care homes. Its education and outreach programme includes workshops for children, projects with students, and collaborations that bring music into unexpected and welcoming spaces.



Biographies

Maxim Calver

Praised for the 'elegance of his technique, overall sound and natural poeticism' (Charlotte Gardner, Strad Magazine), Maxim Calver first gained public recognition as a BBC Young Musician 2018 Grand Finalist and has since been in high demand across the UK and Europe

as a soloist and chamber musician. A winner of multiple international prizes, he was most recently awarded the 'Goldman Sachs Award' at the 2025 Verbier Festival and he is currently Artist in Residence at the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel studying with Gary Hoffman.



Biographies

Simon Earl

Simon Earl has been Director of Music at Christchurch Priory since February 2015 having previously held positions at Wakefield, Guildford, Newcastle and Southwell

Cathedrals. He is also Musical Director to several local choirs. Simon studied for a music degree at Newcastle University, specialising in organ performance and conducting.



Biographies

Lionel Handy

Cellist Lionel Handy specialises in the music of his native Britain, and his solo CD portfolio includes newly commissioned works and several other premiere recordings.

An important educator, he is a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music where he was a professor for over forty years. Lionel plays on a cello by Fendt, circa 1820.





Credits

Matthew Coleridge The Breath of Life

Recorded

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