Programme

Prelude: Te Deum	Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643-1704)
Salve puerule	Marc-Antoine Charpentier
Movements from Messe de Minuit … pour Noël Kyrie Christe Sanctus Agnus Dei	Marc-Antoine Charpentier
Laetentur coeli	William Byrd (*c.*1540-1623)
I saw Eternity the other night	Lucy Walker (b.1998)
Three motets from Motets pour le temps de Noël O magnum mysterium Quem vidistis pastores dicite Videntes stellam	Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)
Villancico: Riu, riu, chiu Bass soloist: Jonathan Millican	Anon.

Interval

Motet: In nativitatem Domini canticum	Marc-Antoine Charpentier
Ave Maria	Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943)
There is no rose There is no rose	John Joubert (1927-2019) Lucy Walker
Toy Symphony Allegro Menuetto & Trio Finale: Allegro	attr. Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)
The Holy Boy	John Ireland (1879-1962)
Make we joy now in this fest	Clive Walkley

Instrumental Ensemble
Violins: Pam Redman, Sue Armstrong
Viola: Wendy Jones
Cello: Tim Gatheral
Recorders: Philip Gruar, Alice Gatheral
Organ: Peter Noke

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Programme Notes

Welcome to our annual Christmas concert! This year we are putting particular emphasis on the Christmas music of the French composer Mark-Antoine Charpentier and we begin with the **Prelude** to his well-known **Te Deum**, written between 1688 and 1698 when Charpentier was musical director of the Jesuit Church of Saint-Louis, Paris. The Prelude to the Te Deum is well-known: it served as the theme music for the Eurovision Song Contest!

The three-verse motet **Salve puerule**, which follows, welcomes Christ as a little child into the world and rejoices at his birth. The three verses are interspersed with a short, tuneful instrumental interlude.

Charpentier's delightful **Messe de Minuit … pour Noël** was written in the 1690s (or perhaps later) and is based on popular French carols or noēls. There are ten melodies in all, most of them dance-like, and we hear just three in the movements we have selected for performance tonight. The first **Kyrie** is based on *Joseph est bien marié* and, after the choir has sung the text, Charpentier directs the organist to immediately play the carol again. After the **Christe** the instrumental group play *Une jeune pucelle;* and after the second Kyrie the organist is again called upon to play *Une Vierge pucelle,* the melody used as the basis for the second choral **Kyrie.** The solemnity normally associated with the Mass is played down in this setting; the result is a tuneful work of great charm which must have delighted a contemporary congregation as much as it can delight us today.

William Byrd's Advent motet **Laetentur coeli** was published in 1589 in his first collection of sacred songs. The text is drawn from the Old Testament:

> *Let the heavens be glad and let the earth rejoice. Let the mountains be joyful with praise, because our Lord will come and will show mercy to his poor. In your days, justice and abundance of peace shall arise and he will show mercy to his poor.*

The three-line text of **I saw Eternity the other night** is drawn fro a long poem by Henry Vaughan (1621-1695). Although these three lines have no obvious association with Christmas, the brief text and mood of the piece fits well into a Christmas programme and there is a lovely atmosphere of stillness throughout the piece. Lucy Walker is a young composer based in Cambridge and is fast gaining a reputation for her highly effective choral writing. She is Composer-in- Residence with St Martin's Voices, the professional vocal consort based at St-Martin-in-the-Fields in London, and has already won many awards and numerous high profile commissions.

Poulenc wrote his **Quatre motets pour le temps de Noël** in 1951/2 and we are performing the first three tonight. Poulenc was born and bred as a Catholic but lost his faith after the death of a close friend in a car accident. At a later date he rediscovered his faith and set many religious texts to music. **O magnum mysterium**, the most serious of the four motets, dwells on the mystery of the Incarnation: 'even animals see the newborn Lord'. Its austere harmonies and exquisite melodic line establish an air of calm. The second motet is a question and answer dialogue with the shepherds: 'Who have you seen shepherds? Tell us'! **Videntes stellam** evokes a starlit night and the joy of the Magi as they present their gifts to the infant Jesus.

Riu, riu, chiu is a *villancico,* a semi-sacred Christmas carol with seven verses and a refrain. *Villancicos* originated as rustic folk songs in the 15th century and became very popular in Spain in the 16th century when choirmasters were expected to produce these compositions at Christmas and other religious festivals. Sadly, many have been lost over the course of time.

This *villancico* has a rather convoluted text which might be summarised as 'Beware of the wolf!' It has a chorus which translates as: *He who herds by the river: God kept the wolf far away from our ewe.* Verse 1 tells us that a furious wolf attempted to bite the Virgin Mary but God protected her; verse 2 announces that the newly born Christ-child is infinite; verse 3 refers to the prophecy foretelling His coming; verse 4 describes a vision of a thousand youths celebrating the birth of Christ; and verse 5 states that Christ brings life to those who have died and atone for their sins. Verse 6, God

the Father states that Mary's Son is also her Father; finally, verse 7 suggests that we should worship the Christ-child.

Charpentier's motet **In nativitatem Domini canticum** was written about 1670, perhaps for a performance in a private house. The first half of the work is in the form of a conversation between a baritone soloist and the shepherds: *Who did you see, shepherds, speak? Tell us who has appeared on earth.* Taking the role of shepherds, the chorus tells of what they have just seen. The final section of this charming little work is a psalm of praise, drawing on Old Testament imagery: *Sing to the Lord on the harp with the sound of the psaltery, trumpets and horns. Let the rivers and mountains acclaim him for he has come to save the earth.*

The acclaimed American composer Morten Lauridsen wrote his **Ave Maria** setting in 1997. The text recalls the Annunciation, the moment when, according to St Luke, the angel Gabriel announced to the Virgin Mary she would give birth to Jesus.

> *Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.*

It is always interesting to hear how different composers set the same text. Many composers have made settings of the mediaeval carol **There is no rose of such virtue**. One of the best known settings is that of Benjamin Britten, found in his lovely choral work *A Ceremony of Carols*. John Joubert wrote his setting in 1954 and it has been a favourite with choirs ever since. Lucy Walker's setting is very different in style and makes an interesting contrast.

The **Toy Symphony.** For over two centuries, this charming little work was attributed to Joseph Haydn but modern scholarship has cast doubt on this. It is now thought to be by Mozart's father, Leopold, since a seven-movement work including the three familiar movements of the Toy Symphony exists in Leopold's hand. Although another manuscript of the work dating from 1785 has been discovered attributed to a Benedictine monk and composer, Edmond Angerer, the favoured opinion is that this is the work of Leopold Mozart, perhaps written to entertain his children while young. The attribution is not really that important. What we have is a simply-constructed, charming miniature for strings with added toy instruments – fun to play and fun to enjoy!

The Holy Boy was originally written as a piano solo, the third of Ireland's four Preludes for Piano but the composer himself arranged it for various other forces over a long period of time. It remains one of Ireland's best-known works. The text of the choral version was written by Herbert S. Brown, Ireland's family solicitor. The musicologist Andrew Burn has written: 'With its wistful melody and subtle shifts of harmony it is quintessential Ireland'.

Make we joy now in this fest is a setting of a mediaeval carol text, half in Latin and half in English. It has the refrain '*Make we joy now in this fest, in quo Christus natus est*'. The verses make reference to Christ's birth through the Virgin Mary, the bright star and the three Kings who give presents.

Please join us for a mince pie and a glass of Christmas Cheer after the concert.

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Future concerts by the Pro Nobis Singers
Sunday, 14 March, 2027
7.45pm Holy Trinity & St George Catholic Church, New Road, Kendal
Leonard Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* &
psalm settings by Tomás Luis de Victoria, William Byrd,
Herbert Sumsion and more.

Saturday, 5 June, 2027
7.30pm St George's Church, Castle Street, Kendal
Handel: Coronation Anthems of 1727

Ode for Saint Cecilia’s Day