

Civil Service Choir

Directed by Stephen Hall, OBE



Thank you for celebrating Christmas with...

The Civil Service Choir

“A Christmas Tapestry” Concert

Thursday 18th December, 7:30pm

St Stephen’s Church, Rochester Row, Westminster

Christmas through the ages, performed by our chamber choir





Programme

Thank you for celebrating Christmas with us. Our programme this evening will take you on a journey through a tapestry of Christmas music from the 16th to 21st century. Please see the reverse of this programme for details of our upcoming performance in spring of Haydn's *The Creation*.

Victoria (1548-1611) – *O magnum mysterium*

Charpentier (1643-1704) – *Messe de minuit pour Noël*

Interval

Poulenc (1899-1963) – *Videntes stellam*

Corp (1951-2025) – *A Christmas Mass*

A selection of refreshments are available free of charge, with charity donations welcome, supporting the Charity for Civil Servants, the Cardinal Hume Centre, and St Stephen's Church.

Acknowledgements

The Civil Service Choir would like to thank Revd. Graham Buckle for allowing us to return to St Stephen's Church and the Charity for Civil Servants for providing volunteers to support the running of this event.

We would also like to thank the Civil Service Sports Council (CSSC) and SPARTA Recreational Association for their financial support.

Additional thanks go to our rehearsal accompanists Mathew Reed, Daniel Leung, Patrick Lillie, James Housego, and all others who have supported the choir in putting on this performance.

Programme Notes

Victoria (1548-1611) – *O magnum mysterium*

Tomás Luis de Victoria (c. 1548–1611) ranks alongside Palestrina as a composer of late Renaissance polyphony. Born in Ávila, Spain, Victoria received his early musical training as a choirboy at the local cathedral before traveling to Rome in the mid-1560s to study at the Jesuit Collegio Germanico.

Ordained a priest in 1575, Victoria entire compositional output was devoted to sacred, Latin-texted vocal music. His style is known for its intensity, dramatic harmony, and rich, shifting choral textures, often with surprising chromaticism. He preferred emotional expression and vivid text-painting over the more detached, intellectual counterpoint of some of his contemporaries.

The motet *O Magnum Mysterium* (O Great Mystery) is one of Victoria's most famous works, first published in his 1572 *Motecta* collection. The text is a responsory from the Matins service for Christmas Day, meditating on the profound and humble miracle of the Nativity: that animals in a manger were the first to witness the birth of Christ. The piece opens with a sense of mystery, employing open fifth intervals that lack a major or minor third, before settling into more definite harmonies.

So effective was this motet that Victoria later used it as the structural basis for a complete parody Mass, the *Missa O Magnum Mysterium*, published two decades later in 1592. The original motet remains a cornerstone of Renaissance choral repertoire, celebrated for its mystical intensity and direct emotional appeal.

O magnum mysterium, et
admirabile sacramentum,
Ut animalia viderent Dominum
natum, jacentem in praesepio!
Beata Virgo, cujus viscera meruerunt
portare Dominum Christum.
Alleluia!

O great mystery, and wonderful
sacrament,
that animals should see the new-
born Lord, lying in a manger!
Blessed is the Virgin whose womb
was worthy to bear the Lord Christ.
Alleluia!





Charpentier (1643-1704) – *Messe de minuit pour Noël*

Marc-Antoine Charpentier (c. 1643–1704) was a prolific and versatile French composer of the Baroque era, his music displaying a unique blend of French and Italian musical styles. Today he is chiefly remembered for his sacred music, of which there are over 500 surviving pieces. This includes the famous *Te Deum* which is used as the signature tune for the European Broadcasting Union (Eurovision events).

Charpentier served as music master for Duchess of Guise, the Jesuit's principal church in Paris (Saint Louis) and the Dauphin (King Louis XIV's son). In 1698, he became music master for the children of the Sainte-Chapelle, a position he held until his death.

The *Messe de Minuit pour Noël* (Midnight Mass for Christmas), is, along with the *Te Deum*, Charpentier's most famous work. It makes use of ten popular French carols, which, in the tradition of the French parody mass, the composer ingeniously interweaves into the traditional Latin Mass, creating a unique blend of sacred liturgy and rustic folk charm.

The piece was composed for the Jesuit church Saint Louis, in 1694. The carols form the melodic and rhythmic basis of the composition, which gives the Mass a joyful, dance-like and folk music quality. This fusion of the sacred and the secular elicits the joining of heaven and earth, of God becoming man and making the divine accessible to all. Charpentier enhances these features through the colourful interplay between strings, flutes and organ, and the dramatic use of word-painting.

Kyrie
Gloria
Credo
Sanctus
Benedictus
Agnus Dei

Poulenc (1899-1963) – *Videntes stellam*

Francis Poulenc (1899 – 1963) was born in Paris. He was mentored by the pianist Ricardo Viñes and the composer Eric Satie. Under Satie's tutelage, he became one of a group of composers known collectively as Les Six.

Poulenc spent most of the war in Paris. Under Nazi rule, he was in a vulnerable position, as a known gay person. Among Poulenc's best-known works are the ballet *Les Biches* (1923), the *Organ Concerto* (1938), the opera *Dialogues des Carmélites* (1957) and the *Gloria* (1959) for soprano, choir and orchestra. Solo piano works, chamber and orchestral music also feature in his output.

Poulenc was an accomplished pianist and was renowned for his performing partnership with the baritone Pierre Bernac. His early works were often high-spirited and irreverent, but a more serious side emerged during the 1930s. In 1936, Poulenc's friend and fellow composer Pierre Octave Ferroud was killed in a car crash, leading to a reawakening of his religious faith.

Videntes Stellam is the third of four a cappella motets for mixed choir entitled *Quatre Motets pour le temps de Noël* (Four Motets for the Christmas Season). This motet is dedicated to Madeleine Bataille. Composed in 1952, the text is drawn from the antiphon for the Feast of Epiphany, which depicts the star in the sky leading the Magi to the infant Christ.

Poulenc's setting is both evocative and ethereal. At the beginning of the piece, the composer suggests an image of the star hovering above by using the upper three voices without the basses. At the entry of the full choir, exquisite and complex chromatic harmonies are used to describe the Magi offering their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Videntes stellam, Magi gavisii sunt
gaudio magno: et intrantes domum
obtulerunt Domino aurum, thus et
myrrham.

Seeing the star, the Magi rejoiced
with great joy; and entering the
house, they offered the Lord gold,
frankincense, and myrrh.





Corp (1951-2025) – A Christmas Mass

Ronald Corp (1951-2025) was a celebrated English conductor and composer who was awarded an OBE for his services to music. Corp founded the New London Orchestra (NLO) in 1988, when his conducting career was launched. Throughout his career as conductor and artistic director, Corp programmed rarely heard works of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Together with the NLO he made some 20 recordings of neglected music by composers such as Milhaud, Satie and Rutland Boughton.

In 1991, Corp founded the New London Children's Choir, which became one of the most successful children's ensembles in the country. It commissioned many new pieces, from composers such as Michael Nyman and Louis Andriessen, as well as by Corp himself. Corp was also musical director of the Highgate Choral Society. His compositions have become staples of the choral repertoire, and include anthems, cantatas and Masses. As well as reflecting his own deep spirituality, they are praised for their invention, melody and accessibility. Corp was ordained in the Church of England as a deacon in 1998 and a priest in 1999.

In his note on *A Christmas Mass*, Ronald Corp says:

"As both a singer and a conductor I have always loved the famous Messe de Minuit pour Noël by Charpentier but have also felt frustrated that I did not recognise the French carols used as material for the work. I have also long cherished the idea of writing a setting of the Mass which might use Christmas music that present-day singers would recognise – hence A Christmas Mass.....From the immense store of carols and hymns for the Christmas season I have used some seventy or so. Many of these melodies in fact chose themselves as I worked on the piece. Some provided important thematic material and some only make a brief appearance. "

For instance, in the opening Kyrie Corp makes use of the 'O Come, O Come Emmanuel' theme, followed by a reference to 'In dulci jubilo' in the central Christe. How many other carols will you recognise during this performance?

Performers

Civil Service Choir – *Chamber Choir*

Sopranos: Helen Baker, Phoebe Clapham, Abi Coskun, Freya Henfrey, Jacqueline Jowett, Gill McManus, Kate Nicholls, Tricia Vincent

Altos: Maria Freeman, Clare Gwynne, Sue Harling, Eden Portman, Kim Sibley, Ruth Stanier, Vicky Vale, Iona Wakely, Rachel Worledge

Tenors: Robert Bradburne, Tim May, Peter Swift, Gordon Woods

Bases: Nick Boorer, David Freeman, Rob Kirtley, Chris Mason-Thom, Matt Sayles, Alexander Walford

Orchestra

Violin: John Haworth (leader), Stephen Brown, Francis Dickinson, Rachel Moyce, Charlotte Town

Viola: Alexander Campbell, Jeremy Cook, Rosemary Cook

Cello: Alison Holford, Chris Terepin

Flute: Linda Penn, Kate Sheerin

Keyboard continuo: Daniel Leung

Thanks

Thank you for joining us this evening, we hope you are feeling ready for Christmas. If you enjoyed the performance, please do join us this spring for Haydn's *The Creation*. We will be performing with the full Civil Service Choir and the Brandenburg Orchestra at Sinfonia Smith Square (details overleaf).





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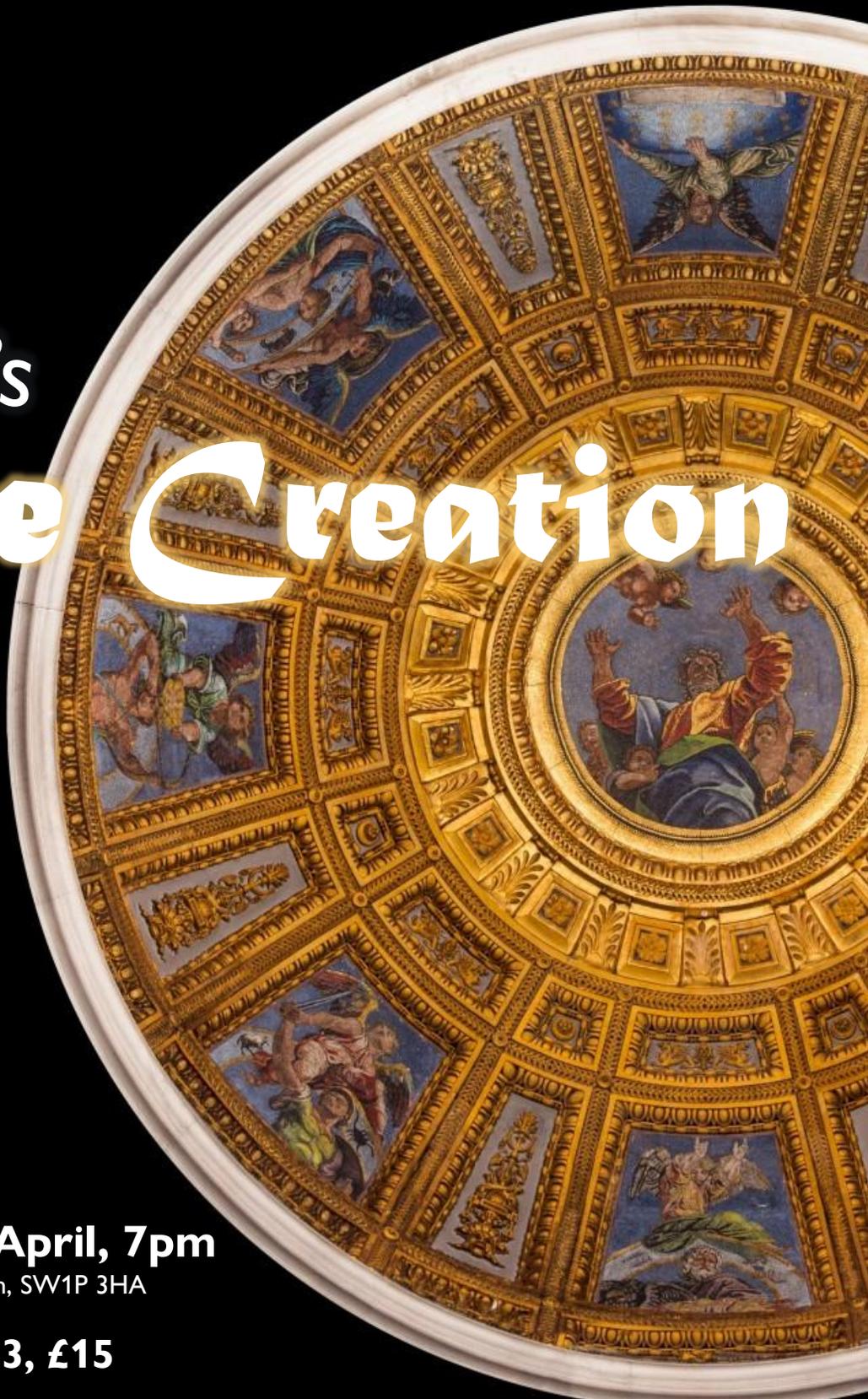
Civil Service Choir

Directed by Stephen Hall, OBE

with
BRANDENBURG
SINFONIA



Haydn's **The Creation**

A large, detailed photograph of the dome of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, showing the intricate gold leaf decorations and the central fresco of the Creation of Adam.

*"This choir is one of the
best I've ever heard."*
- Jools Holland

Sunday 26th April, 7pm

Smith Square Hall, London, SW1P 3HA

Tickets £30, £23, £15

Book online at www.sinfoniasmithsq.org.uk | Booking fees apply | Booking helpline: 020 7222 1061

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