

# A FESTIVAL OF NINE READINGS AND CAROLS

Saturday 16 December 2023, 5.00 p.m.  
Holy Cross Church, Kenmare, Co. Kerry

Sunday 17 December 2023, 7.00 p.m.  
Honan Chapel, UCC, Cork



In 1880 E. W. Benson, then Bishop of Truro in Cornwall, drew up a Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, based on ancient sources, for use on Christmas Eve in the wooden shed that served as his cathedral. In 1918 this was adapted for use in the chapel of King's College, Cambridge by its Dean, Eric Milner-White, and has become famous throughout the world because the BBC broadcasts it, live, every year on 24 December. The traditional nine biblical Lessons trace the story from the beginning of creation to the birth of Jesus. For MUSICÓRUM's performances this year, Seán McGann has curated nine poetic meditations on some of the underlying themes inherent in the biblical readings.

## Carols with audience participation:

Once in Royal David's city  
Hark! The herald angels sing  
The first Nowell  
O come, all ye faithful

## Carols sung by MUSICÓRUM:

H. Darke: *In the bleak mid-winter*  
S. Scheidt harmonized by J. S. Bach: *O little one sweet*  
Bernat Vivancos: *A child is born* (Irish première)  
F. Gruber arr. John Rutter: *Silent night*  
English trad. arr. D. Willcocks: *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day*  
B. Britten: *A New Year Carol*

## Readings curated by Seán McGann:

Creation and fall: *The world is charged with the grandeur of God* by G. M. Hopkins  
A hopeful promise to all people (Abraham and his seed): *Love bade me welcome* by G. Herbert  
A prophecy of restoration: and all will be well: *If only you would listen* by E. W. Wilcox  
A prophecy of paradise: *My soul, there is a country far beyond the stars* by H. Vaughan  
Elizabeth and Mary, a simple visit: from *Beginnings* by D. Levertov  
Birth in a manger - everyone desires a home: from *The virgin made pregnant, down the road comes walking* by John of the Cross  
Rejoice - the angels sing the good news: *Ring the wild bells* by A. Tennyson  
Magi - find another way home; be open to change: *A cold coming we had of it* by T. S. Eliot  
All are invited to respond to the good news: *In the beginning was the word*, Gospel according to John, Chapter 1, verses 1-17

# MUSICÓRUM

Conductor: Geoffrey Spratt

Organist: Tom Doyle

Readers: Niamh Murray and Seán McGann

**Solo soprano (Nicole McDonagh)**

Once in Royal David's city  
Stood a lowly cattle shed,  
Where a mother laid her Baby  
In a manger for His bed:  
Mary was that mother mild,  
Jesus Christ her little Child.

**All**

He came down to earth from heaven,  
Who is God and Lord of all,  
And His shelter was a stable,  
And His cradle was a stall;  
With the poor, and mean, and lowly,  
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.

And through all His wondrous childhood  
He would honour and obey,  
Love and watch the lowly maiden,  
In whose gentle arms He lay:  
Christian children all must be  
Mild, obedient, good as He.

Not in that poor lowly stable,  
With the oxen standing by,  
We shall see Him; but in heaven,  
Set at God's right hand on high;  
Where like stars His children crowned  
All in white shall wait around.

H. J. Gauntlett (1805-76)

1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Creation and fall — Genesis 3, 8-19

'There is no complicated metaphysics in Scripture, because its God is known in the most simple and basic realities, in our fears and hopes, in the glory of creation, in the assurance of his constant loving kindness, and in the work of justice and peace.'

Joseph S. O'Leary (1949-)

*God's Grandeur*

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?  
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

G. M. Hopkins (1844-89)

**Choir**

In the bleak mid-winter  
Frosty wind made moan;  
Earth stood hard as iron,  
Water like a stone;  
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,  
Snow on snow,  
In the bleak mid-winter  
Long ago.

Our God, Heav'n cannot hold Him,  
Nor earth sustain,  
Heaven and earth shall flee away  
When He comes to reign:  
In the bleak mid-winter  
A stable-place suffic'd  
The Lord God Almighty —  
Jesus Christ.

Enough for Him, whom cherubim  
Worship night and day,  
A breast full of milk  
And a manger full of hay;  
Enough for Him, whom Angels  
Fall down before,  
The ox and ass and camel  
Which adore.

Angels and Archangels  
May have gathered there,  
Cherubim and seraphim  
Thronged the air;  
But only His Mother  
In her maiden bliss  
Worshipped the Beloved  
With a kiss.

What can I give Him,  
Poor as I am? —  
If I were a Shepherd  
I would bring a lamb;  
If I were a Wise Man  
I would do my part, —  
Yet what I can I give Him, —  
Give my heart.

Christina Rossetti (1830-94)

2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: A hopeful promise to all people  
(Abraham and his seed)

God promises to Abraham and all a glorious future  
(Genesis 22, 15-18).  
Come back to me with all your heart,  
don't let fear keep us apart.

*Love (III)*

Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back  
Guilty of dust and sin.  
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack  
From my first entrance in,  
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,  
If I lacked any thing.

A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:  
Love said, You shall be he.  
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,  
I cannot look on thee.  
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,  
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame  
Go where it doth deserve.  
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?  
My dear, then I will serve.  
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:  
So I did sit and eat.

G. Herbert (1593-1633)

**Choir**

O little one sweet, O little one mild,  
Thy Father's purpose thou hast fulfilled;  
Thou camest from heaven to mortal ken,  
As equal be with us poor men,  
O little one sweet, O little one mild.

O little one sweet, O little one mild,  
With joy thou hast the whole world filled;  
Thou camest here from heaven's domain,  
To bring men comfort in their pain,  
O little one sweet, O little one mild.

O little one sweet, O little one mild,  
In thee love's beauties are all distilled;  
Then light in us thy love's bright flame,  
That we may give thee back the same,  
O little one sweet, O little one mild.

? S. Scheidt (fl. 1587-1684)

The musical personality of **Bernat Vivancos** (b. 1973) is marked by the impressions received during his school years at the Monastery of Montserrat. Born into a profoundly musical family, after he completed piano and composition studies with Maria Canals and David Padrós in Barcelona, he moved to Paris to study composition for five years at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris with professors Guy Reibel, Frédéric Durieux, Marc-Andre Dalvabie and Alain Louvier, where he graduated in Composition, Orchestration and Analysis.

The year of 2000 became a turning point in his career when he discovered the music of the Norwegian composer Lasse Thoresen; he moved to Oslo to broaden his studies, and this was to determine his musical orientation and future work. Thereafter Vivancos' style incorporates elements that make his work distinctive: a musical sound rich in colour and texture, and with a modality derived from Western traditions combined with a search for spirituality based on a spectral harmonic inspiration. These two fundamental aspects represent strong influences on Vivancos' work: nature as root and soil, symbol of tradition, but also as a presence that manifests itself consistently in the physical properties of sound.

Since 2003 he has been Professor of Composition and Orchestration in the Catalonia College of Music (ESMUC), a post he combines with his research activities in the field of composition and membership of juries for international orchestration and composition competitions. From 2007 to 2014 he served as the Music Director of the Choir of Montserrat. From 2014-2015 both he and Arvo Pärt were Composers-in-Residence at the Palau de la Música Catalana (Barcelona), and during 2021-2022 he was Guest Composer for the Auditori de Barcelona. Several commercial recordings of his work are available, most notably those of *Blanc* (2011) and *Requiem* (2015) made by the famous Latvian Radio Choir conducted by Sigvard Klava (Neu Records).

Vivancos' music, full of limpid sounds and ecstatic harmonies, climbing architectures and resonances of Nordic luminosity, aims to unite beauty, sensuality, and spirituality.

3<sup>rd</sup> Reading: A prophecy of restoration: and all will be well

Coming of the Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9, 2-7.  
'Oh, that today you would listen to his voice ...  
Harden not your hearts.'

*Listen*

If you listen, if you listen  
You will hear from East to West  
The growing sound of discontent and deep unrest

It is just the progress driven plough of God  
It is just the progress driven plough of God

Tearing up the care-worn custom bound sod  
Turning over the tradition trodden track  
Into furrows, fertile furrows rich and black

Oh, what a happy harvest it will yield  
When it widens out into a field

E. W. Wilcox (1850-1919)

All

Hark! The herald-angels sing "Glory to the newborn king;  
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled"  
Joyful all ye nations rise, Join the triumph of the skies  
With the angelic host proclaim "Christ is born in Bethlehem"  
Hark! The herald-angels sing "Glory to the new-born king"

Christ, by highest heaven adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord,  
Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of a Virgin's womb:  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity  
Pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel  
Hark! The herald-angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King"

Hail the Heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Son of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all He brings, Risen with healing in His wings;  
Mild He lays His glory by, Born that man no more may die  
Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth  
Hark! The herald angels sing "Glory to the new-born king"

Charles Wesley (1707-88) and others

# MUSICÓRUM

## May Concerts 2024

Saturday 25 May 2024, 5.00 p.m., St Barrahané's Church, Castletownshend, Co. Cork

Sunday 26 May, 7.00 p.m., Honan Chapel, UCC, Cork

Bernat Vivancos: *Welcome* (Irish première)

Colin McLean (guitar) — Catalan music

Bernat Vivancos: *Messe aux sons des cloches*

for mixed-voice choir, tubular bells, and tam-tams (Irish première)

[www.musicorumcork.com](http://www.musicorumcork.com)

4<sup>th</sup> Reading: A prophecy of paradise, closer than you think

A prophecy of paradise, 'On Him the Spirit rests. The wolf lies with the lamb, the panther lies down with the kid.' (Isaiah 11)

*Peace*

My Soul, there is a country  
Afar beyond the stars,  
Where stands a winged sentry  
All skillful in the wars;  
There, above noise and danger  
Sweet Peace sits, crown'd with smiles,  
And One born in a manger  
Commands the beauteous files.  
He is thy gracious friend  
And (O my Soul awake!)  
Did in pure love descend,  
To die here for thy sake.  
If thou canst get but thither,  
There grows the flow'r of peace,  
The rose that cannot wither,  
Thy fortress, and thy ease.  
Leave then thy foolish ranges,  
For none can thee secure,  
But One, who never changes,  
Thy God, thy life, thy cure.

H. Vaughan (1621-95)

**Choir**

A Child is born in Bethlehem, —Alleluia!—  
Exult for joy!  
—Alleluia!—  
Exult for joy, Jerusalem! —Alleluia!—  
For unto us a Child is given, —Alleluia!—  
for unto us a Child is born. —Alleluia!—  
He comes a maiden mother's son, —Alleluia!—  
"mystic rose" of God:  
—Alleluia!—  
Mary, the girl of Nazareth, —Alleluia!—  
yet earthly father hath He none, —Alleluia!—  
see in that Child the Lord of all. —Alleluia!—  
There came three Kings of Galilee —Alleluia!—  
following the star,  
—Alleluia!—  
and enter with their offerings: —Alleluia!—  
offered gold, incense and myrrh —Alleluia!—  
for the poor of poors, the King of Kings. —Alleluia!—  
Come then, and on this natal day, —Alleluia!—  
rejoice and pray,  
—Alleluia!—  
rejoice before the Lord and pray. —Alleluia!—  
Give praise and thanks eternally —Alleluia!—  
to the Holy One in Three. —Alleluia!—

H. M. MacGill (1807-80)

5<sup>th</sup> Reading: Elizabeth and Mary, a simple visit

Annunciation, visitation: simple things.

God at your kitchen door.

'Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months  
and then went back home.' (Luke 1, 26-35)

from *Beginners*

We have only begun to love the earth.

We have only begun to imagine the fullness of life.

How can we tire of hope?

So much is in the bud.

How can desire fail?

We have only begun to imagine justice and mercy,

Surely our river cannot already be hastening

into — the sea of unbelief.

Not yet, not yet —

there is too much broken that must be mended,

Too much hurt that we have done to each other.

We have only begun to know the power that is within us—

If we could join our solitudes in the communion of struggle

So much is unfolding that must complete its gesture,

So much is in bud.

D. Levertov (1923-97)

**Choir**

Silent night! Holy night!  
All is calm, all is bright  
Round yon virgin mother and child!  
Holy infant, so tender and mild,  
Sleep in heavenly peace!  
Sleep in heavenly peace!

Silent night! Holy night!  
Shepherds came at the sight!  
Glories stream from heaven afar,  
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!  
Christ the Saviour is born!  
Christ the Saviour is born!

Silent night! Holy night!  
Son of God, love's pure light  
Radiant beams from thy holy face  
With the dawn of redeeming grace,  
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth!  
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth!

J. Mohr (1792-1848), translated by J. F. Young

6<sup>th</sup> Reading: Birth in a manger: everyone desires a home

'She gave birth to a Son,  
her first born,  
and laid him in a manger  
because there was no room for them at the inn.'  
(Luke 2-7)

*The Virgin made pregnant, down the road comes walking*

If you want the Virgin will come walking down the road pregnant with the holy, and say, "I need shelter for the night, please take me inside your heart, my time is so close." Then, under the roof of your soul, you will witness the sublime intimacy, the divine, the Christ taking birth forever, as she grasps your hand for help, for each of us is the midwife of God, each of us. If you want, the Virgin will come walking down the street pregnant with Light and sing ...

St John of the Cross (1542-91)

All

The First Nowell the Angels did say  
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay  
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep  
On a cold winter's night that was so deep  
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell  
Born is the King of Israel!

They looked up and saw a star  
Shining in the East beyond them far  
And to the earth it gave great light  
And so it continued both day and night  
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell  
Born is the King of Israel!

And by the light of that same star  
Three Wise men came from country far  
To seek for a King was their intent  
And to follow the star wherever it went  
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell  
Born is the King of Israel!

Then let us all with one accord  
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord  
That hath made Heaven and earth of nought  
And with his blood mankind hath bought  
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell  
Born is the King of Israel!

English traditional carol

7<sup>th</sup> Reading: Rejoice — the angels sing the good news

'Mary treasured all these things  
and pondered them in her heart'.  
(Luke 2, 1-16)

From *In Memoriam* [*Ring out, wild bells*]

Ring out the old, ring in the new,  
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:  
The year is going, let him go;  
Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Ring out false pride in place and blood,  
The civic slander and the spite;  
Ring in the love of truth and right,  
Ring in the common love of good.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease;  
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;  
Ring out the thousand wars of old,  
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

Ring in the valiant man and free,  
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;  
Ring out the darkness of the land,  
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-92)

Choir

Tomorrow shall be my dancing day;  
I would my true love did so chance  
To see the legend of my play,  
To call my true love to my dance;  
Chorus:  
Sing O my love, O my love, my love, my love;  
This have I done for my true love.

Then was I born of a virgin pure,  
Of her I took fleshly substance  
Thus was I knit to man's nature  
To call my true love to my dance.  
Chorus:  
Sing O my love, O my love, my love, my love;  
This have I done for my true love.

In a manger laid, and wrapped I was  
So very poor, this was my chance  
Betwixt an ox and a silly poor ass  
To call my true love to my dance.  
Chorus:  
Sing O my love, O my love, my love, my love;  
This have I done for my true love.

English traditional carol

8<sup>th</sup> Reading: Magi “find another way home”. Be open to change.

‘They were warned in a dream  
not to go back to Herod,  
and returned to their country  
by a different way.’  
(Matthew 2.)

### *Journey of the Magi*

“A cold coming we had of it,  
Just the worst time of the year  
For a journey, and such a long journey:  
The ways deep and the weather sharp,  
The very dead of winter.”  
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,  
Lying down in the melting snow.  
There were times we regretted  
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,  
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.  
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling  
And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,  
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,  
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly  
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:  
A hard time we had of it.  
At the end we preferred to travel all night,  
Sleeping in snatches,  
With the voices singing in our ears, saying  
That this was all folly.  
Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,  
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;  
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,  
And three trees on the low sky,  
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.  
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,  
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,  
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.  
But there was no information, and so we continued  
And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon  
Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.  
All this was a long time ago, I remember,  
And I would do it again, but set down  
This set down  
This: were we led all that way for  
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,  
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,  
But had thought they were different; this Birth was  
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.  
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,  
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,  
With an alien people clutching their gods.  
I should be glad of another death.

T. S. Eliot (1888-1965)

### Choir

Here we bring new water from the well so clear  
For to worship God with, this happy New Year

Sing levy dew, sing levy dew, the water and the wine;  
The seven bright gold wires and the bugles that do shine.

Sing reign of Fair Maid, with gold upon her toe,  
Open you the West Door, and turn the Old Year go.  
Sing levy dew, sing levy dew, the water and the wine;  
The seven bright gold wires and the bugles that do shine.

Sing reign of Fair Maid, with gold upon her chin,  
Open you the East Door, and let the New Year in.  
Sing levy dew, sing levy dew, the water and the wine;  
The seven bright gold wires and the bugles that do shine.

Words anon. from W. de la Mare's *Tom Tiddler's Ground*

Harold Darke (1888-1976) composed his setting of *In the bleak mid-winter* in 1911 as a Christmas present for a friend. After his appointment as organist at King's College Cambridge in 1941 (replacing Boris Ord for the duration of the Second World War), this work became immensely popular through the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols broadcast annually from the chapel.

John Rutter (b. 1975), together with his mentor David Willcocks, is justly regarded as one of the most prolific arrangers of traditional carols, as well as a composer of many original works. His setting of *Silent Night* is subtle and expressive, yet free of artifice.

J. S. Bach's harmonization of a chorale attributed to S. Scheidt (1587-1654) is full of passing notes in the lower three voices which make it at once rich and expressive, yet calm and contained.

David Willcocks (1919-2015) was Organist and Master of the Choristers at King's College, Cambridge from 1957-74, and his arrangement of *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day* is both deft and clever but designed to speak effectively in a generous acoustic.

"Levy-Dew", also known as "A New Year Carol" and "Residue", is a British folk song of Welsh origin. It is associated with a New Year's Day custom involving sprinkling people with water newly drawn from a well, and in 1934 was set to music by Benjamin Britten (1913-76) as part of his suite of pieces for equal voices and piano called *Friday Afternoons* (Op. 7).

9<sup>th</sup> Reading: Invitation and response. All people are invited to respond to His Word.

The Gospel according to John, Chapter 1, verses 1-17

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.

And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

## All

O come, all ye faithful,  
joyful and triumphant!

O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;  
Come and behold him

Born the King of Angels:

O come, let us adore Him,

O come, let us adore Him,

O come, let us adore Him,

Christ the Lord.

God of God,  
light of light,

Lo, he abhors not the Virgin's womb;

Very God,

begotten, not created:

O come, let us adore Him,

O come, let us adore Him,

O come, let us adore Him,

Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels,  
sing in exultation,

Sing, all ye citizens of Heaven above!

Glory to God,

glory in the highest:

O come, let us adore Him,

O come, let us adore Him,

O come, let us adore Him,

Christ the Lord.

J. F. Wade (c. 1711-86)

## MUSICÓRUM

### Sopranos

Fiona Chambers

Dee Coyle

Leona Duffy

Mairéad Gallagher

Sinéad Kelleher

Nicole McDonagh

Mary O'Brien

### Altos

Jane Daly

Laura Farrell

Sinéad Nolan

Trish O'Gorman

Noreen Spillane

Ber Twomey

### Tenors

Jim Cashman

Patrick Fitzpatrick

Stephen Holly

Gerard Moynihan

David Shine

### Basses

Garret Cahill

Justin Donnellan

Paul O'Brien

Lorcan O'Byrne

Kevin O'Connell

Pawel Switaj

If you are interested in joining MUSICÓRUM, please email [leonaeduffy@yahoo.ie](mailto:leonaeduffy@yahoo.ie)

Programme editor: Coral O'Sullivan

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