

## **Concert Programme**

**Bach: Magnificat** 

Interval (20 minutes)
Refreshments are available

Handel: Ode for St Cecilia's Day

Sopranos - Charlotte Bowden and Eloise Irving
Countertenor - Tom Lilburn
Tenor - Sebastian Hill
Bass - Ben Watkins
Hampstead Chamber Orchestra
George de Voil - Director

Please silence mobile phones.

No photographs or recordings may be taken during the performance.

Thank you for your cooperation.

## **Programme Notes**

## Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) Magnificat in D major, BWV 243

Bach's Magnificat stands among his most radiant and festive choral works — a dazzling setting of the Virgin Mary's song of praise from the Gospel of Luke (1:46-55). "My soul magnifies the Lord" is Mary's song of joy after learning that she will bear the Christ child. Bach divides the text into twelve self-contained movements, alternating between exuberant choruses and expressive solos, creating a kaleidoscope of emotion and texture.

Combining brilliant orchestral colour, vivid word-painting, and a deeply spiritual core, the work captures both the grandeur of Baroque ceremony and the intimacy of personal faith.

Bach first composed the Magnificat in 1723, shortly after taking up his post as cantor in Leipzig. That earlier version, in E-flat major, was performed at Christmas and included several extra hymns suited to the season. Around 1733, Bach revised the work, removing the Christmas interpolations and transposing it to D major — a key brightened by the natural trumpets (tuned to D) and timpani of the Leipzig orchestra. This final version, BWV 243, is the one performed here today.

Scored for five soloists (SSATB), five-part chorus, three trumpets, timpani, flutes, oboes d'amore, strings, and continuo, the Magnificat is festive, intimate, and deeply spiritual — a perfect fusion of Baroque splendour and devout reflection.

A description of each of the movements follows:

**1. Chorus** : Magnificat anima mea Dominum.

My soul magnifies the Lord.

The work opens in a blaze of trumpets and timpani. A jubilant choral fanfare bursts forth in fugal energy, expressing unbridled joy. The sweeping scale passages in voices and orchestra literally "magnify" the Lord's greatness.

2. Aria (Soprano II): Et exsultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo.

And my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.

A graceful and flowing aria for soprano and strings, expressing serene joy. The rising melodic lines convey inner exaltation and quiet reverence rather than outward triumph.

**3. Aria (Soprano I)**: Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae: ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes.

For He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden; behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

An intimate and tender aria for soprano and oboe. The delicate interplay of voice and obbligato line illustrates Mary's humility. The sudden shift to major key on "Ecce – "behold"suggests the dawning of divine favour (the graciousness of God in choosing Mary to carry Jesus the child).

4. Chorus: Omnes generationes

All generations

The chorus interrupts the soloist with a brief but powerful choral statement. A dense counterpoint with vigorous rhythms express the universality and timelessness of Mary's prophecy — a sweeping vision of generations praising God.

**5. Aria (Bass)** : Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est, et sanctum nomen eius.

For He that is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.

This movement is an aria for the bass soloist, accompanied by a bass continuo. The bass voice, symbolising authority, proclaims God's power. Trumpets return with noble grandeur, and the stately rhythm suggests awe and majesty. There is a ritornello (a recurring theme) with an instrumental descending scale and leap motif that alternates with the vocal solo. This ritornello structure is common in Baroque music, particularly in concertos and arias.

**<u>6. Duet (Tenor and Countertenor)</u>**: Et misericordia eius a progenie in progenies timentibus eum

And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation

A flowing duet for countertenor and tenor with muted strings. Its gentle suspensions and intertwining lines evoke compassion and enduring mercy.

**7. Chorus**: Fecit potentiam in bracchio suo, dispersit superbos mente cordis sui

He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

A vigorous five voice fugue marked by dramatic rhythmic drive. Bach depicts divine might through bold unisons and trumpet flourishes, while rapid melismas (vocal runs) and the fragmentation of the choral parts at the word "Dispersit" illustrate the scattering of the proud.

**8. Aria (Tenor)**: Deposuit potentes de sede, et exaltavit humiles.

He has put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted the humble.

This aria contrasts falling and rising figures to mirror the text — there is a violent descending F# minor scale to depict "He has put down the mighty" and a rising scale "exalted the humble".

**9. Aria (Countertenor)**: Esurientes implevit bonis et divites dimisit inanes.

He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.

A lilting, pastoral movement with flutes and continuo. The simplicity of the texture reflects divine generosity and human need, painted with warm and tender colour. At the end of the movement Bach illustrates the words "He hath sent the rich away empty" by having the solo flutes omit their final note.

**10. Trio (Two Sopranos and Countertenor)**: Suscepit Israel puerum suum recordatus misericordiae suae.

He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy.

Three high voices weave in serene counterpoint over a gently rocking continuo, accompanied by the tonus peregrinus — the traditional Gregorian chant in the bass. This movement radiates pure devotion and calm assurance.

**11. Chorus**: Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros Abraham et semini eius in saecula

As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.

The text recalls the covenantal promise to Abraham, a central motif in both the Old and New Testaments. The movement is a five-part fugue that offers both warmth and gravitas within the overall D-major framework of the Magnificat. The chorus is accompanied mainly by the continuo and cello.

**12. Chorus and soloists**: Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

The final movement unites all forces in jubilant splendour. A grand fugue and brilliant orchestral writing crown the work, closing with a blaze of D major — a triumphant affirmation of faith and glory. Bach indulges in a touch of cleverness that was already a growing tradition by that time: at the words 'Sicut erat in principio' ('As it was in the beginning'), we hear the trumpets sound out in D and he revisits the music from the work's beginning, a twist that not only underlines the meaning of the words but also rounds everything off with a winning sense of balance.

## Interval - 20 minutes

## George Frideric Handel (1685–1759) Ode for St Cecilia's Day

Text: John Dryden (1687) Composed: 1739

Each year on 22 November, musicians across the world celebrate St Cecilia, the patron saint of music. Among the many tributes to her, George Frideric Handel's Ode for St Cecilia's Day, composed in 1739, stands as one of the most joyful and celebratory works in the choral-orchestral tradition.

Handel based his ode on a 1687 poem by the poet John Dryden, who described the power of music to move the cosmos, stir the soul, and elevate the human spirit. The text reflects the Baroque fascination with music's divine origin, suggesting that music was not only the source of harmony on Earth but also the very force that ordered the heavens. In the line "Through all the compass of the notes it ran, the diapason closing full in man" the choir ascends to and concludes on the perfect interval of the octave. The octave is a fundamental concept in the Pythagorean theory of harmonia mundi (harmony of the world), based on the simple 2:1 numerical ratio of vibrating string lengths. Handel's musical setting of this specific line uses this interval to represent the Pythagorean idea that the creation of the universe and man was based on perfect musical proportions and harmony.

Scored for soprano and tenor soloists, chorus, and orchestra (including trumpet, flute, oboes, and timpani), the work consists of a series of contrasting movements that blend Handel's dramatic flair with lyrical beauty. Each movement highlights a different aspect of music's power—from martial grandeur to tender expression.

#### 1. The Overture

Written in the "French Style", the ode opens with a splendid overture with which Handel seems to have been particularly pleased, since he converted it into his Grand Concerto in D major (Op 6 No 5)

The overture is structured in three distinct movements: Larghetto – a stately and majestic section featuring dotted rhythms. Allegro - a lively and bustling fugue. Minuet-the overture concludes with a graceful and courtly minuet.

## 2. Recitative (Tenor): From harmony

From harmony, from Heav'nly harmony
This universal frame began.
When Nature underneath a heap
Of jarring atoms lay,
And could not heave her head,
The tuneful voice was heard from high,
Arise ye more than dead.
Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry,
In order to their stations leap,

And music's pow'r obey.

This describes the creation of the universe from "jarring atoms". Handel vividly depicts the initial chaos with dissonant, shifting harmonies. The command "Arise, ye more than dead!" marks the transition to an orderly world. The words "Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry," refers to the Aristotelian view of a geocentric universe ordered by the elements earth, fire, air and water.

### 3. Chorus: From harmony; from heavenly harmony

From harmony, from Heav'nly harmony
This universal frame began
From harmony to harmony
Through all the compass of the notes it ran,
The diapason closing full in man.

The chorus enters with a bright and joyful celebration of the power of music with heavenly harmony. It concludes by declaring that the diapason is the full range of notes in the octave ("through all the compass of the notes"). In this climax, "Man" is the final note, completing the grand musical scale of the universe.

#### 4. Aria (Soprano): What passion cannot music raise and quell!

What passion cannot music raise and quell!
When Jubal struck the corded shell,
His list'ning brethren stood around
And wond'ring, on their faces fell
To worship that celestial sound:
Less than a god they thought there could not dwell
Within the hollow of that shell
That spoke so sweetly and so well.

This captivating soprano aria celebrates music's power to both stir and soothe emotions. The text references Jubal, a biblical ancestor who played the "corded shell" or lyre. Handel accompanies the soloist with a lyrical and beautiful solo cello, evoking the ancient sound of the instrument.

## 5. Aria (Tenor) and Chorus: The trumpet's loud clangour

The trumpet's loud clangor
Excites us to arms
With shrill notes of anger
And mortal alarms.
The double double double beat
Of the thund'ring drum
Cries, hark the foes come;
Charge, charge, 'tis too late to retreat.

In this martial and vigorous movement, Handel uses the sound of the trumpet to rouse listeners to battle. The music moves from a solo tenor and trumpet to

the full chorus, which joins in the call to arms. The powerful "double, double, double beat of the thund'ring drum" adds to the sense of alarm and war.

#### 6. La Marche

### 7. Aria (Soprano): The soft complaining flute

The soft complaining flute In dying notes discovers The woes of hopeless lovers, Whose dirge is whisper'd by the warbling lute.

This tender aria provides a stark contrast to the previous movement. Here, the soprano is accompanied by a solo recorder (the "flute" in the text), whose "dying notes" reflect the sorrow of "hopeless lovers". The music is graceful and lyrical, showing music's ability to express tenderness.

#### 8. Aria (Tenor): Sharp violins proclaim

Sharp violins proclaim
Their jealous pangs, and desperation,
Fury, frantic indignation,
Depth of pains and height of passion,
For the fair, disdainful dame.

For this movement, Handel uses the quick, agitated sound of the violins to express fury, jealousy, and desperation, particularly the "pangs" of the disdainful lover. The rapid, "sharp" passages contrast with the softness of the previous aria.

## 9. Aria (Soprano): But oh! What art can teach

But oh! what art can teach
What human voice can reach
The sacred organ's praise?
Notes inspiring holy love,
Notes that wing their Heav'nly ways
To join the choirs above.

This elegant and solemn aria praises the "sacred organ," St. Cecilia's own instrument. The music for the soprano and obbligato organ creates a sense of holy awe and religious devotion, and the sound of the organ inspires the "notes that wing their heavenly ways / To join the choirs above".

## 10. Aria (Soprano): Orpheus could lead the savage race

Orpheus could lead the savage race; And trees uprooted left their place; Sequacious of the lyre.

Handel's musical setting for this aria uses the lively, triple-meter rhythm and syncopations common to the traditional English hornpipe dance. This stylistic choice serves to musically represent the lyrics, which describe Orpheus's lyre enchanting wild animals and even causing uprooted trees to follow his song. The vigorous and upbeat dance rhythm visually and acoustically represents these "dancing trees".

### 11. Recitative (Soprano): But bright St Cecilia

But bright Cecilia rais'd the wonder high'r; When to her organ, vocal breath was giv'n, An angel heard, and straight appear'd Mistaking earth for Heav'n.

The concluding movement begins with a soprano recitative, which elevates St. Cecilia's musical power above that of Orpheus. The soprano explains that when Cecilia played, "An Angel heard, and straight appeared, / Mistaking earth for Heav'n".

#### 12. Grand Chorus: As from the power of sacred lays

As from the pow'r of sacred lays
The spheres began to move,
And sung the great Creator's praise
To all the bless'd above;
So when the last and dreadful hour
This crumbling pageant shall devour,
The trumpet shall be heard on high,
The dead shall live, the living die,
And music shall untune the sky.

The "sacred lays" are the music that caused the cosmic spheres to move and "sung the great Creator's praise," representing a universal, celestial harmony before human music even began. The 'spheres' are the invisible and crystalline spheres above the moon, thought concentrically to bear the planets, the sun and the stars and in so doing to make a heavenly music. The chorus moves to a climax that describes the Last Judgement —"the last and dreadful hour when the last trumpet sounds" (Corinthians 15.22) and the dead shall live, the living die. The chorus culminates in a powerful and magnificent double fugue, providing a brilliant and dramatic ending with the trumpets in D sounding out the last exciting moments of the work.

Notes by Chris Dunning



## Charlotte Bowden Soprano

Charlotte Bowden is a graduate of the Royal College of Music Opera Studio. Since graduating she was awarded Second Prizes at the 2023 Cesti Competition and the 2024 Handel Singing Competition, Fourth Prize and the Dublin Song Series prize at the 2025 Veronica Dunne Competition, and was a finalist in the 2022 Kathleen Ferrier Awards. Following the Cesti Competition, Charlotte has enjoyed collaborations with Accademia Bizantina and Ottavio Dantone for the Ravenna Festival, including performing as Melanto in Monteverdi's II ritorno d'Ulisse in patria, Belinda in Purcell's Dido and Aeneas.

In the UK Charlotte has performed regularly at Glyndebourne, having first been selected as a Jerwood Young Artist for the company in 2022. In the Autumn of that year she performed the role of Barbarina and covered Susanna in Le nozze di Figaro, for which she was awarded the Miss Miriam Trevaux Award. Since then she has returned to Glyndebourne as Zerlina in Don Giovanni, and as the soprano soloist in Vivaldi's Gloria. Charlotte has worked with other leading UK opera companies including English National Opera, Opera Holland Park, and Waterperry Opera Festival. She is an alumna of the Verbier Festival Atelier Lyrique and Britten-Pears young artist programmes and is a Samling Artist.

In concert Charlotte has performed at the Royal Albert Hall, Wigmore Hall, Cadogan Hall, Royal Festival Hall, Snape Maltings, the Aldeburgh Festival, London Handel Festival, and with orchestras including the RPO, LPO, BSO, the Hallé, and the London Handel Players. Highlights include Orfeo in Handel Parnasso in festa with the London Handel Festival at Wigmore Hall, Handel's Messiah at the Royal Albert Hall, and stepping in for Pretty Yende at the dress rehearsal for The Coronation of Their Majesties The King and The Queen Consort singing Handel arias with Antonio Pappano. This season she has performed as Galatea with Cappella Mediterranea in France and Belgium, in Purcell's The Fairy Queen with the Gabrieli Consort, and toured Scotland in recital with the Dunedin consort. She will make her Opera North debut as Barbarina in a new production of Le nozze di Figaro in January.



# Eloise Irving Soprano

Eloise studied voice and harp at Guildhall School of Music and Drama and went on to read English at King's College London, where she held a choral scholarship. She then gained an Acting degree at Central School of Speech and Drama.

She has an extensive solo and choral concert, consort and operatic portfolio; performing at venues all over the world including the Royal Albert Hall, La Scala and Carnegie Hall as well as for various television and radio broadcasts in the UK and abroad. Eloise has also toured and recorded with groups including The Constellation Choir, The Monteverdi Choir, The Tallis Scholars, BBC Singers, Armonico Consort, London Choral Sinfonia, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Tenebrae, Academy of Ancient Music, Polyphony, the Eric Whitacre Singers and Gareth Malone's Voices. She also sings as a regular soprano at Royal Hospital Chelsea, Temple Church, St Mary Le Bow and St Paul's Cathedral.

Additionally, Eloise works as a singer/harpist in a variety of genres from classical to pop. Opportunities have included performing and recording her own composition for voice and harp with the BBC Concert Orchestra, appearing as an actress/harpist in Holby City and performing solo recitals on cruise ships on her electric harp. She is also a founder member of a close harmony vocal trio The Roxy Dots, performing jazzy hits from the 1930s up to the present day.

She recently directed and appeared as 'Puck' in a European tour of Mendelssohn's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' with Sir John Eliot Gardiner's newly formed Constellation Choir; combining her love of acting, singing and directing.



## Tom Lilburn Countertenor

Tom Lilburn is a 31-year-old English countertenor who is a young artist with Opera Prelude. An experienced oratorio performer, recent performances include Handel's Theodora and Messiah, Bach's Mass in B Minor, St. Matthew Passion and St. Mark Passion, Vivaldi's Cessate, omai cessate, Orff's Carmina Burana and Bernstein's Chichester Psalms. Notable performances include solos from Handel's Messiah in the Royal Albert Hall with The Really Big Chorus, Bernstein's Chichester Psalms at the Jubilee Concert at St George's Chapel, and Baroque arias with Florilegium in Milan's Museo Nazionale.

Tom is also a Lay Clerk at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, and in April 2021 he was one of four singers at the funeral of The Duke of Edinburgh. He is a member of the vocal sextet The Queen's Six. He studies with Sally Burgess and is represented by Ann Ferrier. In his spare time, he is a keen golfer and cricketer and enjoys playing chess and following Aston Villa.



## Sebastian Hill Tenor

Sebastian is currently studying on the Opera Course at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and is a graduate of Magdalen College, Oxford. He studies with David Pollard and is supported by the H R Taylor Trust, Drake Calleja Trust and The Countess of Munster Trust.

He was an Opera Holland Park Young Artist covering the title role in Jonathan Dove's Itch and previously a member of the Glyndebourne Chorus. He was awarded first prize in the London Bach Society Competition as well as the Patricia Routledge English Song Competition.

Recent debuts include Britten's Serenade at the Barbican conducted by Roberto González-Monjas, and Ralph Vaughan Williams' On Wenlock Edge in Schaffhausen, Zürich, Bern and Basel with Camerata Variable. Song highlights include a Goethe celebration at Wigmore Hall accompanied by Graham Johnson, the International Lied Festival Zeist, and the Oxford International Song Festival where he is a Young Artist. His increasing portfolio as an Evangelist includes performances with Ex Cathedra at Birmingham Symphony Hall, Oxford Bach Soloists, and Worcester Festival Choral Society.



## Ben Watkins Bass

Ben is a current scholarship holder at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where he is studying on the Masters course in Vocal Performance.

Ben began his musical training in Nottingham, before taking up a choral scholarship at Magdalen College Oxford, where he graduated with a double first in 2021. At Oxford, Ben toured frequently and performed extensively as a soloist, including with the Oxford Bach Soloists and several College choirs.

Ben now lives in London, where he maintains a busy career as a freelance soloist and ensemble singer alongside his studies, as well as being a full-time member of the choir of the Brompton Oratory. Recent highlights include Mozart's Requiem with Southampton Choral Society, Bach's Christmas Oratorio and St John's Passion with the Winchester Bach Voices, and Brahms' Requiem with South Oxfordshire Choir.

Further engagements this year include a performance of works by Charpentier at the Royal Academy of Music and Bach's Christmas Oratorio and Wachet Auf with the Winchester Bach Voices for Stockbridge Music Festival.

Ben is increasingly active on the opera stage, having previously performed the roles of Don Bartolo (Marriage of Figaro, Oxford Opera Society), Polkan (Golden Cockerel, Orchestra Vox), and most recently the title role in Marcello Palazzo's debut Opera, Mount Herzog (Tete a Tete Festival). In 2025, Ben will perform Der Wald (Smyth) and Lucrezia (Respighi) with the Guildhall School Opera department.

Ben studies with David Pollard, and is very grateful for support from the Countess of Munster Musical Trust, Sir Richard Stapley Educational Trust, the Nottingham Gordon Memorial Trust, the Perry Trust Gift Fund, the Hywel Davies Trust for Young Musicians, the Winship Foundation, the Wavendon Foundation, and the Kathleen Trust.



## Katie Holmes Leader of Hampstead Chamber Orchestra

Katie has played the violin since the age of four, and comes from a family of musicians and music teachers. She is a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music in modern and historical performance having studied with Maggie Faultless and Rachel Podger.

She has played for historical ensembles such as The Hanover Band, La Serenissima, Arcangelo, and Instruments of Time and Truth, as well as a plethora of modern orchestras including the Royal Northern Sinfonia.

Since finishing her Masters Degree in 2014 she has specialised in Historical Performance, but still enjoys playing the later repertoire when time allows. Until recently Katie taught the Kodály Method for Junior Guildhall, and led choirs for the Guildhall Young Artists programme.

Since the pandemic when work as a performing musician and teacher was nearly impossible, she decided to work far less as a musician and now works as a Maternity Support Worker, assisting midwives and caring for women and their families during and after birth, hoping one day to follow her dream of becoming a midwife.



## Ben Giddens Organist and WCS Accompanist

Ben Giddens is Assistant Organist at The Guards' Chapel, Wellington Barracks where he accompanies the professional choir and presides over the new Chapel organ by Harrison and Harrison.

Ben previously held the post of Associate Organist at St Martin in the Fields. Whilst at St Martin's, he had the opportunity to perform with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields and the Brandenburg Sinfonia as well as performing regularly on BBC Radio 3.

Ben has held organist posts at St Bartholomew the Great and Magdalen College, Oxford. At Oxford he toured regularly with the Chapel Choir as well as featuring on recordings and regular broadcasts. Prior to this Ben held the position of Acting Assistant Organist at St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, where he performed at many Royal occasions.

Ben holds a first-class honours degree in Music from the University of East Anglia. Whilst studying for his degree, he held the organ scholarship at Norwich Cathedral before returning to St George's, Windsor.

Ben currently maintains an active schedule of freelance performing and regularly deputises at St Bride's, Fleet Street and is the accompanist for Wokingham Choral Society. He has recently taken up the position of accompanist for Wimbledon Choral Society.



## George de Voil Director

George de Voil's reputation as a conductor took off in 2014 when he made the world première recording of Charles Villers Stanford's Mass in G, Op. 46. The disc was praised by BBC Music Magazine and Gramophone, and led to George being named a Classic FM "Young Artist to Watch". MusicWeb International praised his "stylish" direction, calling his recording of Parry's Songs of Farewell "exciting and full of conviction", while the Elgar Society Journal wrote "George de Voil is something of a find... He may be young, but his innate musicianship, his feeling for line, for balance, for phrasing, for the placing of chords, is exciting...". Choir & Organ remarked, "the freshvoiced Exeter College Choir achieve a superb blend under their intelligent young conductor".

This year George marked a decade as Director of Music at St James's, Sussex Gardens, in London with its fine professional choir. Under his leadership, the distinguished musical tradition of this church has been revitalised, with an exciting concerts programme and a major organ restoration. For six years, George was Head of Choral Music at Wellington College. He is now Director of Music at the West London Free School, a specialist music school known for its outstanding choral provision, which was named The Sunday Times London Comprehensive School of the Year for 2025.

Alongside his role as Musical Director of Godalming Choral Society, George is proud to hold the directorship of Wokingham Choral Society, where his predecessors include Edward Gardner Paul Daniel and Stephen Layton. Recent highlights have included directing Elgar's Dream of Gerontius in Guildford Cathedral, Britten's St Nicholas with the choir of St George's School, Windsor Castle, and Mendelssohn's Elijah in the Memorial Chapel at Charterhouse.

A prizewinning Fellow of the Royal College of Organists, with a first class degree from Oxford University, George has broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and Radio 4, and given organ concerts in Westminster Abbey and Westminster Cathedral, as well as across the UK and Europe. On New Year's Day this year he broadcast on Radio 3 accompanying the Rodolfus Choir in music by Schubert, Haydn, David Briggs and Roderick Williams, and he will be heard again live on BBC Radio on New Year's Eve 2025.

## Wokingham Choral Society

President - Edward Gardner OBE Vice Presidents - Stephen Layton MBE, Aidan Oliver

Wokingham Choral Society was formed by a small group of enthusiasts in July 1951.

#### **Edward Gardner OBE**

Edward was Musical Director of WCS from 1997 until 2002. Starting his career as a chorister at Gloucester Cathedral Edward attended Eton College, the University of Cambridge and the Royal Academy of Music. In 2005 he was a winner of the Young Artist prize of the Royal Philharmonic Society, and in March 2006 he was appointed Music Director of the English National Opera. During his time with the ENO, he was also Principal Guest Conductor of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, until 2016. In 2013 Edward was appointed as principal guest conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, becoming its principal conductor from the 2015-16 season. In 2012 he was awarded an OBE for his Services to Music in the Queen's Birthday Honours. At the start of the 2021-22 season Edward took up his new role as principal conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

#### **Stephen Layton MBE**

Stephen was Musical Director of WCS from 1991 to 1997. He won scholarships to Eton College and then King's College, Cambridge as an organ scholar under Stephen Cleobury. Whilst studying at Cambridge, Stephen founded and is Director of the mixed-voice choir Polyphony. He was appointed the Musical Director of the Holst Singers in 1993. His former posts include Chief Conductor of the Netherlands Chamber Choir, Chief Guest Conductor of the Danish National Vocal Ensemble, Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the City of London Sinfonia and Director of Music at the Temple Church in London. Stephen was Fellow and Director of Music at Trinity College, Cambridge from 2006 to 2023. Stephen was awarded an MBE for services to classical music in October 2020.

#### **Aidan Oliver**

Aidan was Musical Director of WCS from 2002 - 2007. He has been Chorus Director at Glyndebourne since 2019. He is one of the UK's leading choral directors, with wide experience across the whole spectrum of symphonic, liturgical, operatic and contemporary music. Alongside his work at Glyndebourne, he directs the Edinburgh Festival Chorus, which plays a central role each year in the Edinburgh International Festival; he is also the founding director of Philharmonia Voices, the professional choir that has collaborated with the Philharmonia Orchestra on many of its most ambitious choral-orchestral projects over many years. He has worked regularly on the music staff of ROH and ENO, and his former positions include Director of Music at St Margaret's Westminster and Associate Conductor of the St Endellion Summer Festival in Cornwall.

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## **Wokingham Choral Society Committee**

Chair: Katy Lethbridge Secretary: Penny Ward Treasurer: Ralph Jaconello

Soprano Representative: Phaedra Ashford

Alto Representative: Hilary Blake Tenor Representative: Richard Payler Bass Representative: Tim Iles Librarian: Fiona Butler

Membership Secretary: Caroline Fulton

Publicity: Chris Dunning

#### Non-committee, WCS support roles:

Events Coordinators: Rhoda Hart and

**Richard Turner** 

Friends & Patrons Coordinator: Jenny Eaglen

Staging managers: Jeremy Farrow and

Dick Whittington 100 Club Coordinator: Claire Hiscock

Ticket Sales manager: Ann Iles Marketing Design: Jo Tremlett

Thank you to our Front of House team - Steve Davies FOH Manager, Hilary, Paul, Russ and Steve Barge.

## Join WCS for fun, friendship and song!

WCS is an auditioned choir, renowned for the high standard of our classical choral singing. For nearly 75 years, our friendly, hard-working choir has enjoyed singing and having fun together. We aim to make quality music accessible for everyone and offer wonderful singing and social experiences for our members. We perform affordable high-quality concerts in our local community at the lovely All Saints Church, Wokingham. Our two major concerts each year feature great works from the classical repertoire, as well as lesser-known pieces, performed alongside professional soloists and orchestras. We also offer a family Christmas concert, a Summer concert of lighter music, 'Come & Sing' workshops, tours to perform at inspiring venues, charity fundraisers, and collaborations with other local choirs, orchestras and schools. We are a volunteer-led choir with a dedicated committee and brilliant choir admin team who work together to make the magic happen, alongside our very talented professional musicians.

To sing with us contact: membership@wokingham-choral-society.org.uk



Spring Concert 2025 - 'The Dream of Gerontius' at Guildford Cathedral

## Next events in 2025-2026

## **Family Christmas Carol Concert**

Saturday 13 December 2025.

## **Karl Jenkins: The Armed Man**

A Come & Sing and Concert in aid of Shelter

Come and sing Karl Jenkins' moving 'Mass for Peace' and perform it in a public concert with organ, trumpet and percussion.

Saturday 7 February 2026

## **Spring Concert - Sturm und Drang**

German Romantic myths and legends - Beethoven Mass in C, with pieces by Schumann, Schubert, Mendelssohn and Humperdinck.

Saturday 21 March 2026

# Summer Concert - Saturday Night at the Movies Saturday 20 June 2026

Our concert venue is All Saints Church, Wokingham, RG40 1TN. www.wokingham-choral-society.org.uk

WCS is a registered charity no. 274853

# Wokingham Choral Society presents A 'COME & SING' and CONCERT in aid of SHELTER

## KARL JENKINS: THE ARMED MAN 'A Mass for Peace'



A 'COME & SING' of the choruses of Jenkin's moving Mass for Peace including a CONCERT with 150 voices, organ, trumpet and percussion all in aid of SHELTER, the housing and homelessness charity.

Come & Sing Pre-booked £25 | On the day £30 | Music hire £2 | Concert only £10

Saturday 07 February 2026

Come & Sing 13.00-17.45 Concert 18.30-19.30



All Saints Church, Wokingham, RG40 1TN

SHELTER