

A Ceremony of Carols

Oxford Girls' Choir
Richard Vendome, *conductor and organ*
Danielle Perrett, *harp*

French language coaching by Professor Hugo Tucker and Dr Ingrid de Smet

Anna Allis	Phoebe Hopson
Ines Barroca Rahtz	Yilan Huang
Charlotte Bestwick	Felicity Hughes
Eloise Breen	Alice Jackman
Imogen Breen (F,B)	Olivia Knops (F,B)
Lucy Britton	Alice Koston
Imogen Carr (B)	Margaret Lingas
Matilda Carr (F,B)	Emily Moughton (F,B)
Julia Dilnot (F,B)	Elizabeth Nixon (F,B)
Rosie Dilnot (F,B)	Kathryn Norris
Elizabeth Dobson	Francesca Padley
Rosalind Dobson	Lucy Prendergast (F,B)
Bella Efthimiou (B)	Emily Price
Harriet Elder	Maddy Purefoy
Imogen Gardam (B)	Sofia Radaelli
Elinor Garnett	Ruby Reed-Berendt (F,B)
Emma Gullifer (F,B)	Emily Robinson
Henrietta Gullifer (F,B)	Susie Rushton
Sophie Hazell	Olivia Sandham

F = Fauré, B = Britten

Oxford Girls' Choir
Richard Vendome, *Director*

Penelope Martin-Smith and Helen Parker, *Assistant Musical Directors*

Richard Vendome formed Oxford Girls' Choir in 1984 to provide a singing environment for talented girls. Now there are four choirs, for both boys and girls, with 150 members. For more information including membership details, rehearsal times and events, please visit www.oxfordgirlschoir.co.uk.

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A Ceremony of Carols

In 1939 Britten and Peter Pears joined W.H. Auden in the United States, but the Bohemian lifestyle Britten found there did not suit his shy and conservative personality. Although he was a conscientious objector Britten decided to forsake exile and return home onboard the neutral Swedish merchant ship Axel Johnson in the Spring of 1942, a dangerous voyage because U-boat activity was then at its height; whilst at sea he composed two of his finest and best-loved choral works, the *Hymn to Saint Cecilia* (Op 27, on a text by Auden), and *A Ceremony of Carols* (Op 28), settings of medieval poems from a book Britten had picked up in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The latter was first performed in the library of Norwich Castle in December 1942 by the women of the Fleet Street Choir, conducted by T.B. Lawrence. Britten is on record as saying that he preferred the words to be pronounced in modern English, as far as possible, so as to be clear to the audience. Simple but refined in melody and structure, dazzling in its colour and poetry, the work combines voices and harp with a sureness of touch rarely heard in modern choral music. Joy and sadness, excitement and serenity, spring warmth and winter frost are all distilled herein.

Gabriel Urbain Fauré (1845–1924) was the leading French composer of his age, whose original melodic and harmonic style paved the way for the language of Debussy and his contemporaries. As a boy he attended the École Niedermeyer, studying with Saint-Saëns, among others. In 1871 he formed the Société Nationale de Musique, together with Chabrier and Duparc, and this gave him a platform for the premières of new works. He was a regular performer at Saint-Saëns' salon, succeeding him as choirmaster at the Église de la Madeleine in 1877; in 1896 he became organist there and took over from Massenet as professor of composition at the Paris Conservatoire, where his students included Maurice

Ravel and Nadia Boulanger. Fauré succeeded Dubois as Director of the Conservatoire in 1905, finally retiring due to deafness in 1920. *Le Ruisseau*, dating from 1881, is a rarely heard but exquisite setting of an anonymous text for female voices and soprano soloist. *Maria, mater gratiae* was probably composed as a Benediction hymn for the choir of the Madeleine in 1888; it also exists in a version for male voices. *En prière* sets a text by Bordèse and dates from the following year.

Alexandre Pierre François Boëly was born in 1785 and died 150 years ago on 27th December 1858. He received his first musical instruction from his father, a singer at Saint-Chapelle in Paris and harpist at the court of Versailles, and went on to study violin and piano at the Paris Conservatoire. During the early 19th century he cultivated an old-fashioned but attractive style as a composer, making a special study of Bach, Haydn and Mozart. But although his work was admired by composers such as Franck and Saint-Saëns, such high taste was no longer appreciated in Parisian society or by the clergy of St Germain-l'Auxerrois, where he was organist from 1840; he was obliged to resign his post there in 1851 and spent the rest of his days working as a piano teacher. In the *Andante con moto* and *Allegretto Pastorale* we hear Boëly's lighter style, but the *Préludes sur des Cantiques de Deniset* are clearly based on Bach's *Orgelbüchlein*, composed 130 years earlier. Boëly took his melodies from the *Cantiques du Premier Avenement de Iesu-Christ*, unaccompanied songs on the subject of the Nativity published by "le Conte d'Alsinois", the anagrammatic pseudonym of Nicolas Deniset (1515–59). A hand-written note in the British Library copy reads "je crois que la musique est de Marc-Antoine Muret" (1526–85).

Richard Vendome