

Samuel Sebastian
WESLEY

Anthems

Let us lift up our heart • The Wilderness

**Choir of Clare College, Cambridge
Christopher Robinson**



Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810–1876)

Anthems

1	Ascribe unto the Lord	12:57
2	O give thanks unto the Lord (<i>Soprano: Philippa Boyle</i>)	8:02
3	Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace	4:06
4	Wash me thoroughly (<i>Soprano: Emilia Hughes</i>)	4:20
5	O God, whose nature Let us lift up our heart	3:08 18:35
6	Let us lift up our heart	4:44
7	Be not very sore, O Lord	4:10
8	Thou, O Lord God (<i>Baritone: George Humphreys</i>)	5:26
9	Thou Judge of quick and dead	1:33
10	O may we thus insure	2:41
11	Blessed be the God and Father (<i>Soprano: Philippa Boyle</i>)	7:05
12	Cast me not away from thy presence The Wilderness	4:28 12:22
13	The wilderness and the solitary place	2:14
14	Say to them of a fearful heart (<i>Baritone: George Humphreys</i>)	2:43
15	Then shall the lame man	3:12
16	And the ransomed of the Lord	2:18
17	And sorrow and sighing	1:54

James McVinnie, Organist and Senior Organ Scholar

Tim Harper, Junior Organ Scholar

George Humphreys, Solo Baritone Tracks 8 & 14

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Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810–1876)

Anthems

Samuel Sebastian Wesley was a towering figure in the history of English cathedral music. No other composer between Purcell and Stanford came close to his achievement. He was a son of Samuel Wesley, another important composer of sacred music, and a grandson of Charles Wesley, the great hymn writer and one of the founders of Methodism. He was a chorister at the Chapel Royal, though no doubt he gained much of his musical knowledge and skill from his father. He certainly inherited or acquired Samuel's mastery of counterpoint, harmony, and the organ, his respect for older styles (especially that of J. S. Bach), and his independence of spirit. To these qualities he added some kinship with the Continental composers of his own time, a passionately romantic temperament, and a genius for the dramatization of biblical words.

Although Wesley tried his hand at many kinds of music both sacred and secular, in the end he devoted his main creative efforts to music for Anglican church choirs, which also provided his steadiest source of income. Between 1832 and his death he was organist at four different cathedrals, with an interlude at Leeds Parish Church, where there was an efficient and well-endowed choir.

It was a time when few cathedral chapters were willing to provide the resources that were sorely needed to bring the music of the services up to a respectable standard. Wesley was constantly complaining of absenteeism and incompetence, especially on the part of the adult choir members, and of inadequate time for rehearsal, deficient organs, and other woes, but he also laid down a positive challenge in the form of his magnificent series of anthems and services. Adequate performance of the more difficult specimens may well

have been beyond the capacities of the choirs he directed; but in course of time, and with the marked improvement in cathedral choirs that was getting under way at the time of his death, they came into their own. Nowadays the large-scale anthem, like the Lutheran cantata, has only a marginal function in religious life, but Wesley's anthems, as much as Bach's cantatas, can benefit from today's high standards of performing and recording, and their excellence can be appreciated as never before.

Wesley wrote for the standard choir of six to eight men, including countertenors on the alto line, and twelve to sixteen boy trebles. A cathedral choir was supposed to be able to divide into two halves, facing each other in the choir stalls and chanting the psalms and other texts antiphonally. Many earlier anthems had taken advantage of this feature with passages for double choir. Apparently the only one of his choirs that Wesley could rely on for this practice was at Exeter, where he officiated from 1836 to 1840. At Exeter he wrote three anthems for double choir with soloists, including *Let us lift up our heart* for four solo voices, eight-part choir, and organ.

Clare College Choir, like the majority of Oxford and Cambridge choirs today, is composed of mixed voices. Some listeners may miss the famous fluty tone of English choirboys, but Wesley, if he had had any choice in the matter, would probably have preferred to write for adult female sopranos, which, he said, had 'vastly superior quality and power' to the voices of children. As for countertenors, the present recording combines them with female contraltos, thereby assuring a reasonably uniform tone quality in all parts of the rather wide range that Wesley demanded of his altos. Henry Willis's organ

at Tenbury, built in 1873–4, replaced the original Flight organ of 1856, but its sound qualities are probably very much of the kind that Wesley had in mind.

The baroque or ‘Restoration’ full-with-verse anthem, which Wesley inherited and transformed, was a spacious work in several linked sections, some homophonic, some declamatory, some fugal. It placed great emphasis on the solo voice, which we find playing an unexpectedly prominent role in some of his earlier works. He also drew on a newer, late-Georgian type, pioneered by Crotch and Attwood: the contemplative or prayerful anthem in one movement, predominantly for full choir, and with little independent writing for the organ. Gems of both categories are well represented in the present selection.

Ascribe unto the Lord, composed at Winchester in 1851, is one of Wesley’s larger works. Its opening chorus is a fine example of his highly individual style of choral declamation, which is only distantly related to operatic recitative. Forceful as well as tuneful, these passages are generally made up of balanced phrases which can be adapted (as here) to different sets of words by careful attention to the rhythms of English prose. This feature is already to be found in earlier anthems like *The wilderness and the solitary place* (1832) and *Blessed be the God and Father* (c.1835: estimated dates follow the work-list in Peter Horton’s book *Samuel Sebastian Wesley: A Life*). These large-scale works also contain exciting, freely contrapuntal movements for full choir, displaying his command of diatonic dissonance and often climaxing in an electrifying modulation to an unexpected key, as at ‘*And the ransomed of the Lord*’ in *The Wilderness*. A particularly good example of Wesley’s structural inventiveness is the eight-part opening chorus of *Let us lift up our heart* (c.1839). (This anthem, unusually, ends with a movement set to a metrical text — a verse of one of Wesley’s grandfather’s

hymns.)

Another type of movement at which Wesley excelled was the melodious treble solo. The best-known example is to be found in *Blessed be the God and Father*, from his time at Hereford (c.1835). The solo ‘*Love one another*’ is particularly happy in its use of an antiphonal answering phrase, somewhere between an echo and a refrain, by the choir trebles; the originality of phrase structure overcomes the initial impression of Mendelssohn’s influence. The treble voice is associated with the idea of holiness, and here perhaps we may miss the cherubic choirboy. The solo in *O give thanks unto the Lord* (also written in Hereford) is, by contrast, an aria of almost operatic proportions. Its wide-ranging melodic line seems either to require a mature voice or, as is frequently the case, tutti trebles. Wesley often used the solo bass voice for songs of anguish and passion. None is finer than ‘*Thou, O Lord God*’ in *Let us lift up our heart*.

There are four examples of the short, self-contained anthem scored largely, or entirely, for unaccompanied choir. *O God, whose nature and property* originated in 1831, but in this recording a much-revised version of 1870 has been chosen; it is hymn-like in character and is chiefly remarkable for a florid ‘*Amen*’. In *Wash me thoroughly* (c.1840), for four-part choir with treble solo, Wesley uses chromaticism to express a longing for Christ’s taking away of guilt. The piece is in a clear ternary form, but the theme of the contrapuntal middle section returns in the modified repeat of the opening; the coda is an oddly unpredictable succession of slow chords. The six-part *Cast me not away* (1848) is also penitential in mood, and its climax comes with a harmonic ‘crunch’ on the words ‘*the bones which thou hast broken*’, partly inspired by a leg injury Wesley had sustained on a fishing expedition.

The most exquisite example of this genre, and still

perhaps Wesley's best-known anthem, is *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace* (c.1850), where the serene opening eight-bar phrase returns almost unchanged twice more, though with different words in the middle statement. The episodes bring some sense of a contrasting restlessness: in the first, the men's voices sing a phrase in three rising keys, each time ending with a surprising

major chord; in the second, the counterpoint is somewhat disturbing, but the mood of peace prevails with the final statement of the main theme, and is then confirmed by the coda's beautiful resolution of a highly dissonant chord.

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Choir of Clare College Cambridge



In addition to its primary task of leading chapel services, the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge, gives frequent concerts, both in the United Kingdom and abroad. It has toured throughout Western and Eastern Europe, the United States of America, Russia, and the Middle and Far East, frequently performs in Britain's major concert halls with many of the country's leading orchestras, and regularly contributes to the Choral Evensong broadcasts on BBC Radio 3. In 2000 it became the first mixed-voice choir from Cambridge or Oxford to perform at the BBC Proms, singing Bach's *St John Passion*, and made a further appearance at the Proms in 2003, in a performance of Berlioz's *L'Enfance du Christ* with the Monteverdi Choir. It has sung under the direction of conductors such as Ivor Bolton, Richard Egarr, Daniel Harding, Sir John Eliot Gardiner, René Jacobs, and Nicholas Kraemer. Successes in recent seasons have included sell-out tours throughout Europe and to the United States with leading period instrument orchestras, and highly acclaimed performances at many major European music festivals, including the Munich Opera Festival, Salzburg Festival, and Innsbruck Festival. In 2002 the Choir joined the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, directed by René Jacobs, to perform Handel's *Jephtha* in Salamanca, Cuenca, Brussels, London, New York, and Innsbruck. In December 2005 the Choir took part in a highly successful tour of Europe with the Freiburger Barockorchester, directed by René Jacobs, performing Handel's *Messiah*; the tour culminated with a recording for Harmonia Mundi. The choir regularly commissions new music and has had works written for it by Christopher Brown, Andrew Carter, Herbert Howells, Nico Muhly, Julian Phillips, Tarik O'Regan, John Rutter, and Giles Swayne. It has an extensive discography, which includes a recording of John Rutter's *Requiem* on the Naxos label; this became an Editor's Choice in the May 2003 edition of *The Gramophone* magazine, and gave Naxos its first number one in the classical charts, and in 2005 was nominated for a Classical BRIT Award. The Choir's recording of John Stainer's *The Crucifixion* was released on Naxos in May 2005.

Sopranos

Philippa Boyle (*Soloist tracks 1, 2, 7 & 11*)
Esther Chadwick
Eleanor Helps
Laura Honey
Emilia Hughes (*Soloist tracks 1, 2, 4, 7, 15 & 17*)
Tessie Prakas
Lucy Roberts
Caroline Smith
Suzanne Szczetnikowicz
Zoe VanderWolk

Altos

Madeleine Bradbury Rance (*Soloist track 2*)
Elisabeth Fleming (*Soloist track 1*)
Charlotte Ho
Charlotte Kingston
Lester Lardenoye (*Soloist track 1*)
Catherine Symonds-Joy
(*Soloist tracks 1, 7, 12, 15 & 17*)
Jessica Thomas

Tenors

Gerald Beatty (*Soloist tracks 1, 2, 7, 12, 15 & 17*)
Jonathan Bird
Jonathan Langridge
Philip Martin (*Soloist track 17*)
Benjamin Walton
Benjamin Winpenny (*Soloist track 1*)

Basses

Edward Ballard (*Soloist tracks 1, 2, 12, 15 & 17*)
Matthew Graham
Jonathan Midgley
George Mullan
David Neal
Edward Parkes (*Soloist track 7*)
Graham Ross (*Soloist track 1*)

Christopher Robinson

Christopher Robinson was educated at Rugby and Christ Church, Oxford, where he was Organ Scholar. After a period as Organist and Master of the Choristers at Worcester Cathedral, where he was also conductor of several Three Choirs Festivals, Christopher Robinson moved to St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, where he was Organist and Choirmaster until 1991. He was conductor of the Oxford Bach Choir from 1976 to 1997 and of the City of Birmingham Choir from 1964 to 2002. He recently retired from the prestigious post of Organist and Director of Music at St John's College, Cambridge, a choir with an international reputation for excellence. He holds honorary degrees from Birmingham University and the University of Central England and is an honorary member of the Royal Academy of Music. He has been Chairman of the Elgar Society and President of the Royal College of Organists. In 1992 the Queen bestowed on him the honour of Commander of the Victorian Order for his services at Windsor Castle, and in the summer of 2002, the Archbishop of Canterbury made him a Lambeth D.Mus. He became an Honorary Fellow of the Guild of Church Musicians in autumn 2003 and received a C.B.E. in the 2004 New Year's Honours List.

The Organ in the Parish Church of St Michael and All Angels, Tenbury

When Sir Frederick Ouseley founded his choir school, St Michael's College, in 1856, a good versatile organ was required for the chapel so that the music and liturgy of the Anglican Church could be performed to the highest possible standard. Sir Frederick commissioned the London firm of Flight and Robson to build an organ which he himself designed. After about ten years this instrument proved unsatisfactory due mainly to water penetration from the roof which damaged the soundboards. Thomas Harrison of Rochdale, the founder of today's Harrison & Harrison of Durham was approached to rebuild the organ. This rebuild dragged on for seven years with Harrison frequently asking for more money. Sadly this organ proved unsatisfactory, so in desperation Sir Frederick approached Father Willis in 1873. He agreed to take the whole instrument back to his factory in London, revoice the existing pipework to sound like Willis pipes, and re-erect the organ within five months for a sum of £1000. There were to be four manuals with fifty-five speaking stops and a fully developed pedal organ: true to his word he installed it within the prescribed time.

In 1895 the solo organ was enclosed and in 1916 the Barker lever action was replaced with pneumatic action which still works to this day. In 1953 the organ was thoroughly cleaned, the Victorian sharp pitch lowered, and balanced swell pedals were installed. Although essential maintenance and a few tonal changes have been carried out over the years, the organ sounds exactly as it did when Henry Willis installed it in 1873.

Michael Hart

1 Ascribe unto the Lord*Psalms 96 and 115*

Ascribe unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of
the people: ascribe unto the Lord worship
and pow'r.

Ascribe unto the Lord the honour due unto
His Name.

Let the whole earth stand in awe of Him.

Tell it out among the heathen that the Lord is King,
and that He shall judge the people righteously.

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

Sing to the Lord, and praise His name:

be telling of his salvation from day to day,
his wonders unto all people.

As for the gods of the heathen, they are but idols.

Their idols are silver and gold, even the work of
men's hands. They have mouths, and speak
not: eyes have they, and see not.

They have ears, and hear not: noses have
they, and smell not. They have hands, and
handle not: feet have they, and walk not:
neither speak they through their throat.

They that make them are like unto them,
and so are all such as put their trust in them.

As for our God, He is in heaven:

he hath done whatsoever pleased Him.

The Lord hath been mindful of us, and He shall
bless us: He shall bless the house of Israel, He
shall bless the house of Aaron.

He shall bless them that fear the Lord,
both small and great.

Ye are the blessed of the Lord, you and your
children Ye are the blessed of the Lord, who
made heaven and earth.

2 O give thanks unto the Lord*Psalms 106: 1, 2, 3; Psalm 86: 5, 9, 10*

O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is gracious:
and His mercy endureth for ever.

Who can express the noble acts of the Lord,
or shew forth all His praise?

For Thou, O Lord, art good and gracious unto
all them that call on Thee, of great

Mercy unto all them that call upon Thee.

All nations whom Thou hast made shall come
and worship Thee, O Lord, and shall
Glorify Thy Name.

For Thou art good and doest wondrous things:
for only Thou art holy, Thou only art the Lord.

For Thou art great, and doest wondrous
things.

Who can express the noble acts of the Lord,
or shew forth all His praise?

Blessed are they that keep judgment, and do
righteousness: they are blessed.

3 Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace*Isaiah 26; Psalm 139; 1 John 1; Psalm 119;
Matthew 6*

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind
is stayed on Thee.

The darkness is no darkness with Thee, but the
night is as clear as the day. The darkness and
the light to Thee are both alike.

God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.

O let my soul live, and it shall praise Thee,
For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for evermore.

4 Wash me thoroughly

Psalm 51: 2-3

Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness,
and forgive me all my sin.
For I acknowledge my faults: and my sin
is ever before me.

5 O God, whose nature

*Book of Common Prayer: The Litany, 'in the time
of any common plague or sickness'*

O God, whose nature and property is ever to have
mercy and to forgive, receive our humble
petitions; and though we be tied and bound
with the chain of our sins,
yet let the pitifulness of Thy great mercy loose us;
for the honour of Jesus Christ,
our Mediator and Advocate.
Amen.

6 Let us lift up our heart

*Lamentations 3: 40, 41; Isaiah 63: 16, 19;
Isaiah 64: 9, 1, 6, 8; Psalm 71: 4, 5, 10, 1*

Let us lift up our heart with our hands
to God in the heav'ns.
Let us search and try our ways,
and turn again to the Lord.
Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer;
Thy Name is from everlasting.
Doubtless Thou art our Father.

7 Be not very sore, O Lord;
neither remember iniquity for ever.
Behold, see, we beseech Thee,
we are all Thy people.

Oh that Thou would'st rend the heav'ns
and come down,
that the mountains might flow down
at Thy presence.

Be not very sore, O Lord;
neither remember iniquity for ever.
But we are all as an unclean thing;
we all do fade as a leaf.

Thou, O Lord, art our Father.
We are Thine, O Lord.
Thy Name is from everlasting.
We are the clay, and Thou our potter;
We are all the work of Thine hand.

8 Thou, O Lord God, art the thing that I long for;
Thou art my hope, even from my youth.
Through Thee have I been holden up
ever since I was born;
Go not far from me, O God.
My God, haste Thee to help me.
In Thee, O Lord, have I put my trust.

9 Thou Judge of quick and dead,
Before whose bar severe,
With holy joy, or guilty dread,
We all shall soon appear;
Do Thou our souls prepare
For that tremendous day,
And fill us now with watchful care,
And teach our hearts to pray.

10 O may we thus insure
A lot among the blest,
And watch a moment to secure
An everlasting rest.

11 Blessed be the God and Father

1 Peter 1: 3-5, 15-17, 22-25

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God; through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear. See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently. Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. Amen.

12 Cast me not away

Psalms 51

Cast me not away from Thy presence,
and take not Thy holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation,
and uphold me with Thy Spirit.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:
a broken and a contrite heart Thou wilt
not despise, O God.
Make me to hear of joy and gladness, that the
bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice.

13 The Wilderness

Isaiah 35

The wilderness and the solitary place shall
be glad for them,
And the desert shall rejoice and blossom
as the rose.
It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice
with joy and singing.

14 Say to them of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not:
Behold your God. He will come and save you.

15 Then shall the lame man leap as an hart,
and the tongue of the dumb sing;
For in the wilderness shall waters break out,
and streams in the desert.
And a highway shall be there:
it shall be called the way of Holiness;
The unclean shall not pass over it.
But the redeemed shall walk there.

16 And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
and come to Zion with songs,
and everlasting joy upon their heads.
They shall obtain joy and gladness
upon their heads.

17 And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Samuel Sebastian Wesley was the pre-eminent organist-composer of the early Victorian era. During his career he worked tirelessly for over forty years to raise the standard of music offered in English cathedrals, and this collection of his most popular anthems, including the exquisite *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace*, reflects the culmination of his achievements in this field. Unashamedly Romantic yet original in style, Wesley's music speaks with a powerful and wholly distinctive voice.

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(1810–1876)

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| 13-17 | The Wilderness | 12:22 |

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Producer: John Rutter • Please see the booklet for a detailed track list

Booklet Notes: Nicholas Temperley

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(Photodisc Green / Getty Images)



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Playing Time
75:14



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