

MY SPIRIT HATH REJOICED

HARWOOD IN A FLAT · NOBLE IN B MINOR · SUMSION IN G
MURRILL IN E · DYSON IN D · DARKE IN F · HOWELLS GLOUCESTER SERVICE
THE CHOIR OF ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL · CHRISTOPHER DEARNLEY · JOHN SCOTT




hyperion




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THE CHOIR OF ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

CHRISTOPHER DEARNLEY organ

JOHN SCOTT conductor



SETTINGS OF THE CANTICLES, the Magnificat and Nunc dimittis, have played a prominent part in the Office of Evensong since the Reformation. Cranmer's original *Book of Common Prayer* of 1549 established the classic pattern for the Anglican Office of psalm-lesson-canticle-lesson-canticle. This pattern survived all the liturgical revisions and upheavals and was reiterated in the definitive 1662 version, which is still adhered to today. The form of Evensong resulted from the fusing together of elements from the Roman Offices of Vespers and Compline, though the liturgical pattern of psalms followed by paired lessons and canticles differs both from its Roman progenitors and from the Lutheran services.

The first canticle of Evensong, the Magnificat, acts as a liturgical pivot, providing a transition between lessons from the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Magnificat, whose text is found in Luke 1: 46–55, is a hymn of praise expressing the joy and thanksgiving of the Virgin Mary following the Annunciation.

The Nunc dimittis or 'Song of Simeon', the second canticle of Evensong, takes its text from Luke 2: 29–32, and acts as a salutation to the arrival of the New Testament message. The words are those uttered in prayer by the aged Simeon who, having witnessed the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple, expresses his faith in God's promise of Salvation and contemplates his approaching death.

Except for the anthem (which is, strictly speaking, extra-liturgical), the canticles have afforded the greatest opportunity for musical development within the Anglican rite. The stylistic foundations of the settings most familiar today from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were established in large part by Samuel Sebastian Wesley and Thomas Attwood Walmisley, two of the most important and influential figures in the history of English church music. The finest achievements of both these men in the setting of the Evening Canticles are included on a previous Hyperion issue *My soul doth magnify the Lord* (CDH55401), which also includes familiar settings by Stanford, Blair, Wood and Brewer. This second disc presents a further seven well-loved settings dating from the late 1800s to the mid-1940s.

When **Thomas Tertius Noble** (1867-1953) resigned from his post at York Minster in order to take up an appointment as musical director at St Thomas's Church, Fifth Avenue, New York, he must have done so with a mixture of trepidation and excitement. This was to be Noble's most important post in a career which had begun at the Royal College of Music in 1886, where he studied with Parratt and Stanford, and which led to appointments at Trinity College, Cambridge, as assistant to Stanford (1890-2), and at Ely Cathedral (1892-1898) and York Minster (1898-1912) as organist and choirmaster. Shortly before his appointment to St Thomas's in 1912, the church had been rebuilt with the aim of creating liturgical conditions akin to those of a cathedral, and on arrival in New York Noble was set the daunting task of establishing the musical traditions there. Noble remained at St Thomas's until 1947, during which time he founded a choir school fashioned after the familiar choral



establishments he had left behind in England. The choir still flourishes today, drawing its repertoire from the vast legacy of English Cathedral Music, including several of Noble's own works. The Magnificat and Nunc dimittis in B minor (Op 6) were first published in 1898 and dedicated to Sir George Martin. Though writing in a simple, syllabic style, Noble shows an expressive approach to word-setting and achieves musical variety through the constant alternation of vocal textures and colours; simple unison passages contrast with those of more complex chordal writing, and long sustained phrases for boys' voices alternate with those scored for the three lower voices. The organ part plays a purely accompanimental role; it is harmonically supportive, yet shows little rhythmic or melodic independence.

Like Britten, **Herbert Howells** (1892-1983) was a composer who responded to specific people, places and occasions. His numerous settings of the Morning and Evening Canticles bear witness to this: the Magnificat and Nunc dimittis written in 1946 for the choir of Gloucester Cathedral magically evoke the spacious, reverberant acoustics of the building and the unique blend of the choir. Having served as a chorister and organ student at Gloucester Cathedral under Brewer from 1905 to 1911, Howells was well aware of the wide variety of musical effects that could be produced, as well as the problems created by the sheer vastness of the cathedral. Howells's skills at adapting his music to suit a particular building, its assets and its problems, is demonstrated to great effect in the Magnificat of this setting, which opens with an extended passage of ethereal beauty scored for boys' voices with chordal organ accompaniment. Whilst the extremely long echo demands a very slow harmonic, rhythmic and melodic pace, the effects gained by the superimposition of harmonies left 'hanging' in the echo are quite stupendous. The 'Gloucester Service' contains many of the hallmarks of Howells's unmistakable style: long, arching melodies in broad phrases; extended passages of diatonic unison writing; chromatic contrapuntal sections; a rich harmonic vocabulary often characterized by a strong modal feeling; supportive yet independent organ-writing; and an impeccable regard for word-setting which is highly expressive yet never over-sentimental.

Unlike Howells, **Herbert Murrill** (1909-1952) is not particularly renowned for his association with the Church and its music. As a composer, he tended to favour the smaller media, though his list of works includes such diverse items as incidental music for films, ballets and plays, a string quartet, two cello concertos and a jazz opera. His education began at Aske's School, Hatcham, where he won the Musicians' Company Carnegie Scholarship to the Guildhall School of Music. However, Murrill chose to relinquish the place in order to study at the Royal Academy (1925-8) under Bower, Marchant and Alan Bush. From 1928 to 1931, Murrill was appointed organ scholar at Worcester College, Oxford, studying with Harris, Walker and Allen. While still at University, his jazz opera *Man in Cage* (1929) was performed at the Grafton Theatre in London, 1930. In 1936 Murrill joined the BBC and embarked on a career that was to lead to his appointment as Head of Music there in



1950. In addition he was professor of composition at the Royal Academy from 1933 until his death. It was during his final year of war service in the Intelligence Corps (1942-1946) that Murrill composed the Evening Canticles in E. Though composed in the same year as Howells's 'Gloucester Service', the two works could hardly be more dissimilar. Murrill's setting is mainly syllabic and the music is conceived on a vertical rather than a horizontal melodic plane. The Magnificat has a fiery, relentless quality and rhythmic interest is provided by constant alternation in metre. The Nunc dimittis is slow and majestic with a rhythmic Gloria.

Throughout his life, **Basil Harwood** (1859-1949) maintained a close association with the Church and its musical heritage. Born in Gloucestershire, he began his studies as an organist with Riseley at Bristol Cathedral. Later he moved to Oxford to study theory with Corfe at Trinity College and for a short time he had lessons at the Leipzig Conservatory with Reinecke. Harwood held his first appointment as an organist at St Barnabas', Pimlico (1883-7) and then proceeded to Ely Cathedral where he was organist and choirmaster from 1887 to 1893. It was during his time at Ely Cathedral that Harwood composed the Morning, Communion and Evening Service in A flat (Op 6) of which the Magnificat and Nunc dimittis sung on this recording form a part. Though the service is usually sung with organ accompaniment, it also exists in a version orchestrated by Sir Walter Alcock, a fellow organist and contemporary of Harwood's. The music clearly shows the influence of Wesley in its rich harmonies, sweeping melodies, delicate phrasing, expressive word-painting, and most importantly in its supremely confident and imaginative handling of vocal textures. After leaving Ely, Harwood's career centred on Oxford where he was organist at Christ Church (1892-1909), precentor at Keble College (1892-1903), and conductor of the Orchestral Association (1892-8). The year 1896 saw the foundation of the Bach Choir; Harwood became its first conductor in that year and held the appointment until 1900 when he took over as University *Choragus* (an Office peculiar to Oxford University). Available sources indicate that Harwood's list of compositions was not extensive; the works that are documented seem to fall into the categories of Church music, organ works and cantatas.

Though **Harold Darke** (1888-1976) was closely associated with the Church and its music throughout his life, it was primarily as a performer and conductor that he gained a worldwide reputation. His studies began at the Royal College of Music where he took organ lessons with Parratt and composition with Stanford. (He later returned to the college as Professor between 1919 and 1969.) In 1916 Darke became organist at St Michael's, Cornhill, a post which he maintained until 1966. Here Darke gave regular organ recitals, founded the St Michael's Singers (1919), organized music festivals for which composers such as Howells and Vaughan Williams submitted new works, and made the church a cultural centre specializing in performances of Bach's music. Darke was President of the Royal College of Organists from 1940 to 1941 and acting organist at



King's College from 1941 to 1944 during the absence on war service of Boris Ord. Darke was a Fellow of the University from 1945 to 1949, and in recognition of his contributions to music he was awarded an honorary Cambridge MA, an Oxford DMus, and he was appointed CBE in 1966. The Magnificat and Nunc dimittis in F, which form part of a Complete Service, were early works, composed between 1910 and 1913 and published in 1923. Darke himself regarded the Nunc dimittis as 'perhaps one of the best things I've ever written', though he is probably best known for his carol *In the bleak mid-winter*. The Magnificat of the Evening Service is stylistically very interesting; the vocal textures are forever changing, with solo and unison phrases followed by thick double choir passages, then simple diatonic four-part sections. There are also several unusual and bold harmonic passages especially in the organ part. The Nunc dimittis starts with a tranquil bass solo but culminates in a dense eight-part texture which leads to a majestic Gloria.

Herbert Whitton Sumsion (1899–1995) was born in Gloucester and, like his contemporary Herbert Howells, he began his musical training at Gloucester Cathedral as a chorister in Brewer's choir. From 1916 to 1917 Sumsion became assistant organist at the cathedral, then later, in 1919, he held the same office before travelling to London in 1922 to become organist at Christ Church, Lancaster Gate. In 1926 Sumsion made the long journey to Philadelphia where he had been offered the job of professor of harmony and counterpoint at the Curtis Institute. After two years he finally returned to Gloucester Cathedral as organist and choirmaster, a post which he retained for thirty-nine years. Sumsion's career was centred on the Three Choirs Festival and as a result his association with such notable composers as Kodály, Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Holst, Howells and Finzi became a close one. Besides composing (mostly for voice and organ), Sumsion was also a skilled organist and conductor, accompanist and chamber music player. He was awarded a Lambeth DMus in 1947 and was appointed CUE in 1961. The Magnificat and Nunc dimittis in G major were written in 1942 to supplement the existing choice of settings already in the repertoire at Gloucester Cathedral. The Magnificat is a gently lilting, lyrical setting, which exhibits moments of extreme tenderness. Sumsion pays careful attention to word-setting and the vocal lines are beautifully shaped. The organ-writing complements the vocal textures with independent melodic interpolations, and in the Nunc dimittis the opening organ solo passage introduces a melodic motif and a triplet figure, both of which are present throughout the canticle.

The musical career of **Sir George Dyson** (1883–1964), like those of so many of his distinguished predecessors and contemporaries, began in the world of Church and organ music. By way of several scholarships, Dyson received formal musical training on the organ and in composition at the Royal College of Music. In 1904 he won the Mendelssohn travelling scholarship which enabled him to study in Italy and Germany for four years. It was during his stay in Dresden in 1907 that Dyson composed the Magnificat and Nunc dimittis in D major. On his return to England, Dyson was



engaged as music master at the Royal Naval School, Osborne, Isle of Wight (1908), then at Marlborough (1911) and finally at Rugby (1914). After the War, Dyson became head of music at Wellington College and joined the staff of the Royal College of Music. From 1924 to 1937 he was director of music at Winchester College. In terms of composition, these were his most productive years; *In Honour of the City* appeared in 1928 and the *Canterbury Pilgrims* in 1931. His list of compositions also includes symphonies and other smaller-scale choral works. Dyson succeeded Hugh Allen as director of the RCM in 1937, and three years later he received a knighthood. He was appointed KCVO in 1953. Besides music, Dyson also wrote several books including *The New Music* (Oxford 1924), which examined modern compositional techniques, and his official *Manual of Grenade Fighting*, which was adopted by the War Office in the First World War. Dyson's setting of the Magnificat and Nunc dimittis in D is well written, dramatic and descriptive. Like his predecessors Parry and Stanford, Dyson's approach to text-setting is both accurate and imaginative and his harmonic vocabulary is often bold. The vocal lines are characterized by broad, expansive phrases and Dyson clearly knew the power of unison writing. The overall feeling in this setting is one of exaltation, and it provides a suitable climax for this recording as a whole.

SARAH LANGDON © 1988

Recorded in St Paul's Cathedral, London, on 7, 8 & 24 March 1988

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Magnificat

My soul doth magnify the Lord: and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
For He hath regarded: the lowliness of His handmaiden:
For behold, from henceforth: all generations shall call me blessed.
For He that is mighty hath magnified me: and holy is His Name.
And His mercy is on them that fear Him: throughout all generations.
He hath shewed strength with His arm: He hath scattered the proud in the
imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seat: and hath exalted the humble and meek.
He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich He hath sent empty away.
He remembering His mercy hath holpen His servant Israel: as He promised to our
forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.

Luke 1: 46–55

Nunc dimittis

Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace: according to Thy word.
For mine eyes have seen: Thy salvation;
Which Thou hast prepared: before the face of all people;
To be a light to lighten the Gentiles: and to be the glory of Thy people Israel.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.

Luke 2: 29–32

