

‘Videntes Stellam’

A concert of choral music for the season of Epiphany

Sung by

Viva la Musica

Chamber Choir

Registered charity no 1180705

Simon Lumby, conductor



Saturday 6th January 2024 at 7.30pm

at **Trinity Methodist Church Centre**
Royland Rd, Loughborough LE11 2EH

Programme.....£1.00



Viva la Musica was formed in 2002 by its first Music Director, David Necklen, and a group of singers who welcomed the challenges and experiences that being part of a small ensemble brings. It now sings a wide range of music from early to modern and from sacred to secular. Programmes, though sung largely in the a capella style, also include performances accompanied by small instrumental ensembles and organ.

As well as performing locally, the choir has travelled further afield, with concert weekends in Haworth in 2013, Tideswell in 2015, Worcester in 2016, Wadebridge in 2018 and a residency at Ripon Cathedral during the first weekend of September 2023.

Our concert engagements for the next twelve months are advertised at the end of this programme.

soprano: Jo Boddison, Sue Elliot, Ellie Stell, Gail Stiven,
Jeni Beasley, Patti Garlick, Jenny Kemp, Valerie Pinfield, Jeanne Simpson

alto: Eleri Bristow, Clare Ward-Campbell, Philippa England, Lis Muller

tenor: Michael Coxon, Neil Waddell, Simon Nicholls, Richard Thomas

bass: Simon Collins, John Thawley, Kevin Norman, James Ward-Campbell



If you would like to be notified of our concerts, please email info@vivalamusica.org.uk to be added to our mailing list or follow the QR code on your smartphone to go to our website.

The only son of a prosperous pharmaceuticals manufacturer, [Francis Poulenc](#) (7th January 1899-30th January 1963) was expected to follow his father into the family firm, and he was not allowed to enrol at a music college. Instead, he studied privately with the pianist Ricardo Viñes, who became his mentor after the composer's parents died, and first encouraged him to compose. [Poulenc](#) also made the acquaintance of Erik Satie, under whose tutelage he became one of a group of young composers known collectively as Les Six. [Poulenc](#) became known for his high spirits and irreverence; his earlier compositions include colourful orchestral works, songs, and ebullient, witty chamber pieces. He was also able to enjoy the busy social life and wild parties of 1920s Paris, and jazz was a strong influence on his writing.

However, apart from a single early work for unaccompanied choir ('Chanson à boire', 1922), [Poulenc](#) only began writing choral music in 1936, a key year in his musical development. As he found it difficult to compose in the hectic environs of Paris, he had taken to spending his summers in the south of France. During the summer of 1936, staying at Uzerche, he was horrified to hear about the sudden death of the composer Pierre-Octave Ferroud in a car accident in Hungary. Ferroud was just a year younger than [Poulenc](#), and the incident seemed to bring him face to face with mortality. He asked his friend Bernac to drive him to Rocamadour, a place of pilgrimage, where a small chapel held a statue in black wood of the Virgin Mary. Here he underwent a mystical experience that brought him back to the Catholic faith of his childhood. That same evening, he began to write his first religious choral piece, *Litanies à la Vierge Noire*, completing it within a week. This was the first of a remarkable series of sacred choral works that continued almost until his death in 1963: the G major Mass (1937), *Quatre motets pour un temps de Pénitence* (1938-39), *Exultate Deo* and *Salve Regina* (1941), *Quatre petites prières* (1948), *Stabat Mater* (1950), *Quatre motets pour le temps de Noël* (1951-52), *Ave verum corpus* (1952), *Gloria* and *Laudes de Saint-Antoine* (1959), and *Sept répons des ténèbres* (1961), his last major work. Speaking of his sacred music, [Poulenc](#) later said, 'I think I've put the best and most genuine part of myself into it', His 'peasant devotion', he called it, is 'distinctive and hereditary in me'.

Our concert tonight is built around the *Quatre Motets pour le temps de Noël*, composed between November 1951 and May 1952, a time when [Poulenc](#) was moving more into the world of opera. We perform them individually rather than as a group, and juxtapose them with the relevant plainsong melody and Renaissance settings of the same texts, trusting that this more thematic approach will throw up illuminating contrasts and similarities.

It seemed appropriate to finish with the angels glorifying the new-born Christ in the words of the *Gloria*, set by Thomas Tallis. Indulgent and anachronistic perhaps, but what magnificent music!

Programme

**O magnum mysterium,
et admirabile sacramentum,
ut animalia viderent Dominum
natum jacentem in praesepio.
Beata Virgo, cuius viscera meruerunt portare
Dominum Jesum Christum. Alleluia.**

*O great mystery and wondrous sacrament,
that animals should see the new-born Lord, lying in a manger.
Blessed is the Virgin whose womb
was worthy to bear Jesus Christ, the Lord. Alleluia.*



Plainchant - Matin Responsory for Christmas Day

Setting by **Tomas Louis de Victoria (1548 - 1611)** 4 part SATB

Victoria was born in Ávila and received his early music training in the Cathedral here. Aged just sixteen, he was sent to Rome to further his musical education, and may have had lessons from Palestrina, whose style he soon mastered. Victoria was ordained in 1575 but continued to compose throughout his life; his collected works were published in his lifetime, and amounted to eight substantial volumes. He returned to his native Spain in 1587, remaining there until his death in 1611.

Setting by **Francis Poulenc (1899 - 1963)** 4 part SATB

Poulenc finished this motet in April 1952, and dedicated it to Felix de Nobel, the conductor of possibly the first performance, which took place in Madrid with the Netherlands Chamber Choir. The opening is suitably dark and serious, in the key of B flat minor. The sopranos enter with the main melody after five bars, and the four parts build to the first climax of the piece, at the words 'jacentem in praesepio' ('lying in a manger'), as if Poulenc is trying to convey the intensity and shock of that first sight of the new-born Jesus. A brief recapitulation of the opening material leads, as in Victoria's setting of these words, to a calmer section in praise of the Virgin Mary, in which the tenor melody is supported by humming from the choir. This leads, after a pause, to the final section, which again develops much of the opening. The final 'jacentem' is marked fortissimo, and is thus the loudest point in the motet, but it is followed immediately by a hushed 'in praesepio', a tranquil ending which resolves the tension and emotion of Poulenc's setting.

Reading - Sonnet: On the birth of Jesus Christ by **Dr John Celes**

Quem vidistis pastores?

Dicite, annunciate nobis in terris quid apparuit?
Natum vidimus, et choros angelorum
collaudantes Dominum. Alleluia.

'Whom have you seen, shepherds?
Speak and proclaim to us – who has appeared on earth?'.
'We have seen a newborn child, and a choir of angels,
together praising the Lord. Alleluia'.

Plainchant - Matin Responsory for Christmas Eve

Setting by [Richard Dering \(1582 - 1630\)](#) 6 part SSATTB

Dering was an expatriate English musician who, because of his Roman Catholic faith, lived and worked in the Spanish-dominated South Netherlands. He most likely began life as a Protestant in England and converted to the Roman Catholic faith during or after a visit to Italy in his early thirties. By 1610 he had travelled to Italy, gaining a BMus in that year from Christ Church, Oxford. For four years from 1612 he travelled with the British ambassador to Venice, and in 1617 he became organist to the Community of English Benedictine nuns in Brussels. He returned to England in 1625 as Organist to the Catholic Queen Henrietta Maria and 'musician for the lutes and voices' to King Charles I.

Setting by [Hans Leo Hassler \(1564 - 1612\)](#) 4 part SATB

Hans received his early musical education from his father Isaac, an organist. In 1584 he became the first of many German composers to travel to Venice to pursue his studies there, becoming friendly with Giovanni Gabrieli; he took organ and composition lessons from Giovanni's uncle, Andrea. On his return to Germany, he worked for a wealthy banker, before becoming Kapellmeister in Nuremberg and Dresden.

Setting by [Francis Poulenc](#) 4 part SATB

'Quem vidistis pastores' was finished in Marseille in December 1951. Poulenc dedicated it to Simone Girard, organiser of the Société Avignonnaise de Concerts; writing to apprise her of this, he remarked that 'the way things are going ... it will be very lovely'. 'Unfortunately', he added, 'I am not as religious as I would like to be. Half of me remains completely the opposite. Though I am not totally impious, I am – alas! – as pious as a horse'. In this setting, the shepherds are asked twice what they have seen, answering that they have seen a choir of angels; they are then told to announce the birth of Christ. The motet opens with a restless, fast-running melody supported by humming from the choir. This perhaps imitates the repeated questioning by people eager for an answer. After just eight bars, the shepherds reply ('Natum vidimus'...), which builds gradually to a homophonic climax, in which they describe the choir of angels praising God. The second half of the motet begins with a wholehearted fortissimo, in which the shepherds are ordered to announce the birth of Christ. Poulenc then reworks some of the previous material, ending with the angels praising God in a fortissimo choral trumpet blast.

[Reading](#) - The Very First Christmas Day by [Brenda Thompson Davis](#)

Videntes stellam Magi gavisi sunt gaudio magno,
et intrantes domum
obtulerunt Domino aurum,
thus et myrrham.

Seeing the star, the Magi were filled with great joy.
Entering the house, they gave to the Lord
gold, frankincense and myrrh.



Plainchant - Matin Responsory for Epiphany

Setting by **Giovanni Gabrieli (1557 - 1612)** 4 part SATB

Little is known of Gabrieli's early life. It is likely that he was brought up by his uncle Andrea, before going to Munich to study with the great composer Orlando di Lasso. Returning to Venice, he became organist at St Mark's basilica then also at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco. His work at the former gained him a Europe-wide reputation, particularly for his pioneering use of small choirs (cori spezzati) and ensembles around the basilica to create dramatic musical effects.

Setting by **Francis Poulenc** 4 part SATB

'Videntes Stellam', completed in Aix-en-Provence in November 1951, depicts the joy of the Wise Men as the star leads them to the infant King. The writing is almost entirely homophonic (in chords), mostly in the warm key of A major. The mood is calm and gentle, and the motet begins with a magical *molto pianissimo* without the basses of the choir, evoking the calm image of the star hovering above. The entry of the basses, some fourteen bars later, suggests the arrival of the Magi at the stable to present their gifts. The rocking phrase 'Videntes stellam', is repeated eleven times throughout – compare 'Hodie Christus Natus Est', below, in which the words 'Hodie' and 'Gloria' also dominate the text rhythmically. Only twice does Poulenc disturb the tranquility of the Wise Men and their journey. When they produce myrrh from among the treasures they have brought, he reminds us, with a sudden, chilly chord, that myrrh symbolises death and thus foreshadows the Crucifixion. This is only a temporary darkening of the atmosphere, however, and the motet finishes as it began, in gentleness and warmth.

Reading - The Three Kings by **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow**

Hodie Christus natus est. Hodie Salvator apparuit.
Hodie in terra canunt angeli, laetantur archangeli;
exsultant iusti dicentes: 'Gloria in excelsis Deo. Alleluia'

Today Christ is born. Today the Saviour has appeared.
Today the angels sing on earth and the archangels rejoice.
The righteous are glad, and say: 'Glory to God in the highest. Alleluia'.



Plainchant - Magnificat Responory for Christmas Day Vespers

This chant survives in a Swiss manuscript of c.990, though it was probably in circulation long before then.

Setting by [Jan Pieterzoon Sweelinck \(1562-1621\)](#) 5 part SSATB

The Dutch composer Jan Pieterzoon Sweelinck succeeded his father as organist at the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam, where he spent his entire career. Immensely influential as a teacher, with Samuel Scheidt amongst his pupils, he was ultimately accorded the distinction—like J.S. Bach in Leipzig—of being honoured with burial inside the church with which he became synonymous.

Setting by [Hans Leo Hassler](#) 10 part SATTB/SATBarB

This joyful, celebratory motet was published in Hassler's collection *Cantiones Sacrae* in 1591, when he was just twenty-seven. Set for a double choir in ten parts, its texture is rich. Like much music of this time, the writing is highly instrumental, and the ten parts might easily be – and no doubt were – doubled by a consort of sackbuts and cornets. The motet starts seriously in G minor, but moves increasingly to brighter major keys, in keeping with the mood of celebration. Throughout, Hassler alternates the principal words of the text, *Hodie Christus natus est*, with Alleluias in the dancing triple time which so many Renaissance composers used for the angels' song. Word-painting is not easy with this text, but the running semi-quaver passages on 'canunt' ('they sing') suggest the angels are singing joyfully and with a flourish. Towards the end, a dramatic general pause heralds the magnificent Gloria, sung by all ten parts, but the motet finishes with seventeen bars of lighter, rocking Alleluias, as the angels praise the new-born Jesus.

Setting by [Francis Poulenc](#) 4 part SATB

This motet was finished in Paris in May 1952. In contrast to 'Videntes Stellam', this is a joyous, lively carol-like celebration, in which the faithful respond to the news of Christ's birth with unconfined exuberance. Unlike the other three Christmas motets, this has no narrative thread: it is simply forty-seven bars of static praise and joy, a series of short, sometimes even abrupt and dissonant 'utterances', reflecting the exclamatory nature of the original text. The dominant fanfare-like motif is introduced in the first bar by the altos alone, and reappears many more times in different rhythmic variations. None of these motifs is longer than two bars, creating an excited disjointedness which contrasts tellingly with the calm beauty and fluency of 'Videntes stellam' which precedes it.

Reading - Madonna and Child by [Gerald Bullett](#)

Gloria from the 'Missa puer nobis' - [Thomas Tallis \(c.1505 - 1585\)](#) 7 part SSAATBB

Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax
hominibus bonae voluntatis. Laudamus te,
benedicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus
te. Gratias agimus tibi, propter magnam
gloriam tuam. Domine Deus, Rex coelestis.
Deus Pater omnipotens. Domine fili
unigenite, Jesu Christe. Domine Deus,
Agnus Dei, Filius Patris. Qui tollis peccata
mundi, miserere nobis. Qui tollis peccata
mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram.
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere
nobis. Quoniam tu solus Sanctus, tu solus
Dominus, tu solus altissimus, Jesu Christe
cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris.
Amen.

*Glory to God in the highest and on earth,
peace, goodwill toward men. We praise thee,
we bless thee, we worship thee, we glorify
thee. We give thanks to thee for thy great
glory. Lord God, King of Heaven, God the
Father Almighty. O Lord, the only begotten
Son of the Father, Jesus Christ. Lord God,
Lamb of God, Son of the Father. Thou who
bears the sins of the world, have mercy upon
us. Thou who bears the sins of the world, hear
our prayer. Thou who sits at the right hand of
the Father, have mercy upon us. For thou only
art Holy, thou only art the Lord, thou only art
the most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy
Spirit in the glory of God the Father. Amen.*

Little is known about Tallis's early life, and no record of him exists before 1531. Though at heart a Catholic, he survived the religious controversies of the age, and served four successive monarchs from Henry VIII to Elizabeth I.

He was briefly at Waltham Abbey, before it was dissolved in 1540, then at the Chapel Royal and the Royal Palace of Placentia, in Greenwich. At some stage, he had taught his great contemporary William Byrd, and in 1575 Queen Elizabeth I granted the two of them the monopoly for printing polyphonic music in England, in any language.

As known Catholics, they did not prosper, however, and poor sales led to a petition to Elizabeth for further support. Shortly after this, Tallis may have given up composing altogether: no manuscripts exist in the last ten years of his life.

The Missa Puer natus est nobis is one of Tallis's most complex works, composed in December 1545, possibly as an oblique compliment to Mary I, thought (wrongly) to be pregnant. Ornate and ceremonial, and scored unusually in seven parts, the 'Gloria' presents a tapestry of parts, all woven around the Tenors, who sing the cantus firmus (plainsong melody) throughout.

[Refreshments will be served at the end of tonight's concert](#)

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We would like to thank the *Viva* friends whose financial
support enables us to hold our programme of concerts.

*Our thanks to Nora Birch, Paul Muller, Karen Seymour
(and all our friends who wish to remain anonymous)*

Simon Lumby is a conductor, tenor, organist, and pianist of some noted versatility. In a time of ever-increasing specialisation, Simon enjoys being thought of as something of a polymath, bringing a wide range of experience and influences to his music-making.

Simon was born in Birmingham and studied organ with Andrew Fletcher before moving to study at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester having been a junior student at the Royal Academy of Music in London.



In 1993, Simon was awarded First Prize in the International Young Organist Competition, held in Plymouth, for his performance of Bach's First Trio Sonata and 'Litanies' by Jehan Alain. Organ recitals have included the Cathedrals of St Paul's London, Hereford, Leicester, Coventry, Birmingham Oratory, Salisbury, Lichfield and Liverpool, the Abbeys of Westminster and Ampleforth, St. Giles' Cripplegate, and St. Bride's Fleet Street. Other concerts of note have included the opening recital of the Harrison Organ at the Community of the Resurrection in Mirfield and several Battle of the Organs with the late and great flamboyant American virtuoso, Carlo Curley. Simon has been featured on both Classic FM and Radio 3.

Simon was ordained in the Church of England and spent many happy years as Parish Priest of Saint Aidan's in Leicester during which time he recorded his first CD ('Loud Organs his glory...') which met with both popular and critical acclaim and went on to record a series of videos with Shea Lolin featuring, among other instruments, the new organ put into Saint Aidan's Church. One such video, having been seen by more than 50,000 people was considered to have 'gone viral'! Simon enjoys recording and is excited to be now able to publish these on his YouTube Channel. Most recent recordings include 'Beloved Bach' - a series of YouTube video releases (one per week for the whole year) of Bach organ music, recorded at the Hauptwerk midi-console that Simon commissioned in 2021. This series of videos has received more than 100,000 views and Simon now has over 8000 followers to his channel.

Simon is in demand as a singer and choral conductor. As a tenor soloist, he has sung with most of the major symphony orchestras in the UK including the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Hallé, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, the Philharmonia Orchestra, the Northern Chamber Orchestra and the Manchester Camerata. He has also appeared with some of the leading period instrument ensembles including the English Concert and most recently (with the Leicestershire Chorale conducted by Tom Williams), Fretwork.

Simon has also been featured in recent concerts with the Northern Lights Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Adam Johnson and the first performance of Martin Ellerby's 'Mass of the Winged Lion' with internationally renowned concert pianist Benjamin Frith.

In his limited spare time Simon pursues a wide range of other interests. He is a keen traveller and has spent much time in continental Europe. His love and study of French 20th century sacred, vocal and organ music has led him to be a keen student of the French language while engaging in more study in this area.

Dates for the coming year:

Saturday 4th May 2024

Choral Evensong at Derby Cathedral
at 5.30pm

Music by Palestrina and Rachmaninov

Free Entrance

but there would be a retiring collection
in aid of the work of
Derby Cathedral

Saturday 5th October 2024

Concert at St Andrew's Jarrom Street, LE2 7DH
at 7.30pm

'Audacious-a-capella'

Music by Finzi, Schumann, Debussy & Monteverdi

Tickets - £12.50 (available on the door
or in advance

from www.vivalamusica.org.uk)

Saturday 18th May 2024

Concert at St George's Ticknall, DE73 7JU
at 4.30pm

'Now is the month of Maying.....'

Music by Finzi, Moeran, Pearsall & Lauridsen

Tickets - £12.50 (available on the door
or in advance

from www.vivalamusica.org.uk

Sunday 12th January 2025

Concert at Trinity Methodist Church Centre
at 7.00pm

Shepherds, animals, kings and infanticide

Music by Leighton, Chilcott, Gabrielli & Dove

Tickets - £12.50 (available on the door
or in advance

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Choral Evensong at Derby Cathedral
sung by *Viva la Musica* Chamber Choir

Saturday 4th May 2024

at 5.30pm

Introit:

‘Slava v vishnikh Bogu’
(All night Vigil)
Sergei Rachmaninov

Responses:

William Smith

Magnificat:

Quarti Toni (impares)
Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina

Nunc Dimittis:

a 8 voci
Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina

Anthem:

‘Blazhen muzh’
(All night Vigil)
Sergei Rachmaninov

Derby Cathedral
18-19 Iron Gate,
Derby DE1 3GP

Viva la Musica chamber choir

www.vivalamusica.org.uk