

CANTORUM CHOIR PRESENTS

GREAT BRITTEN



Saturday 21st March, 7pm

Holy Trinity Church,
Cookham, SL6 9SP

www.cantorumchoir.org.uk



Stained glass image courtesy of St Nicolas Church Taplow



Patron: Ralph Allwood MBE • Music Director: Oliver Gooch
 Associate Music Director: Robert Jones



Cantorum Choir is a dedicated and talented choir of approximately forty voices, based in Cookham, Berkshire. The ensemble boasts a wide-ranging repertoire and performs professional-quality concerts throughout the year. Under the directorship of Oliver Gooch, it has continued to earn itself a reputation as one of the leading chamber choirs in the area.

SOPRANOS

- Alex Cope*
- Kate Cromar
- Louise Evans
- Kirsty Janusz*
- Jenny Knight
- Hilary Monaghan
- Rebekah Morton**
- Marilyn Rogers
- Joy Strzelecki
- Deborah Templing
- Pippa Wallace

ALTOS

- Celia Armstrong
- Sarah Barton**
- Sally Brooke
- Jill Burton
- Catherine Formstone
- Anne Glover
- Sandy Johnstone
- Angela Plant*
- Lorna Sykes
- Chiu Sung
- Gill Tucker

TENORS

- Antony Dowlatshahi*
- Philip Martineau
- Malcolm Stork**

BASSES

- John Buck
- Arthur Cresswell
- Nick Plant
- Ed Millard
- Paul Seddon**
- Ben Styles
- James Simpson*
- Paul Reid
- Julian Yolland

Young Nicolas - Finn Miall • **Nicolas** - Ben Alden

Pickled Boys - Alexander Gooch, Monty Knight, Henry Smith

Gallery Choir - Paulina Voices (directed by Heidi Pegler)

SOLOISTS FROM THE CHOIR * Hymn to St Cecilia ** Rejoice in the Lamb

PAULINA VOICES Chelsea Zhang, Arelle Chambers, Rebecca Ellam, Sandra Sankoorikal, Amalia Petersen, Amelia Ewing, Raphaela Paradise, Lola Ajala, Sofia Gibbs, Claudia Membery, Romilly Greenwood, Megha Agarwal, Claudia Sobti, Sania Wadhwa, Sophie Morrow Nifemi Aluko, Emilia Muzzi-Hall, Veronica Yellin, Yuvika Khare, Ivy Fu, Keisha Kwok

ORCHESTRA

- David Juritz leader
- Dimitar Burovviolin 2
- Tim Grant..... viola
- Laura Ansteecello

- Sean Lawdouble bass
- Andrew Plant & John Cuthbert.. piano duet
- Robert Jonesorgan
- Iolo Edwards & Ben Bishoppercussion

AN ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913-1976)

Jubilate in Eb (1934)

Hymn to St Cecilia Op 27

Folksongs

O can ye sew cushions
Tom Bowling (Dibdin, realised Britten)
Come you not from Newcastle

Rejoice in the Lamb Op 30

I Opening Hymn

Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues (chorus)

II Animistic Praise

For I will consider my cat, Jeoffry (treble solo)
For the Mouse is a creature of great personal valour (alto solo)
For the flowers are great blessings (tenor solo)

III Lament

For I am under the same accusation with my Saviour (chorus)

IV Mystic Praise

For H is a spirit, and therefore he is God (bass solo)
For the instruments are by their rhimes (chorus)

V Closing Hymn

For at that time malignity ceases (chorus)
Hallelujah from the heart of God (chorus)

INTERVAL

St Nicolas Op 42

I Introduction

II The Birth of Nicolas

III Nicolas devotes himself to God

IV He Journeys to Palestine

V Nicolas Comes to Myra and is Chosen Bishop

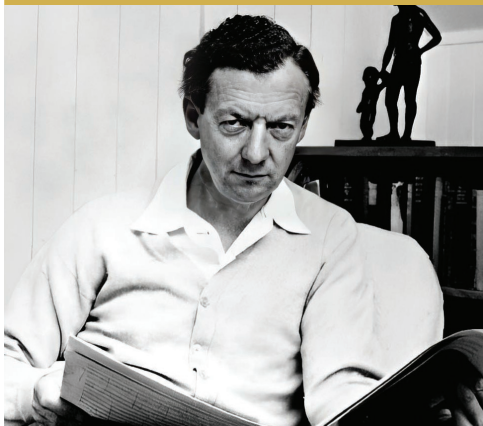
VI Nicolas from Prison

VII Nicolas and the Pickled Boys

VIII His Piety and Marvellous Works

IX The Death of Nicolas

NOTES



This evening's programme celebrates the extraordinary choral legacy of Benjamin Britten in an anniversary year that invites renewed reflection on his life, his voice, and his unique contribution to British music. Few composers have shaped the soundscape of twentieth-century choral writing as profoundly as Britten. Rooted in the English tradition yet unmistakably modern, his music combines luminous clarity with emotional directness, technical brilliance with an unflinching sensitivity to text. The choral works heard tonight — *Jubilate in E-flat*, *Hymn to St Cecilia*, *Rejoice in the Lamb*, and *St Nicolas* — span different moments in his career and reveal the remarkable range of his imagination.

Britten's affinity for the human voice was central to his musical identity. From early childhood he was drawn to singing, accompanying services at his local church and later developing a lifelong partnership with the tenor Peter Pears. His choral works are never merely decorative settings; they are dramatic, psychological, and often deeply personal responses to words. In this anniversary year, we celebrate not only a master craftsman but also a composer who believed passionately in the power of music to communicate, to question, and to bring communities together.

Jubilate in E flat, composed in 1934 and

unpublished as juvenilia during his lifetime, was written as a companion to the earlier *Te Deum in C*. Where the *Te Deum* radiates ceremonial grandeur, the *Jubilate* offers buoyancy and warmth. Scored originally for choir and organ, it opens with an atmosphere of confident joy. Britten's characteristic clarity of texture allows the text from Psalm 100 — "O be joyful in the Lord" — to shine through. The organ writing sparkles, sometimes dancing lightly beneath the choir, sometimes underpinning it with noble strength. Particularly striking is Britten's gift for pacing: the music alternates between exuberance and moments of reflective tenderness, reminding us that joy in worship can encompass both brilliance and intimacy. The final doxology builds to a resplendent conclusion, affirming praise not as a fleeting emotion but as a sustaining force.

If the *Jubilate* reveals Britten's skill in liturgical celebration, *Hymn to St Cecilia* (1942) shows his artistry at its most refined and intimate. Written during his sea voyage back to Britain from the United States in the midst of the Second World War, the piece sets a text by W. H. Auden, Britten's close friend and collaborator. St Cecilia, patron saint of music, becomes in Auden's poem a symbol of artistic purity and spiritual resilience. The work unfolds in three sections framed by a recurring invocation: "Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions." Britten's setting is both playful and ethereal. Rapid, dancing passages evoke childlike wonder; hushed harmonies suggest reverence and mystery. The central section, with its sinuous melodic lines and subtle harmonic shifts, demonstrates Britten's extraordinary ear for colour. He paints Auden's words with precision yet never lapses into mere illustration. Instead, the music seems to grow organically from the poetry, as though sound and language were inseparable. In the final pages, the invocation returns transformed — radiant, serene, and deeply consoling. In a time of global conflict, Britten created a work that reaffirms the redemptive and unifying power of art.

Earlier in his career, Britten composed one of his most exuberant and unconventional choral works: *Rejoice in the Lamb* (1943). Commissioned for the fiftieth anniversary of St Matthew's Church, Northampton, its text by the eighteenth-century poet Christopher Smart, drawn from his extraordinary poem *Jubilate Agno*, written during a period of confinement in an asylum. Smart's words are visionary, eccentric, and profoundly spiritual — celebrating God through images of animals, nature, and personal devotion. Britten responded with music of dazzling originality. Each section has its own character: playful, contemplative, humorous, or majestic. The famous setting of "For I will consider my Cat Jeoffry" is tender and affectionate, capturing both the innocence and the quiet dignity of Smart's vision. In contrast, the vigorous choral declamations of "Let Nimrod, the mighty hunter" burst forth with rhythmic vitality. The organ part plays a crucial dramatic role, sometimes providing mischievous commentary (as in the accompaniment to the lovable "For the mouse is a creature") and sometimes underpinning the choir with solemn grandeur. What unites this kaleidoscopic work is Britten's deep empathy for the outsider. Smart's unconventional spirituality resonated with Britten's own sense of being different in a conformist society. Yet the piece is anything but insular: it is a joyful affirmation that all creation — human and animal, rational and eccentric — can join in praise.

The largest work in tonight's programme, *St Nicolas* (1948), was written for the centenary celebrations of Lancing College. Conceived as a cantata for tenor soloist, choir, children and small instrumental ensemble, it tells the story of St Nicolas, the fourth-century Bishop of Myra, whose legend has inspired centuries of devotion. Britten's approach is theatrical and immediate. Rather than presenting a distant saint in stained-glass splendour, he gives us a vivid human journey: a child dedicated to faith, a young

man seeking purpose, a leader confronting persecution, and finally a figure of compassion and courage. The tenor soloist assumes the role of Nicolas himself, narrating and embodying his spiritual pilgrimage. The choral writing ranges widely: energetic crowd scenes, reflective hymns, and moments of communal participation in which the audience is invited to join. Particularly moving is the hymn "God be glorified," which radiates warmth and inclusivity. In the storm interlude, Britten's orchestral writing becomes vividly pictorial, while the final movement brings the community together in a prayerful farewell that feels both intimate and universal. Tonight, we welcome Paulina Voices, girls from St Paul's Girls' School, alongside children from our own community, including Finn Miall, whose grandfather founded Cantorum forty years ago.

Across these works we encounter recurring themes: celebration and contemplation, individuality and community, innocence and experience. Britten's music never simplifies faith or joy; instead, it acknowledges complexity while insisting on hope. His harmonic language, at once accessible and searching, speaks directly to performers and listeners alike. He challenges choirs with intricate rhythms and luminous textures, yet always rewards them with moments of profound beauty. In marking this anniversary, we honour a composer who reshaped the possibilities of choral expression. His works continue to resonate because they address fundamental human concerns — belonging, conscience, wonder, and praise. Whether in the radiant strains of the *Jubilate*, the mystical poise of *Hymn to St Cecilia*, the visionary exuberance of *Rejoice in the Lamb*, or the communal storytelling of *St Nicolas*, Britten invites us to listen deeply and to sing wholeheartedly. This evening's performance stands as both tribute and renewal: a celebration of Britten's enduring voice, and an affirmation that his music still speaks — urgently, tenderly, and joyfully — to our own time. **Oliver Gooch**

TEXTS

Hymn to St. Cecilia

Words by W. H. Auden (1907-1973)

In a garden shady this holy lady
With reverent cadence and subtle psalm,
Like a black swan as death came on
Poured forth her song in perfect calm:
And by ocean's margin this innocent virgin
Constructed an organ to enlarge her prayer,
And notes tremendous from her great engine
Thundered out on the Roman air.
Blonde Aphrodite rose up excited,
Moved to delight by the melody,
White as an orchid she rode quite naked
In an oyster shell on top of the sea;
At sounds so entrancing the angels dancing
Came out of their trance into time again,
And around the wicked in Hell's abysses
The huge flame flickered and eased their pain.
Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
To all musicians, appear and inspire:
Translated Daughter, come down and startle
Composing mortals with immortal fire.

I cannot grow;
I have no shadow
To run away from,
I only play.
I cannot err;
There is no creature
Whom I belong to,
Whom I could wrong.
I am defeat
When it knows it
Can now do nothing
By suffering.
All you lived through,
Dancing because you
No longer need it
For any deed.
I shall never be Different. Love me.
Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
To all musicians, appear and inspire:

Translated Daughter, come down and startle
Composing mortals with immortal fire.
O ear whose creatures cannot wish to fall,
O calm of spaces unafraid of weight,
Where Sorrow is herself, forgetting all
The gaucheness of her adolescent state,
Where Hope within the altogether strange
From every outworn image is released,
And Dread born whole and normal like a beast
Into a world of truths that never change:
Restore our fallen day; O re-arrange.
O dear white children casual as birds,
Playing among the ruined languages,
So small beside their large confusing words,
So gay against the greater silences
Of dreadful things you did: O hang the head,
Impetuous child with the tremendous brain,
O weep, child, weep, O weep away the stain,
Lost innocence who wished your lover dead,
Weep for the lives your wishes never led.
O cry created as the bow of sin
Is drawn across our trembling violin.
O weep, child, weep, O weep away the stain.
O law drummed out by hearts against the still
Long winter of our intellectual will.
That what has been may never be again.
O flute that throbs with the thanksgiving
breath
Of convalescents on the shores of death.
O bless the freedom that you never chose.
O trumpets that unguarded children blow
About the fortress of their inner foe.
O wear your tribulation like a rose.
Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
To all musicians, appear and inspire:
Translated Daughter, come down and startle
Composing mortals with immortal fire.

Rejoice in the Lamb

Text from the poem *Jubilate Agno* by
Christopher Smart (1722-1771)

Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues;
Give the glory to the Lord,
And the Lamb.

Nations, and languages,
And every Creature
In which is the breath of Life.
Let man and beast appear before him,
And magnify his name together.
Let Nimrod, the mighty hunter,
Bind a leopard to the altar
And consecrate his spear to the Lord.
Let Ishmail dedicate a tyger,
And give praise for the liberty
In which the Lord has let him at large.
Let Balaam appear with an ass,
And bless the Lord his people
And his creatures for a reward eternal.
Let Daniel come forth with a lion,
And praise God with all his might
Through faith in Christ Jesus.
Let Ithamar minister with a chamois,
And bless the name of Him
That cloatheth the naked.
Let Jakim with the satyr
Bless God in the dance,
Dance, dance, dance.
Let David bless with the bear
The beginning of victory to the Lord,
To the Lord the perfection of excellence.
Hallelujah, hallelujah,
Hallelujah for the heart of God,
And from the hand of the artist inimitable,
And from the echo of the heavenly harp
In sweetness magnifical and mighty.
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah.
For I will consider my cat Jeoffry.
For he is the servant of the living God.
Duly and daily serving him.
For at the first glance
Of the glory of God in the East
He worships in his way.
For this is done by wreathing his body
Seven times round with elegant quickness.
For he knows that God is his saviour.
For God has bless'd him
In the variety of his movements.
For there is nothing sweeter
Than his peace when at rest.

For I am possessed of a cat,
Surpassing in beauty,
From whom I take occasion
To bless Almighty God.
For the Mouse is a creature
Of great personal valour.
For this is a true case--
Cat takes female mouse,
Male mouse will not depart,
but stands threat'ning and daring.
If you will let her go,
I will engage you,
As prodigious a creature as you are.
For the Mouse is a creature
Of great personal valour.
For the Mouse is of
An hospitable disposition.
For the flowers are great blessings.
For the flowers are great blessings.
For the flowers have their angels,
Even the words of God's creation.
For the flower glorifies God
And the root parries the adversary.
For there is a language of flowers.
For the flowers are peculiarly
The poetry of Christ.
For I am under the same accusation
With my Savior,
For they said,
He is besides himself.
For the officers of the peace
Are at variance with me,
And the watchman smites me
With his staff.
For the silly fellow, silly fellow,
Is against me,
And belongeth neither to me
Nor to my family.
For I am in twelve hardships,
But he that was born of a virgin
Shall deliver me out of all,
Shall deliver me out of all.
For H is a spirit
And therefore he is God.
For K is king

And therefore he is God.
 For L is love
 And therefore he is God.
 For M is musick
 And therefore he is God.
 And therefore he is God.
 For the instruments are by their rhimes,
 For the shawm rhimes are lawn fawn and the like.
 For the shawm rhimes are moon boon and the like.
 For the harp rhimes are sing ring and the like.
 For the harp rhimes are ring string and the like.
 For the cymbal rhimes are bell well and the like.
 For the cymbal rhimes are toll soul and the like.
 For the flute rhimes are tooth youth and the like.
 For the flute rhimes are suit mute and the like.
 For the bassoon rhimes are pass class and the like.

For the dulcimer rhimes are grace place and the like.
 For the clarinet rhimes are clean seen and the like.
 For the trumpet rhimes are sound bound and the like.
 For the trumpet of God is a blessed intelligence
 And so are all the instruments in Heav'n.
 For God the Father Almighty plays upon the harp
 Of stupendous magnitude and melody.
 For at that time malignity ceases
 And the devils themselves are at peace.
 For this time is perceptible to man
 By a remarkable stillness and serenity of soul.
 Hallelujah, hallelujah,
 Hallelujah for the heart of God,
 And from the hand of the artist inimitable,
 And from the echo of the heavenly harp
 In sweetness magnifical and mighty.
 Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah.

V Nicolas comes to Myra and is chosen Bishop

All people that on earth do dwell,
 Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice!
 Him serve with fear, His praise forth tell,
 Come ye before Him and rejoice.

O enter then His gates with praise,
 Approach with joy His courts unto,
 Praise, laud and bless His name always,
 For it is seemly so to do.

For why? The Lord our God is good:
 His mercy is for ever sure;
 His truth at all times firmly stood,
 And shall from age to age endure.
 Amen.

IX The Death of Nicolas

God moves in a mysterious way
 His wonders to perform;
 He plants His footsteps in the sea,
 And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
 Of never failing skill
 He treasures up his bright designs,
 And works his sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
 The clouds ye so much dread
 Are big with mercy, and shall break
 In blessings on your head. Amen!

FRIENDS OF CANTORUM

We are delighted to report that we have recently inaugurated a 'Friends of Cantorum' scheme. This group has been set up for our much-appreciated loyal supporters, who like to attend most of our concerts throughout the year. For more details, as well as a list of membership benefits, please email friendsofcantorum@gmail.com



OLIVER GOOCH



BEN ALDEN



ANDREW PLANT

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OLIVER GOOCH (MUSIC DIRECTOR)

Oliver has enjoyed collaborations in recent seasons with the LSO, Philharmonia, BBC Symphony, Hallé, London Philharmonic, Queensland Symphony, Tasmanian Symphony, Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, New York Sinfonietta, Orchestra I Pomeriggi Milano and a debut recording with the RTÉ NSO. He balances orchestral engagements with extensive work in opera, formerly as assistant to Sir Charles Mackerras (Glyndebourne) and Sir Antonio Pappano (ROH).

As Associate Conductor (JPYAP) at the Royal Opera House he conducted their debut tour of Australia, winning a Helpmann Award. As a regular guest conductor with Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, his recent engagements in the Royal Albert Hall include *Madama Butterfly*, *La bohème* and *Carmen*.

He was Founding Artistic Director of Opera East, most recently premiering O'Regan's *Heart of Darkness* at the Linbury Theatre; and Artistic Director of Iford Arts since 2005.

Oliver received his training at Cambridge University, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and the National Opera Studio. He studied conducting at Tanglewood with Seiji Ozawa and was nominated for a South Bank award and a Creative Scotland award. In 2012, he was elected a Clore Leadership

Fellow by the Clore Foundation, elected Fellow of the Royal Society in Arts in 2014; and in 2018, he was appointed Director of the Blyth Centre for Music and Visual Arts at Imperial College London and, closer to home, Cantorum Choir!

BEN ALDEN (TENOR)

Ben enjoys a busy career as a soloist and ensemble singer, with a repertoire spanning over a millennium. After studying Modern Languages at Durham University, he pursued postgraduate vocal training as an ABRSM scholar at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, studying under Peter Alexander Wilson. Now under the tutelage of Raymond Connell, Ben is also a Lay Clerk at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle.

A passionate interpreter of English song, Ben's recital highlights with accompanist Andrew Plant include Britten's *Winter Words* and *Canticle II* at the Sheremetev Palace in St Petersburg, and the premiere of Joseph Phibbs' *Shades of Night* at the Penkhull Festival (later recorded for NMC Recordings). In May 2025, Ben and Andrew launched their first album of English song, entitled "When I was one-and-twenty" - available on all online platforms, and for physical purchase via baldensinging@gmail.com

Ben is in demand as a concert soloist across the UK and Europe, and has featured

as a soloist for Sir John Eliot Gardiner with The Monteverdi Choir and The Constellation Choir in many distinguished venues. Other notable performances include Monteverdi's *Vespers* at The Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, Vaughan Williams' *Serenade to Music* at Cadogan Hall, and the role of Pilate in Pärt's *Passio* at the Laeiszhalle, Hamburg. An accomplished and versatile ensemble singer, he tours internationally with the UK's leading choirs and vocal ensembles, appearing on an extensive range of broadcasts, recordings, film and gaming soundtracks. Ben appeared as a featured Artist in Series 7 of *Endeavour* (ITV).

Ben's recent performances as a soloist, include Mozart *Requiem*, Salieri *Requiem*, Beethoven *Mass in C*, and Haydn *Harmoniemesse*. He can be heard singing Evangelist in Bach's *St John Passion* next Saturday at St Peter's Church, Staines with Spelthorne Choral Society.

ANDREW PLANT (PIANO)

Andrew Plant studied the piano in London with Christopher Elton, and at the University of Leeds, and was awarded his doctorate in musicology from the University of Birmingham, where he was a visiting lecturer. He was based for almost a decade at the Britten-Pears Foundation, from where he inaugurated a long-standing and particularly fruitful partnership with counter-tenor James Bowman, resulting in many recitals throughout the UK, in France and Slovenia, and recordings for Signum and NMC. He has also accompanied Michael Chance, Lynne Dawson, and James Gilchrist. His collaboration with Ben Alden has engendered numerous recitals in the UK, and – together with counter tenor Stephen Burrows – concerts of Purcell and Britten in St Petersburg. Their first recording was launched at the English Music Festival last year, and a second is

being planned. Committed to new music, Andrew has given the world premieres of several early songs by Britten, and works by Peter Maxwell Davies, Ivor Gurney, Colin Matthews, Joseph Phibbs, Giles Swayne, and others.

Andrew has written studies of Christian Darnton, John Ireland and Alan Ridout, and is now editing James Bowman's memoirs for publication, and writing a study of Gordon Crosse. In conjunction with synaesthete artist Jane Mackay, he has just completed a volume of commentaries on Britten's music, to be launched at the Aldeburgh Festival in June, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Britten's death.

PAULINA VOICES

Paulina Voices was created by Heidi Pegler in 2012 and is an auditioned chamber choir of upper voices from St Paul's Girls' School. The choir has performed at many of London's leading venues including the Royal Albert Hall, Cadogan Hall, Smith Square, St Paul's Cathedral and St Martin-in-the-Fields.. They are featured on two CD's: *The Coming of Christ* – music by Gustav Holst with the City of London Choir (Hilary Davan Wetton) and John Gardner – *Cantata for Christmas*, on which they can be heard singing *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day* and *Angels from the realms of glory*, both written by Gardner for the choir of SPGS.

The choir specialises in performing the women's voice parts in Holst's *The Planets* which is so closely associated with the school.

Paulina Voices have also sung for many charity events including the Stroke Association and Save the Children. Many students go on to study singing to a high level and can be found in the choirs at Oxford and Cambridge as well as various opera houses around the globe.

*Heidi Pegler - Deputy Director of Music,
St Paul's Girls' School*



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