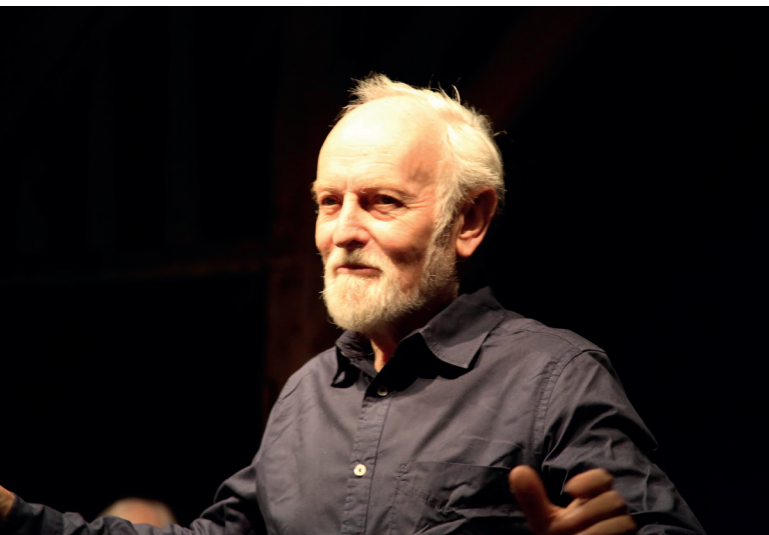


Christmas Concert

heav'n-ly love, with news of heav'n-ly love

St Michael and All Angels Church, Great Torrington

Welcome...



There is nothing like being in a choir. Absolutely nothing comes close. You bring your little singing voice, which you are a bit embarrassed about, and become a vital part of a huge and glorious sound, or a subtle communal whisper. You have to concentrate, so whatever is on your mind can be ignored for a while. You have to rely on the people on either side of you, who in their turn are relying on you. You improve. You become part of a tribe, who all have each other's backs. You entertain audiences, and help them forget the cares of the world. And you make friends. There is nothing — absolutely nothing — like being in a choir. So hurrah for the Winkleigh Singers, as they approach middle age!

Honorary Patron

In May 1984, Roland Smith put up a card in Winkleigh Post Office inviting anyone interested to join together to sing madrigals and part songs. It wasn't long before those who met regularly got the urge to perform and a Christmas Concert at Winkleigh Church was the result. Now, here we are forty years later at the Winkleigh Singers 40th Anniversary Christmas Concert. Welcome!

This really is a significant event and we are delighted that, thanks to generous supporters and friends of the choir, we have been able to commission a new work to celebrate the event. We are delighted that Alison Willis, who has written the Fantasia, is with us for its world premiere, and we are equally delighted to welcome the Landkey Carollers, custodians of the carols on which the Fantasia is based. I am sure you will be fascinated to hear the carols in their original and re-worked versions.

In the first half of the evening, as well as the Fantasia, there will be some popular Christmas music which we hope you will enjoy. The second half is Haydn's *St Nicholas Mass* which celebrates the Festive season and we are very lucky to be joined by four young soloists who are in the early years of their musical careers.

We had hoped that Gus Orchard who accompanied the very first Christmas Concert would be able to join us but unfortunately, due to family illness, he is unavailable. We are most grateful therefore to Tom Bayliss, our regular rehearsal accompanist, for stepping into the breach tonight. Thank you, Tom.

We very much hope you enjoy tonight's music and thank you for supporting the choir on this very special occasion.

Tim Allen

Chair of the Winkleigh Singers trustees.

Acknowledgements

St Michael's Church, Great Torrington.

Loan of Haydn scores: Lutterworth & District Choral Society.

Fantasia scores: Composers Edition.

Programme compiled by Roland Smith. Programme notes acknowledged with (MM) are from the Music Bank of Making Music.

Please note that photography (with or without flash) and/or recording of any sort during the performance is not permitted without the prior consent of The Winkleigh Singers.

The right is reserved to substitute artists and to vary the programme for reasons beyond our control, although these details were correct at the time of going to print.

To ensure that everyone is able to enjoy the performance without interruption, please make sure your mobile phone is either turned off or set to silent. Thank you.

Programme

Hymn to the Virgin

Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)

Hodie Christus natus est

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562–1621)

Landkey Carols (performed by Landkey Carollers)

Traditional

Virga Jesse floruit

Anton Bruckner (1824–1896)

In dulci jubilo

Old German tune arr. Robert Lucas Pearsall (1795–1856)

O Holy Night

Adolphe Adam (1803–1856) arr. Sir John Rutter (b. 1945)

The Christmas Gift

Gordon Langford (1930–2017)

Fantasia on the Christmas Carols from Landkey
(world premiere)

Alison Willis (b. 1971)

Interval

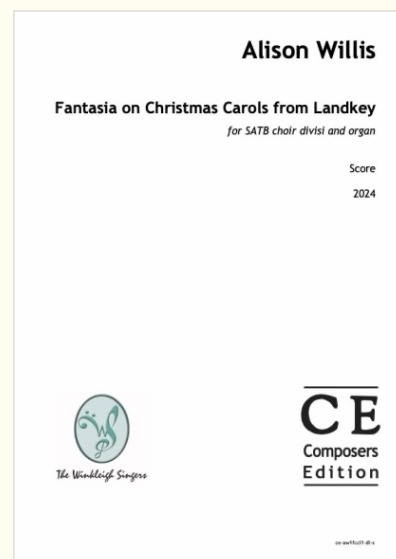
Missa Sancti Nicolai

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809)

Kyrie – Gloria – Credo – Sanctus – Benedictus – Agnus Dei

Composers Edition is extremely proud to have brought The Winkleigh Singers and Alison Willis together for the commissioning of *Fantasia on Christmas Carols from Landkey* and looks forward to helping singers and audiences far and wide to enjoy this special festive work.

All best seasons greetings!



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Programme notes

Benjamin Britten: *A Hymn to the Virgin*

A Hymn to the Virgin has a first and last place in Benjamin Britten's musical life. It was one of his earliest works and almost certainly his earliest piece of church music, written at the age of 16 when he was undergoing a spell in the sick room at Gresham's School, Lowestoft. It was also one of the two works heard at his funeral in Aldeburgh, the last to be sung in the presence of his mortal remains. It is a gentle piece, full of innocence, set to anonymous words taken from the Oxford Book of English Verse. Scored for double mixed choir, there are antiphonal effects as each choir sings the alternate English and Latin lines in turn. Written in 1930, the first performance was given in January 1931 by the Lowestoft Musical Society. Slight revisions were made to the work in 1934.

Programme note provided by John Dalton, September 2012 (MM)

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck: *Hodie Christus natus est*

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck spent most of his life, from the age of 15 as organist of Oude Kerk in Amsterdam, where his recitals were well known for his flamboyant improvisations. This is reflected in his sparkling and joyous setting of *Hodie Christus natus est* with its bell-like "Noe"s.

Today Christ was born, today on earth the angels sing, the archangels rejoice, the righteous rejoice, proclaiming: glory to God in the highest, alleluia, alleluia, nowell, nowell, nowell.

Landkey Carols



The Landkey Carols were first sung just over 100 years ago but then the tradition died out until 2018 when a group of Landkey residents decided to save them. All the carols were collected by Landkey local John

Darch who led the group for many years. Some of the carols were written by a villager called Gulley and we have some works within our library that can't be heard elsewhere. Historically carols were learnt by ear only so we are lucky to have found old manuscripts which Wren music have transcribed into working music for us.

We will be singing the four carols which have inspired Alison Willis's new piece.

Ring on Sweet Bells which is pure Landkey, *Once More the Sweet* which has an intoned beginning to each verse, *Blessed is He*, the only other rendition we have found being in America, and *Angels from the Realms of Glory*, to our own tune.

The Landkey Carollers are delighted that some of our local carols have been immortalised in this beautiful new work. To find out more about us visit www.landkeysings.co.uk or our facebook page Landkey Sings.

Anton Bruckner: *Virga Jesse floruit*

Virga Jesse floruit is a traditional medieval text, based on Isaiah: 11, stating that Jesus belongs to David's lineage (Jesse being King David's father). In the Tridentine Rite it is assigned as the Alleluia verse for the Feast of the Annunciation when it falls in Eastertide rather than Lent. The motet was written in 1885 for the centenary celebrations of the diocese of Linz. The message is punctuated by silences at first, and ends in Allelujas both loud and very soft.

The rod of Jesse hath blossomed: a Virgin hath brought forth God and man: God hath restored peace, reconciling in Himself the lowest with the highest. Alleluia.

Old German tune arr. Pearsall: *In Dulci Jubilo*

In Dulci Jubilo originated as a German medieval dance tune. Over the ages there have been many and varied arrangements including the hymn *Good Christian men rejoice* and Mike Oldfield's 1975 chart hit.

Here Robert Lucas Pearsall sets the mix of English and Latin texts for two choirs with solo trio and quartet sections within.

Starting with two hymn like verses, one for each choir, verse three begins with a solo trio building up to a quartet in counterpoint, then the two full choirs together bring the carol to a heavenly conclusion.

Adolphe Adam, arr. Rutter: *O Holy Night*

Adolphe Adam composed the music in 1847 to the French poem "Minuit, chrétiens" (Midnight, Christians) written by Placide Cappeau. The song was premiered

Programme notes

in 1847 by opera singer Emily Laurey in Roquemaure, France. In 1855, John Sullivan Dwight adapted the song into English, which became popular in the United States.

Composer Sir John Rutter, famous not only for his Christmas music but for full length choral works and music for royal occasions, made this arrangement for choir and organ in the early 1980s.

Gordon Langford: *The Christmas Gift*

Gordon Langford is best remembered for his light music, especially that used in the 1960s and 1970s, his music and arrangements for brass bands and The Kings Singers. *The Christmas Gift* with words by John Miller was first published in 2006 and recorded in 2009 by the Winkleigh Singers for their CD of the same name.

Alison Willis: *Fantasia on Christmas Carols from Landkey*

This piece was commissioned to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of The Winkleigh Singers and we wanted to create a piece that resonated with their beautiful part of North Devon. As well as being a composer I am also a folk musician and immediately wondered if there were any carols local to the area.

A little research led us to the Landkey Carol Tradition, a unique collection including some pieces written specially for the original group of singers in the 1890s. The tradition died out in the 1970s, but there are still some villagers who remember being part of the group where singers and instrumentalists would travel round through the village and further afield with the perambulations continuing into the early hours! A revival project was established, in partnership with Wren Music, in December 2017 and we are very grateful to them, Becky Houghton and Doc Rowe for their kindness and support in allowing us to re-imagine these unique carols that deserve to be more widely heard.

Several carols are considered to be 'pure Landkey', as in not really found anywhere else and it is these Carols that underpin the Fantasia. The first to appear is *Ring On, Sweet Bells* accompanied by bell like sounds based on Devon Call Changes, a method of bell ringing found in the West Country. The second features the opening tenor call from *Once More the Sweet* followed by the quieter and calmer *Blessed is He* ending with the reappearance of the bells from the start, this time in the organ with fragments from the Carols heard so far and a line from the Landkey setting of *Angels From the Realms of Glory*. These lines weave together leading to the final section reprising text from *Blessed is He* and

closing with a grand Amen.

As a folk musician myself with an interest in preserving historical songs and tunes whilst keeping them alive in new ways, one of the challenges of writing this piece was to maintain the integrity of the originals whilst creating something new. I hope that is what I have managed to do.

Alison Willis

Franz Joseph Haydn: *Missa Sancti Nicolai*

Haydn most likely wrote his St. Nicholas Mass in 1772 to celebrate the name-day of his employer Prince Nicolaus Esterházy, which fell on 6 December, the Feast of St. Nicholas. In many continental countries this was, and still is, an important pre-Christmas celebration of the saint whose name was to become corrupted as Santa Claus. The original score and parts of the mass were found at the Eisenstadt seat of the Esterházys and show some evidence of haste in composition, with a missing *Dona nobis pacem* (later added), and without a viola part in some sections. Haydn also chose the route of the *Missa Brevis*, saving time by having different lines of the text of the Credo sung simultaneously by the four sections of the choir, while still complying with the ruling by the ecclesiastical authorities that the text must not be cut.

Haydn wrote few choral works before the age of 50, the great masses, *The Creation* and *The Seasons* all coming from the last fifteen years of his life, but this early St. Nicholas Mass is full of vigorous youthful spirits. In complete contrast to the sombre *Farewell Symphony* which preceded it, its infectious joy is appropriate to the approach of Christmas. It has the same quality as found in the pastoral symphonies of Handel's *Messiah* and Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* and its idyllic mood is found immediately in the opening Kyrie, in the unusual 6/4 time, and again in the *Agnus Dei* with its concluding *Dona nobis pacem*. The four soloists are fully employed with a characteristic tenor solo in the *Et incarnatus* and complex ensemble writing in the *Crucifixus*. A rapturous quality is particularly apparent in the gentle *Benedictus* and the fugal Amen at the end of the Gloria.

For use on a different occasion, Haydn crossed out 'Nicolai' in the title and substituted 'Josephi', another feast day appropriate to the Christmas season.

Programme notes provided by John Dalton (MM)

Biographies

Ginevra Dobson – soprano

Ginevra was offered a place in Exeter Cathedral Choir at the age of 6 and sang there for over five years under the direction of Timothy Noon, attending Exeter Cathedral School. In her final year she shared the Smith prize for girl chorister solo work.

She is now a Music Scholar in year eleven at Blundell's School, performing in their wide range of musical ensembles and in her first year mentored their chorister programme.

Ginevra's solo performances have included Bach's St John Passion at Exeter Cathedral and Mozart's Requiem and Vivaldi's Gloria in Blundell's Chapel. She previously studied with Alison Burnett and now studies with Eamonn Mulhall and Madeleine Shaw. In the school holidays, Ginevra sings with the Exeter Cathedral Consort and at other local concerts and events.

Ginevra was one of the winners of the 2023 Two Moors Festival Young Musicians Competition.

Benjamin Irvine-Capel – alto

Benjamin is a Choral Scholar of Exeter Cathedral and an undergraduate at the University of Exeter. Prior to Exeter, he was an alto in Portsmouth Cathedral Choir, having been a Chorister of St Paul's Cathedral in London.

Whilst at St Paul's, he participated in services of national significance such as Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's ninetieth birthday, a service of commemoration marking the withdrawal of British troops from Afghanistan, and a memorial service for the Grenfell Tower fire. Through association with St Paul's and Portsmouth Cathedrals, he has toured the USA, Germany, and Sweden. He has undertaken solo repertoire including Bach's St Matthew and St John Passions, Handel's Messiah, and Mendelssohn's Elijah.

Since moving to Devon, he has performed for concerts with groups including the University of Exeter Choral Society, Wellington Choral Society, the Dumnonii Consort,

and at Powderham Castle. Upcoming engagements include concerts with Amamus Cantare, the Winkleigh Singers, and Exeter Chamber Choir — as well as being a member of the 2024–2025 cohort of the Genesis Sixteen.

Matthew Jeffrey – tenor

Matthew has sung as a member of Exeter Cathedral choir since 2016. During his time with the choir, he has sung in a number of high-profile concerts, including collaborations with groups such as Devon Baroque, and has collaborated with a number of nationally renowned ensembles. He has also sung on a number of BBC Radio 3 live broadcasts, and has been involved in a number of world premieres.

Matthew is in-demand as a soloist with groups across the South-West. He has also sung solos with Exeter Cathedral Choir and University of Exeter Chapel Choir, with whom he sung the role of Evangelist in Bach's St John Passion in Buckfast Abbey, and also performs recitals across Devon.

Matthew sings with other groups in the area, and also sings in the 8-part group he founded and directs, the Dumnonii Consort. He was part of the 11th Cohort of Genesis Sixteen, the young artist programme run by The Sixteen.

Matthew also works as a conductor, and is currently the musical director of the Budleigh Salterton Male Voice Choir and Exmouth Choral Society. He was also the musical director of the Exeter University Singers, and the University of Exeter Opera Society while at university.

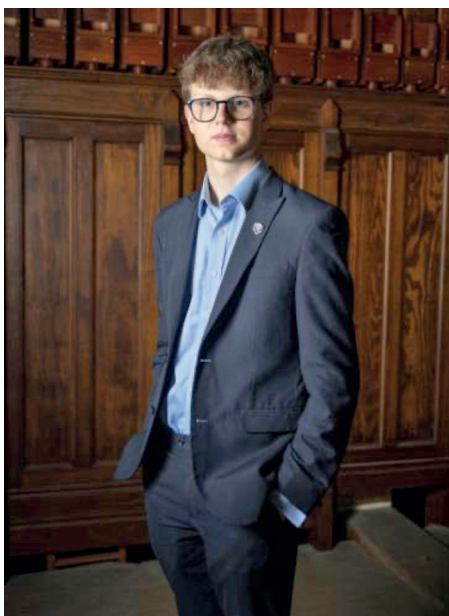
Adam Warne – bass

Adam is a third-year Politics and International Relations student at Exeter University. He is in his second year of singing in Exeter Cathedral Choir as a bass choral scholar.

Previously Adam sung as a chorister at Chelmsford Cathedral where he took part in several national commemorative ceremonies, most notably the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Gallipoli Campaign at the Cenotaph.



Ginevra Dobson



Benjamin Irvine-Capel



Matthew Jeffrey

Biographies

Adam also has an interest in operatic singing, having sung with several touring opera companies, firstly at the Aldeburgh Festival performing Britten's 'Owen Wingrave' which later toured to the Edinburgh Festival. Adam has also sung Britten's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' at Snape Maltings with a cast including Iestyn Davies, Mathew Rose and Sophie Bevan. Adam has continued singing operatic roles, most recently in Italy, directed by his vocal coach Colin Baldy.

Since beginning his studies in Exeter, Adam has taken up several solo opportunities with choirs across Exeter including the University Chapel Choir, University of Exeter Choral Society and The Torbay Singers.

Alison Willis

Writing music described as 'rather beautiful' (Suzy Klein, BBC Radio 3), 'beautiful, scholarly yet singable' (Cathedral Singers of Christ Church, Oxford) and 'stunning!' (Katie Derham, BBC Radio 3), Alison (b. 1971) is an award winning composer whose works have been performed and broadcast across the UK and internationally by ensembles including the BBC Singers, The Gesualdo Six, BBC Concert Orchestra and the Ora Singers.

She finds particular inspiration in historical sources and events, forgotten women, social issues, English Folk music and enjoys working collaboratively with both young people and adults. Alison is also an experienced conductor, educator, pianist, organist and folk musician, enjoys composing music for theatre and is a Trustee of the Martin Read Foundation, supporting young composers. Now based in the East of England she has recently been appointed as Musical Director of the Grimsby Bach Choir. She is a qualified teacher, enjoying roles as Composer/Musician in Residence as well as mentoring a select number of private composition students.

Recent works include *Be Still, My Soul*, premiered at the London Festival of Contemporary Church Music, *I Am*

Bartholomew for the 900th Anniversary of St Bart's the Great, Smithfield, 'We're Nor 'Avin' It!', a micro-opera written in collaboration with performers from Streetwise Opera and premiered with the BBC Concert Orchestra and members of The Sixteen at the Southbank Centre, the *Derby Service* written for Derby Cathedral and *Salve Deus, Rex Judaeorum* for Luminosa. She is currently working on a collection of medieval carols and a set of twenty-four Preludes and Fugues for organ.

When not composing or educating Alison can be found walking her dogs on the beach, feeding the chickens or making soup for her family from the vegetables in the garden.

Tom Bayliss

Tom Bayliss is the rehearsal accompanist for the Winkleigh Singers. He studied music at London University and gained his teaching qualifications at Cambridge University. He taught secondary music for 10 years, before returning to Cambridge to train for ordination as a minister in the United Reformed Church. Since retiring after 27 years of ministry, Tom has immersed himself in the musical life of North Devon. He has given a number of organ recitals in the local area and is currently organist at the Parish Church in South Molton, where he lives with his wife, brother, a cat and a dog! In addition to his keyboard activities, Tom plays French horn with the Giocosio Wind Quartet, is conductor of the South Molton Singers, and joint conductor of the Petrovian Orchestra.

Roland Smith

Roland took up singing at the age of seven in the choir at Holy Trinity Church, Cookham, where he became joint head chorister and later a bass. With this choir he sang in first performances of works by Malcolm Williamson and Herbert Sumsion, amongst others, and had the opportunity to sing in a number of cathedrals and collegiate chapels.

He moved to Devon in 1984 and introduced the idea of a Winkleigh-based chamber choir, which saw the start of The Winkleigh Singers. Since then, he has also sung with a number of distinguished choirs including The Schola Aquae Sulis, The South West Cathedral Singers, and Exeter Festival Chorus. As a member of these choirs he has been on tour to cathedrals throughout the south west of England and performed in Austria and Russia.

Roland currently sings bass in Somerset Chamber Choir.



Adam Warne



Alison Willis

The Winkleigh Singers

Soprano

Jayne Baley
Kathy Cousins
Tina Gibbons
Jo Preston /alto
Diane Wheller
Sue Whitehead

Alto

Deborah Bayliss
Lucy Giddy
Miriam McCurdy
Jo Preston /soprano II
Liz Smith
Carol Wisken

Tenor

Ben Armstrong
David Wyatt

Bass

Tim Allen
Richard Side
John Smith

Accompanist

Tom Bayliss

Musical Director

Roland Smith

The Winkleigh Singers was formed in 1984 as an informal group singing madrigals for mutual pleasure. Over the years the choir has studied works, both small and large, by composers from the sixteenth to twenty-first centuries and has performed not only in North Devon and further afield in England but in France and Hungary.

The choir has performed with a number of professional orchestras and ensembles and has a policy of encouraging talented young musicians, regularly employing students and recent graduates from the

major music colleges. Among these have been Gareth Brynmor John, winner of the Kathleen Ferrier Award (2013), Iain Milne, tenor, now singing leading rôles at the Opernhaus Zürich (2009) and a then unknown Gareth Malone (2004).

Working with other local musical groups has seen performances with Vocal Accord and Artavian Baroque and Singers. Our most recent collaboration was with The South West Baroque Players in a highly successful performance of John Blow's *Venus & Adonis*.

Keep up to date at www.winkleighsingers.org.uk

There will be the opportunity as you leave this evening to donate, either in cash or using the cashless giving machine, towards the running and upkeep of the historic church of St Michael and All Angels.



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