

A Ceremony of Carols

A feast of Christmas music for choir, organ and harp

The Winkleigh Singers

with harpist **Sally Jenkins**

and **Tom Bayliss**, organ.

Conductor **Roland Smith**



Sunday 14th December 2025

St Michael & All Angels Church, Great Torrington

Programme

Magnificat attributed to Dietrich Buxtehude (1637–1707)
*Soloists from the choir: Tina Gibbons, Jaynne Baley (sopranos),
Jo Preston (alto), David Wyatt (tenor), John Smith (bass).*

Christmas hath a darkness

A maiden mild Derek Healey (1936–)

All my heart this night rejoices Johann Georg Ebeling (1637?–1676)

O magnum mysterium William Byrd (1543–1623)

Resonet in laudibus Jacob Handl (Gallus) (1550–1591)

Virga Jesse floruit Anton Bruckner (1824–1896)

Hodie Christus natus est J P Sweelink (1562–1621)

Variations pastorales sur un vieux Noël

Marcel Samuel-Rousseau (1882–1955)

O Holy Night Adolphe Adam (1803–1856) arr. John Rutter (1945–)

INTERVAL

(15 minutes)

A Ceremony of Carols, op. 28 Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)
arr. Julius Harrison (1885–1963)

*Procession – Wolcum Yole! – There is no Rose – That yongë child – Balulalow –
As dew in Aprille – This little Babe – Interlude – In freezing winter night –
Spring carol – Deo gracias – Recession*

Soloists from the choir: Tina Gibbons, Jaynne Baley (sopranos).

Cover image from Henry VIII's decorated manuscript Psalter of 1540.

Source: British Library.

Please be sure that all phones are switched off or set to silent.

No recording of this performance is allowed, neither is photography permitted during the performance.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to St Michael and All Angels for use of their church as a concert venue; also to the front of house and bar volunteers.

Libraries Unlimited: loan of music scores.

Magnificat – this setting of the *Song of Mary* from Luke's Gospel is almost certainly not the work of Buxtehude, being more in the Franco-Italian style of Lully and Carissimi with its lilting triple time, often in thirds. Put that to one side, this is one of the gems from the baroque era.

My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the lowliness of his hand-maiden. 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.

Derek Healey writes of *Christmas hath a darkness*, the second of two carols completed in the spring of 2009, “*Like many other composers, I am often drawn to Christina Rossetti's fresh and imaginative religious and secular poetry*”. Originally set for unaccompanied choir or with piano, Derek provided the new harp part for The Winkleigh Singers to perform in their 2017 Christmas Concert. *A Maiden Mild* is a late fifteenth century English text by James Ryme, eight verses telling of the appearance of the Angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary.

German born **Johann Ebeling** is best known as a composer and editor of hymns, especially those of Paul Gerhardt, including *All my heart this night rejoices*. A number of Ebeling's cantatas also survive.

A morning responsory for Christmas Day, **O magnum mysterium** (O marvel and mystery) has been set by many a composer from the earliest days of church

music to the present day. Byrd's setting comes from his *Gradualia* collection of 109 motets written for the then illegal Roman Catholic liturgy without the composer incurring any penalty...

O great mystery, and wonderful sacrament, that animals should see the newborn Lord, lying in a manger!

Jacob Handl was certainly a man on the move, born in Slovenia, leaving there in his youth to be a singer at the Imperial chapel in Vienna then to Moravia by 1580, settling in Prague in 1586. *Resonet in laudibus* is an elaborated version of a popular 14th century German carol melody.

Let the voice of praise resound...

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.

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.

Adolphe Adam composed the music for *O Holy Night* in 1847 to the French poem

“Minuit, chrétiens” (Midnight, Christians) written by Placide Cappeau. The song was premiered 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.

Britten’s *A Ceremony of Carols* for treble voices in three parts and harp was written in 1942, the same period as the Hymn to St. Cecilia and Rejoice in the Lamb. The version we sing tonight was arranged by Julius Harrison for SATB and harp. It was first published in 1955. The texts are taken from a range of medieval and Renaissance poetry, and Britten’s music also reflects the influence of earlier times. The opening and closing sections are a plainsong setting of *Hodie Christus natus est*, material which undergoes transformation during the harp interlude, and there are strong modal inflections to the music throughout.

The first two carols set 14th-century texts. The joyful cries of *Wolcum Yole!* contrast with the gentle setting of *There Is No Rose*, in which the repeated C/F bass ostinato in the harp only changes briefly to a long E flat at the third statement of the word transeamus. The harp’s semitone motif in *That yonge child* depicts the baby’s crying, while in *Balulalow* the cross rhythms of the accompaniment provide a continuous rocking motion for the cradle. *This little Babe*, which sets a 16th-century poem by Robert Southwell, builds gradually from the unison writing of its first verse through two-part and then three-part canons to a powerful climax. The cold minor-key opening of *In freezing winter night* (another Southwell text) contrasts with the warmer major at *This stable in a Prince’s court*, and winter is swept aside altogether by the *Spring Carol* with its dancing accompaniment. Joyful shouts of *Deo gracias* introduce the final carol, and canonic entries of the same figure are used to create a tumultuous climax.

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Sally Jenkins, harp



Sally commenced her study of the harp with Jeanette Bevan (former principal of Royal Ballet orchestra) before continuing her studies at Bristol University and The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, where she was fortunate to receive tuition in both pedal and Baroque triple harp from Meinir Helen (former principal of Welsh National Opera) and Frances Kelly (Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment). Her career led her first into class teaching in independent schools in Bristol and Bath but more recently to teaching the harp in a wide variety of independent schools in Somerset and Dorset and performing widely around the south west.

The Winkleigh Singers

Soprano

Jayne Baley
Kathy Cousins
Jane Denton-MacLennan
Tina Gibbons *
Maddy Harland
Louise Sweet
Diane Wheller

Alto

Deborah Bayliss *
Lucy Giddy
Miriam McCurdy
Jo Preston *
Deb Reeves
Liz Smith *
Carol Wisken

Tenor

(Ben Armstrong)
Rachel Griffiths *
David Wyatt *

Bass

Tim Allen
Richard Side *
John Smith †

Rehearsal accompanist

Tom Bayliss *

Musical director

Roland Smith †

* Trustee

† Honorary member

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.

More about our Spring 2026 programme can be found overleaf.

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

Dates for your diaries

Traditional Carol Service with The Winkleigh Gingers

followed by mulled wine and mince pies

Sunday 21st December: at 6.30pm

St Michael's Church Great Torrington

MOZART SOLEMN VESPERS K339

Spring Concert at St Michael's Church Great Torrington

Saturday 21st March 2026 at 7.30pm



Early Bird Tickets from 1st February 2026

COME AND SING MOZART'S REQUIEM

A full day workshop with The Winkleigh Singers

Saturday 18th April 2026

10.00am – 5.00pm, with a free public performance at 4.00pm



Bookings from 1st February 2026

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.