



Stories of Christmas

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Heinrich Schütz
THE CHRISTMAS STORY

(first performance of this version)

Edward Lambert
BRIGHTER THAN THE SUN

(first performance)

Kristy Swift (*soprano*)

Paul Robinson (*tenor*)

Jeremy Hagan (*bass*)

Newbury Chamber Choir & Players

Elizabeth Flower (*violin*)

Sue Black (*viola*)

Fiona Murphy (*cello*)

Clare Mellor (*flute*)

Jonathan Calvert (*horn*)

Jenny Broome (*harp*)

£££!

**The audience is invited to contribute to the considerable costs of mounting
this concert by giving generously to the retiring collection.**

(Gift Aid envelopes are provided for UK taxpayers).

Schütz was the greatest German composer of the 17th century and the first of international stature. Through the example of his compositions and through his teaching he played a major part in establishing the traditions of high craftsmanship and intellectual depth that marked the best of his nation's music and musical thought for more than 250 years after his death.

(Grove's Dictionary of Music)

Bad Köstritz is a small town near Gera in Thuringia, famous for its 'black' beer; Schütz was born there in 1585, in his grandfather's inn. Heinrich's father subsequently moved to nearby Weißenfels where his hospitality empire prospered and saw the family rise in prominence such that, when Heinrich was thirteen, the Landgrave of Kassel stayed overnight and happened to hear the boy sing; after some resistance, the parents were persuaded to allow Heinrich to receive a musical education at court. It was in deference to their wishes that he later enrolled to study law at the University of Marburg, but the Landgrave - still intent on nurturing the young man's musical talents -



The inn in Köstritz, now a Schütz museum

sent him to Venice on a grant to study composition with Giovanni Gabrieli. He was there from 1609 to about 1613, a period and place which provided the richest of musical environments, a culmination of a tradition of music making - backed up by instrument makers and publishing houses - that was celebrated above all in the Basilica of San Marco.

A new musical language was just gaining currency: monody was the art of solo singing (and subsequently playing as well) which had a revolutionary freedom from the constraints of formal polyphonic music. Melodic twists and turns, scales, ornaments and novel harmonies were all hallmarks of this new *concerto* style which Schütz brought back with him following a second visit to Italy around 1628 when he studied with Monteverdi.



Meanwhile he had been head-hunted by the Elector of Saxony and in Dresden found himself in charge of the largest and most important musical establishment in Protestant Germany. His fame spread but the Thirty Years' War took its toll on the fortunes of musical life in the German courts and it was only when the Elector died - after Schütz had served him for 40 years - that he was released from his duties; he continued to write new works for major occasions and prepared approved editions of his existing manuscripts.

'...during my recent journey to Italy I engaged myself in a singular manner of composition, namely how a comedy of diverse voices can be translated into declamatory style and be brought to the stage and enacted in song - things that to the best of my knowledge ... are still completely unknown in Germany.'

(letter of 1633)

The first performance of "the birth of Christ in recitative style" seems to have taken place at Dresden during Christmas Vespers in 1660. By then, the new Elector had amalgamated the two *Kapellen* previously in existence and larger forces at Schütz' disposal would explain characters in *The Christmas Story* each having the luxury of their own colourful accompaniments.

In addition, contrasts of style and texture combine to give the work dramatic shape: the High Priests and Scribes sing in a learned style worthy of a Renaissance master, the Heavenly Host in *concerto* style, fresh and exuberant. There is the new monody in abundance, in the



Johann Georg I Elector of Saxony
1611 -1656

‘arias’ of the serene Angel and irritable Herod but most importantly in the Evangelist’s narration which is delivered by means of a perfectly flowing recitative whose melodic and harmonic contours highlight the text in subtle but sometimes striking ways. Its originality - the earliest known setting of the Evangelist’s text sung in this way - can hardly be overstated and it remains one of the greatest examples of its kind in the German language.

And so it was with much care that I set about arranging the music to fit the familiar English text of the King James Bible by which means I hoped

to reproduce for our performers and audience the direct appeal that the work was surely intended to have. The precise instrumentation for the work is the subject of some debate and many interpretations exist: in this version I have reduced the number of players to a minimum necessary to perform the composer’s notes using an ensemble of modern instruments; naturally, some of the intended contrasts have been lost along with the unique character that an ‘original instrument’ performance could provide. However, perhaps it is possible to view musical history as a continuum and allow that the notion of a story ‘enacted in song’ which Schütz imported to Saxony 400 years ago may bear further fruit when adapted for a contemporary English Christmas.

(EL)

Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672)

The Christmas Story

SWV 435

The Evangelist: Paul Robinson (*tenor*)

The Angel: Kristy Swift (*soprano*)

Herod: Jeremy Hagan (*bass*)

1. Introduction - Chorus

Evangelist - the journey to Bethlehem where Jesus is born

2. The Angel to the Shepherds - Soprano solo

Evangelist introduces the angelic host

3. The Host of Angels - Chorus

Evangelist introduces the shepherds' response

4. The Shepherds - Chorus of sopranos and altos

Evangelist - the visitation of the shepherds, the arrival of the Wise Men

5. The Wise Men - Chorus of tenors and basses

Evangelist - Herod consults the priests and scribes

6. The Scribes and Priests - Chorus

Evangelist - Herod sends the Wise Men to Bethlehem

7. Herod - Bass solo

Evangelist - the Visitation of the Wise Men

8. The Angel to Joseph - Soprano solo

Evangelist - the flight into Egypt and the Massacre of Innocents

9. The Angel to Joseph in Egypt - Soprano solo

Evangelist - the Holy Family return to Nazareth

10. Conclusion - Chorus

Interval

drinks will be served



Fra Angelico: The Adoration of the Magi

Brighter than the Sun

music and texts arranged & composed by Edward Lambert
(*first performance*)

Mary: Kristy Swift (*soprano*)

The Angel Gabriel: Paul Robinson (*tenor*)

Joseph: Jeremy Hagan (*bass*)

with Christine Crerar as **Elizabeth**

This work, designed as a companion piece for the Schütz, is a *cantata* constructed around four medieval carols whose texts form a commentary on the Annunciation and Nativity. Leaving the music intact, but arranging it to fit a mixed-voice choir, I ‘translated’ the texts into modern English, making a singing version that I hoped would make these beautiful works more generally accessible. I then turned to the medieval Mystery Plays - particularly the Coventry Cycle - and extracted three scenes that formed a ‘prequel’ to the Christmas Story in the down-to-earth and often humorous manner for which these plays are famous: the Annunciation, the Visitation and the confrontation between Mary and Joseph. In the central scene, from the York Cycle, I took the words of the *Magnificat* and tried to imagine them in their original context: two pregnant women enjoying some time together. A new setting for female voices of a medieval Hymn to the Virgin and two short instrumental interludes complete the sequence, an interplay of medieval and modern carols, drama and music. (EL)

1 CAROL: Gabriel, from Heaven's King

(“*Angelus ad Virginem*”) One of the most popular carols in medieval Europe, particularly in Britain, it tells the story of the Annunciation, which marks Jesus’ conception and the beginning of God’s humanity. Two 14th settings are used in this version.

2 SONATA: an instrumental interlude depicting the stillness of the night - and the darkness of the world before the birth of Jesus.

3 SCENE ONE: suddenly Mary finds herself in the company of the Angel Gabriel and is not unnaturally terrified. The news that she will give birth also comes as something of a shock. Like Mary, the music cannot at first make up its mind whether it is nervous or serene.



4 CAROL: There is no rose of such virtue

Another famous carol in two parts from a 15th century source which tells of the birth of Jesus. Mary is identified with a rose.

5 SCENE TWO: The Magnificat

In Luke’s Gospel, Mary, now pregnant, visits her cousin Elizabeth who is also expecting a child, the future John the Baptist; Elizabeth praises Mary who voices the *Magnificat* in

response: *My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my saviour...* This ancient canticle is usually sung with solemnity at Vespers or Evensong, but it is here intended to be a joyful ‘operatic’ aria. The version of the text used is from the Book of Common Prayer.

6 CAROL: Alleluia! A new creation now to hand

A reflection on the Virgin’s conception (“*as glass lets through the rays of sun*”) this sophisticated 1, 2 and 3-part carol is thought to date from the early 15th century.

7 SCENE THREE

In the Coventry Play, Mary’s encounter with the Angel is overheard by a jealous Joseph; when she unlocks the door, revealing her already well-advanced pregnancy, he is beside himself with rage: “*Behold! What have I said all my life? It would do me no good to take on a wife!*” It takes all the diplomacy of the Angel to calm things down and set the story straight.

8 SONATA: an instrumental meditation on the Adoration.

9 HYMN: Of one that is so fair and bright

A Hymn to the Virgin, a famous text from the thirteenth century, here in a modern setting for female chorus.

10 CAROL: Nowell! Out of your sleep arise and awake

This is a 15th century carol with a canonic refrain; the third verse gives the title to the cantata: “*Now man is brighter than the sun; we shall all dwell on high as one...*”. Truly, mankind has been elevated beyond its wildest dreams!

Conjecturing a Life of Mary

sources: the New Testament, the Gospel of James, the Qur'an, Roman Catholic dogma and practice, and scholars' research

18 BC: Joachim is a pious man of the House of David who, because his wife Anne is childless, does penance in the desert for forty days until angels tell him Anne will conceive a child who will be the Mother of God. While Mary has human parents, her conception on **8 December** is without sin, the *Immaculate Conception*.

17 BC: On **8 September** Anne gives birth to Mary.

14 BC: On **21 November**, Mary, aged three, is presented to the Temple as a consecrated virgin. She remains there until puberty to be educated in preparation for her role as the Mother of God.



*Titian:
The Presentation of Mary in the Temple*

Reni: St Joseph (1635)



4 BC: Mary returns home to Nazareth. Now aged twelve and in keeping with Jewish custom, she is betrothed to Joseph who is a carpenter or artisan, a widower who already has a son called James, the 'brother of Jesus'. On **25 March**, which is Lady Day, (English New Year's Day until 1752), the Angel appears to Mary and tells her she will conceive a child called Jesus, 'Saviour', the *Annunciation*, her *First Joy*. This is accomplished by the Holy Spirit at the command of God. On **31 May** Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth in Hebron, wife of the priest Zechariah, the *Visitation*. The Angel

has told Mary that Elizabeth, previously barren, is miraculously expecting a child. To Elizabeth's expression in praise of her, Mary, of humble origin, responds with the words of the *Magnificat* in which she foreshadows Christ's ministry by speaking for the poor and oppressed.



Leonardo's *Annunciation*

The Angel tells Joseph to take Mary as his wife. The marriage rites are concluded with the formal home-taking ceremony and Mary accompanies Joseph to Bethlehem for the census. On **25 December** Jesus is born in a stable, or in a cave, in or near Bethlehem, her *Second Joy*. Eight days later, **1 January**, Jesus is circumcised. On **6 January** follows the Adoration of the Magi, *Epiphany*, her *Third Joy*. On **2 February**, *Candlemas*, forty days after the birth, Mary presents Jesus for the customary 'ceremony of the first born son', which is witnessed by Simeon who utters the words of the *Nunc Dimittis*.

30 AD: Jesus' ministry begins.



Miriam and Isa: Ancient Persia

33 AD: On **Friday** 3 April Mary is present at Jesus' *Crucifixion*. On **Sunday** 5 April Mary learns of Christ's *Resurrection*, her *Fourth Joy*, and forty days later He ascends into Heaven, her *Fifth Joy*. Ten days later, fifty days after the Resurrection, the Holy Spirit descends upon Mary and the twelve Apostles at Pentecost, and the Christian Church is born, Mary's *Sixth Joy*.

41 AD: On **15 August**, Mary, ever-virgin, dies in Jerusalem surrounded by the Apostles. Her body is taken into Heaven, the *Assumption*. On **22 August** she is crowned Queen of Heaven, her *Seventh Joy*.



Australian born soprano **Kristy Swift** has performed extensively throughout her native country and Europe. After graduating from Queensland University, she continued her education at the Victorian College of the Arts. She won Australia's largest classical singing competition in 2006, which enabled her to relocate to London for further study. This year, Kristy made her Royal Opera House debut as 'The First Spirit' in *Cendrillon*, and sang 'Paquette' in *Candide* with the LSO at the Barbican Centre. She also made her Scandinavian debut in the title role of *Theodora* for Opera Bergen. Future engagements include 'Yum-Yum' in *The Mikado* (Opera Queensland), 'Cunegonde' in *Candide* (Cambridge Philharmonic) and 'Solomon's Queen/First Harlot' in *Solomon* (Capella Cracoviensis,

Poland). Other previous roles include Mag in the European premiere of Richard Wargo's *Winners* (Wexford Festival Opera), 'The Makeup Girl' in *The Golden Ticket* (Wexford Festival Opera), Atalanta in *Xerxes* (Iford Opera), Norina in *Don Pasquale* and Angelica in *Orlando* (Lyric Opera of Melbourne) and Micaela in *Carmen* (West London Opera). Kristy was also a young artist for the National Reisopera of Holland, where she sang 'Olympia' in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. She has performed solo Handel cantatas in Mainz and Engers with selected musicians from Musica Antiqua, Köln, and her voice is heard in the British film, *Over the Edge*, starring Fenella Fielding. Solo oratorio appearances include Handel's *Messiah*, both Rossini's and Gounod's *Petite Messe Solenne*, Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Mozart's *Mass in C minor* and Haydn's *Creation*.

Paul Robinson read music and was a Choral Scholar at King's College, Cambridge, where he had been a boy chorister. He continued his studies at the Royal College of Music and was awarded the Opera Scholarship and the Mills Williams Junior Fellowship. His recordings include Purcell's *Ode to St Cecilia* and Mendelssohn's version of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* for Radio della Svizzera Italiana (RTSI) and a setting of Psalm 91 on the Hyperion Schubert series. Concert performances have included Handel's *Messiah* and Mozart's *Requiem* in King's College, Cambridge; Haydn's *Missa Sancti Nicolae* and Schubert's *Magnificat* with the Philharmonia Royal at the Festival Hall; Britten's *Cantata Misericordium* with the Bochum Symphoniker; Handel's *Solomon* and

Theodora in Darmstadt and Frankfurt, and concerts in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Shizuoka, Japan. Recent engagements have included Beethoven's *Mass in C* in Bergen; *Frederic*, *Pirates of Penzance* in Buxton and Cheltenham and *Edwin*, *Trial by Jury* for Tiramisu Opera, Bach's *St John Passion* in Buxton, *Holofernes* in Alessandro Scarlatti's *La Giuditta* for Figur'd Shade, Handel's *Solomon* and *Theodora* in Darmstadt and Frankfurt, and concerts in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Shizuoka, Japan. He has sung for Newbury Chamber Choir several times including Stainer's *Crucifixion*, Purcell's *King Arthur*, and, most recently, Ed Lambert's *Rossetti Requiem*.



Jeremy Hagan is based in the Chester area, and has been performing as a bass and baritone soloist in opera, oratorio and song recital for a number of years. He has fulfilled numerous solo engagements including performances of *Carmina Burana*, *Belshazzar's Feast* and Beethoven's *9th Symphony*. He has made concert appearances with the Derby Concert Orchestra, the St John's (Chester) Orchestra, and the Brent Symphony Orchestra (in all of which he also plays the viola), including two performances of *Die Frist ist Um*, from *Der Fliegende Hollaender*.



He has featured as soloist in a BBC Radio 2 performance of *The Messiah*, broadcast as part of the 1994 "Voices for Hospices" event. His roles as principal with various operatic societies have included Noye (*Noye's Fludde*), Death (*Savitri*), Ruggiero (*La Juive*), Sarastro (*The Magic Flute*), Mr Gedge (*Albert Herring*), Germont (*La Traviata*), Zachariah (*Nabucco*), Count di Luna (*Il Trovatore*), Amonasro (*Aida* in concert), and Enrico (*Lucia di Lammermoor*). His recital experience includes broadcasts for BBC Radio Leicester and Radio Scotland, song recitals in the Midlands, Scotland and the North-West, and public master classes with Paul Hamburger. He has also performed a number of times for Derby Music Club.

Newbury Chamber Choir

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new members welcome

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The Newbury Chamber Choir has a long and illustrious history in the West Berkshire/North Hampshire area. The choir sings music of many different kinds while focusing on Baroque and Classical masterpieces. Recently the choir has sung music by Bach, Telemann, Mozart, Liszt, Dvorak, Stainer, Handel and Purcell. Giving 4 or 5 concerts a year, it often gives valuable experience to young or local performers. Future plans include Haydn's Seasons on 5 May 2012, a concert in Douai Abbey in November 2012 and a visit to St James' Piccadilly in March 2013.

next concert

Saturday 10 March 2012

Newbury Methodist Church

Campion, Kirby & Jones

Madrigals and Lute Songs from Elizabethan England

Katrina Damigos (*soprano*) and Jake Gill (*baritone*)