

12. Hevene Quene — Kerry Andrew (b. 1978)

This British composer's eclectic and creative use of voices reflects her own journey; she sang as a child in Catholic church choirs, studied classical music, sings in an experimental trio named "Juice," and performs alone under the name "You Are Wolf." Hevene Quene is a rhapsodic reflection on the Virgin Mary that occasionally drifts from chant to a dreamlike confluence of individual voices.

O virgo splendens;
Edi beo thu, hevene quene.
Thou asteye so the daiy rewe
The deleth from the deorke nicht.
Splendens hevene quene,
Of the sprong an leomme newe
That all this world haveth ilyt.
Mi swete levedi her me bene
And reu of mi if thy wille is;
O virgo splendens.

O splendid virgin,
Blessed be you, queen of heaven,
You rose like day
from the dark night,
O queen of heaven,
From you sprang a new sunbeam
that has lit all the world.
My sweet lady, hear my plea
And pity me if you so will.
O splendid virgin.

- 13th-c. English hymn

13. Tomorrow go ye forth — Gabriel Jackson

This companion piece to "I look from afar" reprises the doxology of the earlier work, bringing an organic closure to the responsories of the day, beginning with Matins and concluding with Vespers. Gabriel's originally-composed chant has the austerity and beauty of Gregorian plainsong, evoking a timeless and nostalgic air.

Judah and Jerusalem, fear not, nor be dismayed:
Tomorrow, go ye forth, and the Lord, He shall be with you.

Stand ye still and ye shall see the salvation of the Lord.

Tomorrow go ye forth, and the Lord, He shall be with you.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son; and to the Holy Spirit.

Tomorrow go ye forth, and the Lord, He shall be with you.

- Vesper Responsory of Advent Sunday

14. Adam lay ybounden — Colin Mawby (b. 1936)

There are a number of familiar settings of this minstrel's song, most likely from the Christmas mystery plays and first recorded in an English manuscript c. 1400; few capture the urgency of advent found in the swing and rhetorical calling of this eight-part motet.

Adam lay ybounden,
Bounden in a bond;
Four thousand winter,
Thought he not too long.

And all was for an apple,
An apple that he took.
As clerkes finden,
Written in their book.

Ne had the apple taken been,
The apple taken been,
Ne had never our ladie,
Abeen heav'ne queen.

Blessed be the time
That apple taken was,
Therefore we moun singen.
Deo gracias!

-15th-c. English Carol

15. Christmas Daybreak — Robert Convery (b. 1954)

Convery's elegant carol was composed in 1996 for The Bridge Ensemble, a Philadelphia choral ensemble that preceded The Crossing and featured a number of the artists heard on this recording.

Before the paling of the stars,
Before the winter morn,
Before the earliest cock-crow
Jesus Christ was born:

Born in a stable,
Cradled in a manger,
In the world His hands had made
Born a stranger.

Priest and king lay fast asleep
In Jerusalem,
Young and old lay fast asleep
In crowded Bethlehem:
Saint and angel, ox and ass,
Kept a watch together,
Before the Christmas daybreak
In the winter weather.

Jesus on His mother's breast
In the stable cold,
Spotless Lamb of God was He,
Shepherd of the fold:

Let us kneel with Mary maid,
With Joseph bent and hoary,
With saint and angel, ox and ass,
To hail the King of Glory.

- Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

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1. What child is this? — Andrew Gant (b. 1963)
A conversation with Andrew in London produced this mixed-choir version of his touching motet on this familiar text (commonly associated with the tune Greensleeves). Originally for men's choir, this version was premiered by The Crossing at Christmas 2007.

What Child is this who, laid to rest
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom Angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?

This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds praise and Angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring Him praise,
Jesus, the Son of Mary.

How comes he in such mean estate,
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Yet have no fear, God's love is here,
His love all loves exceeding.

Raise, raise your song on high,
As Mary sings a lullaby,
Praise, praise the Son of Man
Jesus, the Son of Mary.

Earth, give him incense, gold and myrrh,
Come tribes and peoples, own Him;
The King of Kings salvation brings,
So in your hearts enthrone Him.

Nails, spear shall pierce Him through,
Such pain he bore for me and you.
Praise, praise the Son of Man
Jesus, the Son of Mary.
-William Chatterton Dix (1837-1898)

2. Alpha and Omega — James MacMillan (b. 1959)

Premiere recording
Commissioned by Soli Deo Gloria and premiered at Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago in June 2011, this extended, dramatic motet is a setting of the Revelation text often heard in liturgies for the week prior to Christmas.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

The Crossing @ Christmas: CHRISTMAS DAYBREAK

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."

-Revelation 21:1-6a (English Standard Version)

3. I look from afar — Gabriel Jackson (b. 1962)

This early work of a favorite Crossing composer demonstrates the influence of medieval music in the extended, rhythmic melismas, punctuated with Gabriel's engagingly dissonant harmonic world.

I look from afar:

And lo, I see the power of God coming, and a cloud covering the whole earth.

Go ye out to meet him and say:

Tell us, art thou he that should come to reign over thy people Israel?

High and low, rich and poor, one with another,
Go ye out to meet him and say:

Hear, O thou Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a sheep,

Tell us: art thou he that should come?

Stir up thy strength, O Lord, and come to reign over thy people Israel.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Spirit.

-Matins Responsory of Advent I

4. Ane sang of the birth of Christ — Jackson

A gracefully embellished role for the organ joins alternating sections of solo soprano and choir in this simple work in which an ever-undulating metric feel gives freedom and breath to the early-Renaissance English text.

I come fra hevin heich to tell
The best nowells that e'er befall;
To you thir tythinges trew I bring,
And I will of them say and sing:

This day to you is born ane child
Of Marie meik and Virgin mild,
That blissit bairn, bening and kind,
Sall you rejoyce baith hart and mind.

Lat us rejoyis and be blyth
And with the Hyrdis go full swyth
And see what God of His grace has done
Throu Christ to bring us to His throne.

My saull and life, stand up and see
Wha lysis in ane cribbe of tree,
What Babe is that, sa gude and fair?
It is Christ, Goddis Sonne and Air.

O my deir hart, yung Jesus sweet,
Prepair Thy creddill in my spreit,
And I sall rock Thee in my hart,
And never mair fra Thee depart.

Bot I sall praise Thee evermoir
With sangis sweit unto Thy gloir,
The kneis of my hart sall I bow,
And sing that rycht Balululow.

-att. John Wedderburn (c.1500-1556)

5. Lullay, lullay little child — Jonathan Varcoe

Yet another English composer with a fresh idea of an ancient text, Jonathan's carefully-placed dissonances draw focus to the carol's brilliant juxtaposition of the innocent newborn and his ineluctable sacrifice.

Lullay, lullay, little child, mine own dear *fode,
How shalt thou suffering be nailed on the rood.
So blessed be the time?

Lullay, lullay little child, mine own dear **smart,
How shalt thou suffering the sharp spear to thy heart?
So blessed be the time!

Lullay, lullay little child, I sing all for thy sake,
Many a one is the sharp shower to Thy body is shape.
So blessed be the time!

Lullay, lullay little child, fair happis thee befall,
How shalt thou suffering to drink ***ezyl and gall?
So blessed be the time!

Lullay, lullay little child, I sing all befor,
How shalt thou suffering the sharp garlong of thorn?
So blessed be the time!

Lullay, lullay little child, why weepy thou so sore,
Thou are both in God and man, what wouldest thou be more?

So blessed be the time?

-variation of a 15th-c. English Carol

*fode = nursing,

**smart = cause of grief,

***ezyl = vinegar

6-8. Three Carols for Wintertide — Benjamin C.S. Boyle (b. 1979)

Benjamin has a long history with The Crossing, having composed a work for its debut concert in 2005. Here, a series of commissions from Crossing conductor Donald Nally's ensembles come together to form a winter cycle: the first, written for The Crossing in 2007; the second, premiered by the chorus of Lyric Opera of Chicago in its only concert in a sixty-year history; and the last, written for VAE: Cincinnati's Vocal Arts Ensemble.

1. Lo, how a rose e'er blooming
Lo, how a rose e'er blooming,
From tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming,
As seers of old have sung;
It came, a flow'ret bright,
Amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night.

Lo, how a rose e'er blooming,
From tender stem hath sprung!

-trans. of 16-c. German carol "Est ist ein Ros,"
Theodore Baker (1851-1934)

2. The holly and the ivy
The holly and the ivy,
When they are both full grown,
The holly bears the crown.

(Refrain) O the rising of the Sun and the running of the deer,
The playing of the merry organ, sweet singing of the choir.

The holly bears a blossom as white as lily flower.
The holly bears a berry as red as any blood.
The holly, it bears a prickle as sharp as any thorn.
The holly bears a bark as bitter as any gall. (R.)

The holly and the ivy,
Now both are well full grown.
The holly bears the crown.
-based on the English Carol, c. 17th century

3. Down with the rosemary
Down with the rosemary and bay,
Down with the mistletoe;
The holly hitherto did sway
Until the dancing Easter day,
Or Easter eve appear.

Then youthful box which now has grace
Your houses to renew;
Grown old, surrender must his place
Unto the crispèd yew.

Now the yew is out, then birch comes in,
Both of a fresh and fragrant kin.
Green rushes, then, and sweetest bents,
Come in for comely ornaments.

Thus times do shift;
each thing his turn doth hold.
New things succeed,
as former things grow old.
-adapted from Ceremonies for Candlemas Eve,
Robert Herrick (1591-1674)

9. To Morning — Gabriel Jackson

A classic example of the high quality of anthem writing for English cathedrals, this is a far more homophonic setting than the other Jackson works heard on this recording. It demonstrates Gabriel's ability to write to the occasion (here, for the Dean Close School Chapel Choir) while capturing the essence of each text, founded on his years of choral experience; his father was an Anglican priest in Bermuda and he spent years as a chorister at Canterbury Cathedral fully absorbing the specificity and beauty of each liturgy.

O holy virgin! clad in purest white,
Unlock heaven's golden gates, and issue forth;
Awake the dawn that sleeps in heaven; let light
Rise from the chambers of the east, and bring
The honey'd dew that cometh on waking day.
O radiant morning, salute the sun
Roused like a huntsman to the chase, and with
Thy buskin'd feet appear upon our hills.
O radiant morning, appear on our hills.

- Poetical Sketches, William Blake (1757-1827)

10. Gabriel's Message — Zachary Wadsworth (b. 1983)

This co-commission of The Crossing and The Choir of St. Paul's Church Chestnut Hill, for double choir and organ, inspired this recording; Choir I — The Crossing — sings Zach's setting of Rossetti's "Before the paling of the stars," while Choir II — the choir of our host church — responds with a kind of fantasia on the familiar Basque Carol, Gabriel's Message. The two come together in the blazingly triumphant finale.

Choir I — see text for Robert Convery's "Christmas Daybreak," below

Choir II
The angel Gabriel from Heaven came,
His wings as drifted snow,
His eyes as flame; 'All hail,' said he,
'Thou lowly maiden Mary,
Most highly favoured lady,' Gloria!

'For known a blessed Mother thou shalt be,
All generations laud and honour thee,
Thy Son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold,
Most highly favoured lady,' Gloria!

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head,
'To me be as it pleaseth God,' she said,
'My soul shall laud and magnify his holy name.'
Most highly favoured lady, Gloria!

Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ, was born
In Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,
And Christian folk throughout the world will ever say:
Most highly favoured lady, Gloria!

-Basque Carol (trans. Sabine Baring-Gould)

11. Love came down at Christmas — Edwin Fissinger (1920-1990)

Fissinger's prolific output of choral music, primarily sacred and focused on vocal textures, was largely written for his own choir at North Dakota State University in Fargo. Love came down at Christmas is one of a number of works that have established his legacy as a thoughtful, imaginative composer.

Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we our Godhead,
Love incarnate, Love divine;
Worship we our Jesus:
But wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token,
Love be yours and Love be mine,
Love to God and all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.

-Christina Rossetti