

DUNSFORD SINGERS



Christmas Concert

DUNSFORD CHURCH

Saturday 13th December 4pm

PROGRAMME

Raffle & Refreshments

Welcome to the Dunsford Singers' Christmas Concert

Thank you to Premier Barton Farm, Higher Ashton, for their generous sponsorship of our December concerts.

Conductor/Musical Director Tim Pithers

Tim is passionate about community and student music-making, and firmly believes that classical music should be made as accessible as possible to performers and audiences alike. He undertook his degree in Music and French at the University of Exeter studying violin, composition and musical direction. Tim studied conducting with Denise Ham at the London Conducting Academy, completing the programme in 2024. He has also studied with Rodolfo Saglimbeni, Dominic Grier and Denise Ham at the George Hurst Conductors' Course at Sherborne Summer School of Music, at the Girton Conducting Course and at other public masterclasses. He enjoys working with ensembles of varying degrees of experience and aims to develop ambitious objectives for amateur groups. As well as holding the role of Musical Director of the Dunsford Singers, Tim is also Conductor of the Dartmouth Orchestra, Exeter University Symphony Orchestra, the Exeter University Symphonic Wind Orchestra, and EX4 Chamber Orchestra.

Organist/Accompanist Tim Crompton Tim hails from Warwickshire and is a graduate of the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. He is a pianist, organist and bassoonist and a former Director of Music at several schools. He now lives in Teignmouth, teaches at Trinity School and conducts the Shaldon Singers. Tim is now increasingly in demand locally as an organist but still finds time to play bassoon in Devon and Exeter orchestras. He can often be found on Teignmouth's Back Beach with his labrador!

IF YE LOVE ME by Thomas Tallis (c1505-1585)

Thomas Tallis lived and created sublime choral music during one of England's most turbulent eras. We know little about his early life but by 1530 he was an organist at Dover Priory, a Benedictine establishment. Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries left Tallis jobless on several occasions but by 1541 his sparkling reputation had secured him a post as a singer at Canterbury Cathedral. By 1544 he was a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal, a job for life, accompanying the monarch wherever he went and supplying music for his spiritual needs. Tallis shifted nimbly through composing music for Protestant and Roman Catholic purposes. With Elizabeth I's accession he finally settled to composing pieces to suit the new Anglican church.

The text is taken from the Gospel of John in Tyndale's translation of the Bible in the 1520/30s. Jesus speaks to his disciples, foretelling his own death but promising that God the Father will send the Holy Spirit to comfort them.

If ye love me, keep my commandments, and I will pray the Father, and He will give you another comforter, that he may bide with you forever. E'en the spirit of truth.

This anthem was certainly being sung in churches by 1550, and by 1565 was available to choirs in a published book. Maybe it was sung here in Chudleigh. If only church walls could talk! Recently it was sung in the Sistine Chapel as part of the service in which Pope Leo XIV and King Charles III prayed together. How surprised Tallis would have been!

Reading: *Resistance* by Simon Armitage (read by Giles Frampton)

This poem was written as a direct response to the war in Ukraine. The harrowing images we all saw on television in 2022 prompted Armitage to write in admiration of Ukraine's resistance, and conveys the message that hope and resilience will prevail in the face of war: “*The air raid siren can't fully mute the cathedral bells – let's call that hope.*”

THE ARMED MAN CHORAL SUITE by Karl Jenkins (b1944)

This afternoon we are singing three movements from Karl Jenkins' longer work ***The Armed Man, a Mass for Peace***. Commissioned for the Millennium by Britain's Royal Armouries, it was dedicated to the victims of the Kosovo crisis, and explores the themes of war, its consequences and the hope for peace. We feel that its message resonates strongly as the world faces such appalling conflict today.

Sanctus: Unusually, Jenkins' *Sanctus* has a military, menacing air, at odds with the text which means "*Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Hosts. Heaven is full of Thy glory. Hosanna in the highest.*" This creates a foreboding atmosphere and a deliberately subversive interpretation of what is usually a joyful section of the Latin mass.

Benedictus: *Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.* This piece is prized as one of the most achingly beautiful and haunting choral compositions of modern times and is often sung as a 'stand alone' piece. Peace and serenity are interposed by explosive *Hosannas*.

Agnus Dei: *O Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Oh Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world, grant us Thy peace.* After the traumas of war, there is a fragile hope for peace.

AVE VERUM CORPUS by William Byrd (c1540 -1623)

William Byrd was a pupil of Thomas Tallis, probably in the Chapel Royal. In his thirties he became a Roman Catholic, yet served under Protestant monarchs and wrote both sacred and secular music, of which nearly 600 pieces survive. He is remembered as one of the most important and influential of English composers. *Ave Verum Corpus* is a hymn sung during holy communion. The words have been attributed to Pope Innocent VI (1282 -1362).

In translation: *Hail, true Body, born of the Virgin Mary, having truly suffered, sacrificed on the cross for mankind, from whose pierced side water and blood flowed: be for us a sweet foretaste in the trial of death! O sweet Jesus, O holy Jesus, O Jesus, son of Mary, have mercy on me, Amen.*

ONLY IN SLEEP by Eriks Esenvalds (b1977)

If you've never heard this before, you're in for a treat. The pensive and rhapsodic music reflects the surreal atmosphere of the poem. Many people say it evokes a deep, emotional response about the innocence of childhood, the transience of human life and the yearning for a past we can never recover. Enjoy the subtle chords, harmonies and soaring soprano descant.

Soloists: Hazel Linney, Jan Middleton and Julie Cooney

*Only in sleep I see their faces,
Children I played with when I was a child;
Louise comes back, with her brown hair braided,
Annie with ringlets, warm and wild.*

*Only in sleep Time is forgotten,
What may have come to them, who can know?
Yet, we played last night as long ago
And the doll house stood at the foot of the stair.*

*The years had not sharpened their smooth, round faces,
I met their eyes and found them mild,
Do they, too, dream of me, I wonder?
And for them am I too a child?*

INTERVAL

Please remain in your seats and refreshments will be brought to you.
There is one toilet at the back of the church and the toilets in the village hall are
also open during the interval.

AUDIENCE CAROL: Ding Dong Merrily on High

CHRISTMAS LULLABY: by John Rutter (b1945) Sir John Rutter has recently celebrated his 80th birthday. He is one of the best known and loved English choral composers of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. He's as busy as ever, and this month is conducting at the Royal Albert Hall and Smith Square Hall in London, Cambridge, Guildford and Bath Abbey. Maybe it wouldn't be nearly Christmas without one of Rutter's beautiful carols. For the tender *Christmas Lullaby* he wrote his own words, focusing on iconic aspects of the Nativity and urging reverence for the Christ Child and His mother.

Reading: A Medieval Christmas from *Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight* (read by Jan Middleton)

SIR CHRISTMAS In the mid 1400s, the Rector of Plymtree in Devon penned the opening lyrics to this jolly, exuberant evocation of the spirit of Christmas. It then appeared in a manuscript believed to have been copied at a Franciscan monastery in Devon or possibly at Exeter Cathedral. The Welsh composer **William Mathias** composed this musical setting in 1971. In a mixture of English and French, it speaks of the days when Sir Christemas wore green, not red, and cheerfully urges us all to raise our glasses to the Christmas story. **Nowell!**

A MAIDEN MOST GENTLE by **Andrew Carter** This pretty carol is based upon a traditional French tune and the words are supposedly by the Venerable Bede, a Northumbrian Saxon monk. Its lovely melody and the texture of the SATB parts make it a favourite with amateur choirs.

SPOTLESS ROSE by **Ola Gjeilo (b1978)** How blessed we are to have modern composers like the Norwegian Gjeilo. He has injected new life into choral singing but always includes beauty and lyricism. Here he offers a joyful and melodic setting of a famous 16th century text, celebrating the coming of the Christ Child, in the cold of winter. It's as if Gjeilo's music was always meant to accompany these lyrics. Somehow, the cold Scandinavian winter is reflected in the lilting music.

*A Spotless Rose is blowing,
Sprung from a tender root
Of ancient seers' foreshowing,
Of Jesse promised fruit,
Its fairest bud unfolds to light
Amid the cold, cold winter,
And in the dark midnight.*

*The Rose which I am singing
Whereof Isaiah said,
Is from its sweet root springing
In Mary, purest maid.
Through God's great love and might
The Blessed Babe she bare us
In a cold, cold winter's night*

AUDIENCE CAROL: O Come, All Ye Faithful

READING: 'Winter' from *Love's Labours Lost* by William Shakespeare (read by Liz Robin)

(With apologies to any Joans or Marians in the audience, and some reassurance that the crabs mentioned are crab apples, not creatures!)

This poem describes a winter from the late 1500s, probably well-remembered from Shakespeare's childhood in Stratford upon Avon. The contrast of the warmth inside and the cold outside, where the owl hoots, isn't so far away from our own lives in rural Devon!

* *the parson's "saw" probably means his "sermon"*
'keel the pot' means stirring to cool the contents

*When icicles hang by the wall
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail
And Tom bears logs into the hall
And milk comes home frozen in the pail;
When blood is nipp'd, and ways be foul,
Then nightly sings the staring owl:
"Tu whit, tu who!" A merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.*

*When all aloud the wind doth blow
And coughing drowns the parson's saw,
And birds sit brooding in the snow
And Marian's nose looks red and raw;
When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl,
Then nightly sings the staring owl
"Tu whit! Tu whu!" A merry note!
While Greasy Joan doth keel the pot.*

MID – WINTER by Bob Chilcott (b1955) Born in Plymouth, Chilcott went on to become a boy chorister at King's College, Cambridge and was a member of the famous King's Singers from 1985 -1997, singing tenor. He has written many beautiful compositions for children's and adult choirs. With a characteristically memorable tune, Christina Rosetti's famous poem is given a new, appealing musical setting with a beguiling accompaniment.

**We wish you all a peaceful season of Advent,
a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year 2026**

CHOIR MEMBERS:

Soprano: Caroline Brimblecombe, Julie Cooney, Ruth Frampton, Alexia Hollingsworth, Sue Jury, Hazel Linney, Jo MacDonald, Jan Middleton, Diana Petit, Verity Stiff, Emily Vantreen

Alto: Jo Jenkin, Kath Keating, Erica Lee, Leslie Pearman, Liz Robin, Juliet Speed, Toria Wimpenny

Tenor: Steve Cook, Giles Frampton, Lorraine Hart, Mike Lee, Ray Mallett, Mike Wimpenny

Bass: Gerald Battersby, Sam Guyah, Jan Traylen, John Sawyer

If anyone is interested in joining our friendly choir please contact our secretary Jan Middleton janmiddleton29@gmail.com Not everyone can read music and there are no auditions.

Future Dates:

Rehearsals begin on Monday 19 January 2026 in Dunsford Village Hall - 7.30pm-9:00pm.

Summer Concerts – Saturday 6 June (St Mary's Church, Dunsford) and Saturday 13 June (St David's Church, Exeter) when we'll be performing the gorgeous Dvorak Mass in D and folk songs collections by the modern composers Bob Chilcott and Cecilia McDowall.

Come and sing with us!

<http://www.dunsfordsingers.co.uk>

<https://www.facebook.com/dunsfordsingers/>