



Photo: Thousand Word Media

Composer Profile: Bob Chilcott (b. 1955):

Described by The Observer, as “A contemporary hero of British choral music”, Bob Chilcott has enjoyed a lifelong association with choral music as an institutionally renowned composer, conductor and singer with a prolific output of works, performed worldwide.

Bob Chilcott’s affinity with music grew from his time as a young chorister, then choral scholar in the choir of King’s College, Cambridge, and for 12 years as a member of the King’s Singers. He became a full-time composer in 1997, embracing his career with energy and commitment and has produced a large catalogue of music, for all types of choirs, published by OUP.

His music for Christmas forms a considerable part of his most popular repertoire, setting both new and traditional texts in his carols, and writing for mixed-voice and upper-voice choirs. Among his multitude of works, community-based projects, pieces for children, and a significant amount of music for the church, Bob is also renowned for A Little Jazz Mass, Requiem, and St. John Passion.

He has written large-scale works, including The Angry Planet, commissioned by the BBC Proms in 2012. And, in 2013, The King Shall Rejoice, commissioned by Westminster Abbey to celebrate the Queen’s 60th Anniversary of her Coronation.

Bob’s music has been widely recorded by leading British choirs and groups including the King’s Singers, The Sixteen, Tenebrae, The Bach Choir, BBC Singers, Houston Chamber Choir and Wroclaw Philharmonic Choir.

In 2016 he collaborated with Katie Melua on her album In Winter, and in 2017 with Choralis, to release In Winter’s Arms, and also with Commotio, to release his album of jazz infused choral works, All Good Things.

Bob was invited to write the Raymond Brock Memorial Commission for the ACDA National Conference in Dallas in 2021: Collaborating with poet Delphine Chalmers, Songs My Heart Has Taught Me explores and embraces themes of identity, diversity, inclusivity, unity and commonality.

For 7 years Bob was conductor of the Chorus of The Royal College of Music. He has been Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC Singers since 2002. In 2017 he was awarded an Honorary Fellowship by the Royal School of Church Music and in 2019 took up the role of Principal Conductor with Birmingham University Singers. In Autumn 2020, Bob was appointed Musician-in-Residence at Downe House School.

Working with choirs in more than 30 countries around the world, Bob Chilcott inspires all age groups. He works annually as an adjudicator and conductor at choir festivals and with many thousands of amateur singers across the UK in a continuing series of Singing Days.

Programme Notes: On Christmas Night:

On Christmas Night was composed in 2010, and is a musical celebration of the Christmas story; from the fall of Adam, through the promise of a child's coming and the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, to the birth of the baby Jesus - presented as a sequence of eight original carols. Chilcott calls upon several familiar carol melodies within his own settings, resulting in an impressive array of styles and moods - from comforting and reflective, to jubilant, swinging and folksy.

Chilcott has designed the piece to be as flexible as possible in terms of performance. It can be sung either liturgically or in concert, including Chilcott's suggested readings between each piece in similarity to a service of nice lessons and carols. The piece can also be performed without readings.

As each movement is autonomous, the individual carols may also be performed separately.

The work incorporates several traditional carols, both texts and melodies (the latter occasionally slightly altered), and these feature most often in the upper-voice part.

Combining tradition and invention, On Christmas Night is a versatile and enchanting addition to the choral repertory.

This Is The Truth (I)
Adam Lay Ybounden
A Spotless Rose
The Cherry Tree Carol
O Little Town
Sweet Was The Song
Rejoice And Be Merry
This Is The Truth (II)

1. This Is The Truth (I)

This is the truth sent from above
The truth of God, the God of love;
Therefore don't turn me from the door,
But hearken all, both rich and poor.

*Once in royal David's city
Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her baby
In a manger for his bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little child.*

The first thing that I will relate,
That God at first did man create;
The next thing which to you I tell,
Woman was made with him to dwell.

Thus we were heirs to endless woes
Till God the Lord did interpose;
And so a promise soon did run:
That he'd redeem us by his Son.

2. Adam Lay Ybounden

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 one apple taken been,
The apple taken been,
Ne had ne'er our Lady
Abeen heavene queen.

Blessed be the time
That apple taken was;
Therefore we moun singen:
Deo gracias!

3. A Spotless Rose

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;
For through our God's great love and might,
The Blessed Babe she bare us
In a cold winter's night.

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 blossom bright,
Amid the cold of winter,
When half-spent was the night.

5. O Little Town

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing to God the King,
And peace to men on earth;
For Christ is born of Mary;
And, gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wond'ring love.

How silently, how silently,
The wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of his heav'n.
No ear may hear his coming;
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him still,
The dear Christ enters in.

4. The Cherry Tree Carol

When Joseph was an old man, and an old man
was he,
When he married Mary, the Queen of Galilee.

Joseph and Mary walked through an orchard good,
Where was cherries and berries, so red as any
blood.

O then bespoke Mary, so meek and so mild: "Pluck
me a cherry, Joseph; for I am with child."

"Go to the tree, Mary, and it shall bow to thee, And
the highest branch of all shall bow to Mary's knee."

Then bowed down the tallest tree, it bent to Mary's
hand;
Then she cried: "See, Joseph, I have cherries at
command,"

"O eat your cherries, Mary, O eat your cherries
now!
O eat your cherries, Mary, that grow upon the
bough."

Then Mary plucked a cherry, as red as any blood;
And she did travel onward, all with her heavy load.

6. Sweet Was The Song

Sweet was the song the Virgin sang,
When she to Bethlem Juda came
And was delivered of a Son
That blessed Jesus hath to name.
Lulla, lulla, lulla, lullaby,
lulla, lulla, lulla, lullaby.

Sweet Babe, sweet babe, sung she,
'My Son, and eke a Saviour born,
Who has vouchsafed from on high
To visit us that were forlorn.'
Lalulla, lalulla, lalullaby,
lalulla, lalulla, lalullaby.
'Sweet babe', sang she,
And rocked him sweetly on her knee.

Silent night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright;
Round yon virgin mother and child,
Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

7. Rejoice And Be Merry

Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, rejoice!
Rejoice and be merry in songs and in mirth!
O praise our Redeemer, all mortals on earth!
For this is the birthday of Jesus our King,
Who brought us salvation: his praises we'll sing!

Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, rejoice!

A heavenly vision appeared in the sky;
Vast numbers of angels the shepherds did spy,
Proclaiming the birthday of Jesus our King,
Who brought us salvation: his praises we'll sing!

Likewise a bright star in the sky did appear,
Which led the wise men from the East to draw
near;
They found the Messiah, sweet Jesus our King,
Who brought us salvation: his praises we'll sing!

And when they were come, they their treasures
unfold,
And unto him offered myrrh, incense, and gold.
So blessed for ever be Jesus our King,
Who brought us salvation: his praises we'll sing!

Rejoice!

*On Christmas night all Christians sing,
To hear the news the angels bring
News of great joy, news of great mirth,
News of our merciful King's birth.
Rejoice!*

8. This Is The Truth (II)

And at this season of the year
Our blest Redeemer did appear,
And here did live, and here did preach,
And many thousands he did teach.

And our eyes at last shall see him,
Through his own redeeming love,
For that child so dear and gentle
Is our Lord in heav'n above;
And he leads his children on
To the place where his is gone.

Thus he in love to us behaved,
To show us how we must be saved;
And if you want to know the way,
Be pleased to hear what he did say.

God grant to all within this place true saving faith,
God grant to all within this place, that special grace
Which to his people doth belong:
And thus I close my Christmas song.
Not in that poor, lowly stable,
With the oxen standing by,
We shall see him; but in heaven,
Set at God's right hand on high,
When like stars his children crowned
All in white shall wait around.
And this I close my Christmas song.