



# **Stretton Choral Society**

presents

## *Christmas Cantatas*

**Soloist**

**Catherine Rooney-Ward, Soprano**

**Conductor**

**Michael Turner**

### **The Shropshire Hills Ensemble**

**Leader: David Joyce**

**Piano/Keyboard: Sally Oak**



**Sunday 10th December 2023**

**7.30 pm**

**Silvester Horne Institute**

# PROGRAMME

<b>For Christmas</b>	Michael Turner
<b>Suite for Strings</b>	Michael Turner
<b>Christmas Cantata</b>	Geoffrey Bush

## INTERVAL

*Please remain seated until the choir and orchestra have left the hall.*

*Refreshments will be available for sale at the side of the hall.*

*A bell will be rung at the end of the interval.*

<i>Audience Carol</i> <b>O Come O Come Emmanuel</b>	French Franciscan Processional/Arr. David Willcocks
<i>Choir</i> <b>Rejoice and be Merry</b>	Trad. English/Arr. Reginald Jacques
<i>Reading</i> <b>Mistletoe</b>	Walter de la Mare
<i>Choir</i> <b>A Christmas Greeting</b>	Edward Elgar
<i>Audience Carol</i> <b>God Rest You Merry Gentlemen</b>	Trad. English/Arr. David Willcocks
<i>Choir</i> <b>Shepherd's Pipe Carol</b>	John Rutter
<i>Reading</i> <b>Nativity</b>	John Donne
<i>Choir</i> <b>Away in a Manger</b>	Trad. Normandy Tune/Arr. Reginald Jacques
<i>Choir</i> <b>Carol Medley</b>	Arr. Michael Turner
<i>Audience Carol</i> <b>The First Nowell</b>	Trad. English/Arr. David Willcocks

## **SOLOIST: Catherine Rooney-Ward, Soprano**

Canadian-British soprano, Catherine Rooney-Ward completed her studies in vocal performance at the Glenn Gould School of the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto and continued her studies with the English National Opera's "Opera Works" programme in 2011. A keen performer of Baroque repertoire, Catherine has performed the role of Sesto in Giulio Cesare (Opera in Concert/Aradia Ensemble), Armida in Rinaldo and the title role in Handel's Semele (Summer Opera Lyric Theatre). Other roles include Frasquita in Carmen (Co-Opera Co.), Annina in La Traviata (Opera York) and the title role in La Gran Vestale by Mercadante (Opera in Concert). Catherine recently moved to Shropshire where she lives with her husband Chris, daughters Olive and Florence and pug Thor.

## **MUSIC DIRECTOR: Michael Turner**

From Birmingham, Michael Turner studied violin and viola, before settling on percussion as his main instrumental study. As a singer, he has been a member of the CBSO Chorus, along with a number of other choirs across the Midlands.

Michael has attended conducting courses with John Carewe and George Hurst and studied under Hilary Davan Wetton, with whom he settled on adopting the conducting technique favoured by Sir Adrian Boult.

A music graduate of Leicester University, Michael has conducted several amateur and professional ensembles and choirs including the Birmingham Singers, Proteus Chamber Orchestra, the More Singers, the Telford Orchestra, the Marches Choir and the Phoenix Singers. He made his professional debut with the Milton Keynes City Orchestra and has also worked with the Manchester Camerata. Michael has been Music Director of the Bloomsbury Chamber Orchestra since 1996, was Music Director of the Oswestry Sinfonia from 2014 - 2020 and became Music Director of the Stretton Choral Society in September 2021. He has been an ensemble conductor for Shropshire Music Service since 2016.

Michael has composed extensively, with works including a Horn Concerto, several orchestral and choral works, instrumental music and pieces for percussion and wind ensemble. He lives in South Shropshire with his wife. They have three sons.

## O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL!

1. (All)

O come, O come, Emmanuel!  
Redeem thy captive Israel  
That into exile drear is gone,  
Far from the face of God's dear Son.

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

2. (Men)

O come, thou Branch of Jesse! draw  
The quarry from the lion's claw;  
From the dread caverns of the grave,  
From nether hell, thy people save.

*Rejoice! Rejoice!...*

3. (Women)

O come, O come, thou Dayspring  
bright!  
Pour on our souls thy healing light;  
Dispel the long night's lingering  
gloom,  
And pierce the shadows of the tomb.

*Rejoice! Rejoice!...*

4. (Men)

O Come, thou Lord of David's Key!  
The royal door fling wide and free;  
Safeguard for us the heav'nward  
road,  
And bar the way to death's abode.

*Rejoice! Rejoice!...*

5. (All)

O come, O come, Adonai,  
Who in thy glorious majesty  
From that high mountain clothed in awe  
Gavest thy folk the elder Law.

*Rejoice! Rejoice!...*

## GOD REST YOU MERRY, GENTLEMEN

1. God rest you merry, gentlemen,  
Let nothing you dismay,  
For Jesus Christ our Saviour  
Was born on Christmas day,  
To save us all from Satan's power  
When we were gone astray:

*O tidings of comfort and joy,  
comfort and joy,  
O tidings of comfort and joy.*

2. From God our heav'nly Father  
A blessèd angel came,  
And unto certain shepherds

Brought tidings of the same,  
How that in Bethlehem was born  
The Son of God by name:

*O tidings.....*

3. The shepherds at those tidings  
Rejoicèd much in mind,  
And left their flocks a-feeding,  
In tempest, storm and wind,  
And went to Bethlehem straightway  
This blessèd babe to find:

*O tidings.....*

4. But when to Bethlehem they  
came,  
Whereat this infant lay,  
They found him in a manger,  
Where oxen feed on hay;  
His mother Mary kneeling,  
Unto the Lord did pray:  
*O tidings.....*

5. Now to the Lord sing praises,  
All you within this place,  
And with true love and brotherhood  
Each other now embrace;  
This holy tide of Christmas  
All others doth deface:  
*O tidings.....*

### THE FIRST NOWELL

1. The first Nowell the angel did say  
was to certain poor shepherds in  
fields as they lay,  
in fields where they lay keeping their  
sheep,  
on a cold winter's night that was so  
deep.  
*Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,  
born is the King of Israel.*

2. They looked up and saw a star  
shining in the east beyond them far;  
and to the earth it gave great light,  
and so it continued both day and  
night.  
*Nowell, Nowell,...*

3. And by the light of that same star  
three wise men came from country  
far;  
to seek for a king was their intent,  
and to follow the star wherever it  
went.  
*Nowell, Nowell,...*

4. This star drew nigh to the  
northwest;  
o'er Bethlehem it took its rest,  
and there it did both stop and stay,  
right over the place where Jesus lay.  
*Nowell, Nowell,...*

5. Then entered in those wise men  
three,  
full reverently upon their knee,  
and offered there in his presence  
their gold, and myrrh, and  
frankincense.  
*Nowell, Nowell,...*

6. Then let us all with one accord  
sing praises to our heavenly Lord,  
that hath made heaven and earth of  
nought,  
and with his blood our life hath  
bought.  
*Nowell, Nowell,...*

## Musical Notes

*An introduction to tonight's concert from our Music Director, Michael Turner*

Putting together a Christmas concert programme can prove quite a challenge. Christmas in music seems to take two forms: significantly large pieces such as Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* or Handel's *Messiah*, or miniatures such as the magnificent repertoire of carols old and new that can be drawn upon.

It is for a concert like this evening's that pieces such as Geoffrey Bush's *Christmas Cantata* come into their own. This work, the most substantial piece on the programme but lasting around 30 minutes, was written in 1947 and sets a series of Christmas texts, many of which will be familiar. Similarly, Bush employs well known melodies associated with those texts (such as the *Coventry Carol*), often with slightly astringent harmonies to add a charming "newness" to them. As can be found in his extensive output of songs and opera, Bush is an effective writer for the voice (solo or choral) and here chooses to provide small-scale accompaniment in the form of a string orchestra and a single oboe.

Opening our concert is a reworking of a piece I wrote for Stretton Choral Society to mark the Coronation of King Charles III back in May 2023. Now retitled *For Christmas*, I've set texts from the Bible, where Mary is visited by the Angel to tell her of her impending childbirth, before a hymn-tune tells of the setting for the birth and, finally, the piece ends on a celebratory note marking the arrival of the newborn King, Jesus.

Between the two choral pieces in the first half comes a short *Suite for Strings* which I wrote some time back. There are three short movements: a *Prelude*, a *Dance* and a *Finale*.

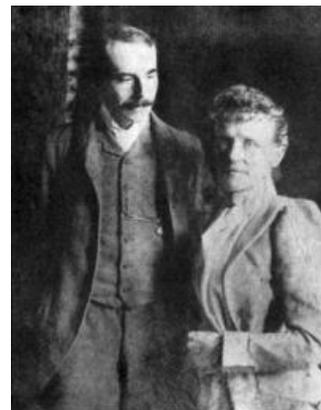
Our second half is given over to a series of carols (including three which we would love you to join us in singing), two Christmas readings, and a short piece by Edward Elgar, *Christmas Greeting*, setting words written by his poet wife, Alice.

We all hope that you will enjoy our evening's music making and go on to have a splendid Christmas!



*Geoffrey Bush  
(1920-1998)*

*Edward Elgar  
(1857-1934)  
and Alice Elgar  
(1848-1920)*



Our Spring concert 2024

**Sunday 12th May**

**Something a bit different...**

In our summer concert of 2024, we will be performing two entertaining works, both created in the later twentieth century to present familiar words and stories through a new musical idiom.



Joseph Horowitz's *Captain Noah and his Floating Zoo* is a re-working of the bible story using lyrics written by Michael Flanders (of *Flanders & Swann* fame).



George Shearing's *Songs and Sonnets* are jazz-inspired settings of familiar verses from Shakespeare.

Do you like the idea of singing in a choir? Perhaps you find the traditional choral repertoire of nineteenth century (or earlier) church music daunting? Or you're put off because you've never had any formal choir training? These fun and more modern pieces could be the ideal opportunity to give it a try.

Although we aim for high standards when we perform, we are a very welcoming group - open to anyone, of any level of ability and experience, and definitely no auditions.

We will rehearse every Thursday at 7.30 p.m. in the United Reformed Church, High Street, Church Stretton, starting with our first rehearsal on Thursday 11 January.

New members are always very welcome. Just arrive at about 7.20 pm and introduce yourself - we will provide the score, introduce you to others singing the same vocal part and help you to learn the music. Do come and join us!

If you're concentrating in tonight's concert during *Christmas Greeting*, you may hear the line "*The pifferari wander far*". You may already know what a *pifferaro* is, but if, like most of the choir, it's new to you, we offer this dictionary definition....

**pifferaro**

**Noun**

Pifferaro (plural *pifferaros* or *pifferari*)

1. A musician who plays the *piffero*, a kind of oboe

**Etymology**

Italian *pifferaro*



Stretton Choral Society acknowledges the assistance of ***Shrewsbury Performing Arts Library*** and ***Phoenix Library*** for the loan of music used in this concert.

In addition, the Society gratefully acknowledges help in presenting our concerts from many local sources and special thanks are extended to:

Church Stretton Library  
Co-op Foodstore  
Stretton Focus  
Vine & Co

Also helpers and choir members who donate and assist with refreshments.

The Society is very grateful for the support of those who are our Friends. If you would like to become a Friend please contact:

[strettonchoral@gmail.com](mailto:strettonchoral@gmail.com)

**Website: [strettonchoral.org.uk](http://strettonchoral.org.uk)**



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