

Journey Into Light
The Choirs of Jesus College Cambridge
Directed by Mark Williams
Robert Dixon and Timothy Lambourn (organ); Rebecca Crawshaw (trumpet)
Signum, 2012: SIGCD 269

‘Merrily onto your iPad’ – Journey into Light - a bold collection of modern classics.

Hugh Canning, The Sunday Times

This album provides a lovely programme of music. The Choir of Jesus College, Cambridge perform beautifully and the album contains a lot of wonderful rarities.

David Mellor, Classic FM

This disc from Jesus College, Cambridge, features the choir in three guises: boy trebles, female undergraduate sopranos, and with both top lines merged. An approachable programme, includes Britten, Rutter, Howells, Poston, Mathias, Head, Tavener, Warlock and Burgon. ****

Daily Mail

Another Oxbridge college, another fine mixed-voice choir, another gorgeously captured chapel acoustic (Mike Hatch engineering) - this selection of favourite pieces by mainly British composers makes a pleasingly intimate impression. *****

BBC Music Magazine

Oxbridge choirs are on top form this year. The boy choristers and choral scholars of Jesus College Cambridge deliver the goods in *Journey into Light* (label: Signum Classics). Their programme, persuasively shaped by conductor Mark Williams, includes spine-tingling performances of Tavener’s *The Lamb* and Judith Bingham’s *Epiphany*.

Andrew Stewart, Sinfini Music

The third year of Mark Williams’s tenure as director of music at Jesus College, Cambridge, has yielded a disc of mainstream Christmas music, **Journey into Light**, which showcases the combined forces of the college’s chapel choir, with its top line of boys, and the mixed-voice college choir. It’s a performance of full, rich sounds from a group who are among the unsung heroes of a collegiate choir circuit currently dominated by the larger colleges, and it stands proudly next to King’s College’s **Nine Lessons & Carols**.

Caroline Gill, Gramophone

The choir of Jesus College Cambridge, founded in 1496, is distinctive in maintaining two choirs: the Chapel Choir, which is made up of boy choristers and adult male singers; and the College Choir, formed in 1982, which has female undergraduates for its top line. The adult male singers form the ‘back row’ for both choirs. In addition to the weekly schedule of choral services, members of the Choirs enjoy concerts, recordings, broadcasts and foreign tours. Their recording of Charles Wood’s *St. Mark’s Passion* got a very favourable review from Michael Cookson.

The booklet is very well presented. I read and hear constantly that CDs of vocal music are released with no words or background notes; not so here. There is an explanation concerning the title, summaries of each carol and their composers, texts, biographies of the main participants, and names of the entire choir. This is how CD booklets should be; the same information is available on Signum’s web site but having such clearly printed texts is first rate.

Mark Williams’ wisely selected programme blends favourite carols with lesser known works beginning with “Jesus Christ the Apple tree”, followed by McKie’s “We wait for thy loving kindness”, written for the Royal Wedding of 1947, an inspiring piece gorgeously sung. Impressive too is “I sing of a maiden” by Patrick Hadley, a close friend of Vaughan Williams. The splendid acoustics are very faithfully captured on “Advent Prose” and “There is no rose”. Britten’s moving “Hymn to the virgin” was written when he was only 16 and was new to me. I was very taken with “Bright Star carol” by Nico Muhly before we come to the familiar “In the Bleak Midwinter” with fine treble and tenor solos. “Tomorrow shall be my dancing day” is one of my favourites, is at just the right pace and has great clarity in the singing.

Bob Chilcott, a King’s singer has written an excellent piece in “The Shepherd’s Carol” and this is followed by an original arrangement of “I saw three ships” by Simon Preston, who I remember from his time at Christ Church Oxford as Organist and Choirmaster. I didn’t know “The little road to Bethlehem” and as the notes say, it is very touching. “Away in a manger” sung unaccompanied shows off the prowess of the combined choirs. A very fine rendition of William Mathias’s lively “Sir Christèmas” is succeeded by John Tavener’s popular “The Lamb” one of the best renditions I’ve heard. Thundering organ from Timothy Lambourn heralds a tour de force on the tune “Of the father’s heart begotten”, one to play loud! In line with

the concept of Journey is “Epiphany” by Judith Bingham written in 1996. This shows the College choir to good effect.

Herbert Howells’ “Here is a little door” is a good example of this fine English composer as is “Bethlehem Down” by Peter Warlock which won “The Daily Telegraph” carol competition; both are glorious here. Many will remember the late Geoffrey Burgon’s “Nunc Dimittis” from “Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy”. This is one of the highlights of this disc as the choristers combine with trumpet and organ. The final item is the eight part “Hymn to the Creator of Light” by John Rutter. It’s a first-rate example of this composer’s work; the choral singing is superb.

I really enjoyed this record and looked forward to playing it often. The excellence of the singing coupled with the aptness of the selection make this collection special. It deserves to do well. There’s something distinctive about a College Choir and they are to be congratulated on this recording.

A very well chosen selection of Christmas Choral music magnificently sung.

David R Dunsmore, *Musicweb International*

This is an attractive and very well-planned disc of music from Advent to Epiphany. The Choir of Jesus College, Cambridge, appears in two guises here: the College Choir made up of mixed voices and the all-male Chapel Choir. Under the direction of Mark Williams, both formations sing with a welcome lack of mannerism and a clean, naturally produced sound. I enjoyed this record a good deal, not least because the programme is so effective. There isn’t space to discuss all 21 of the pieces here, but Patrick Hadley’s *I sing of a maiden*, John Joubert’s *There is no Rose* and Britten’s *A Hymn to the Virgin* are among the best of the Advent pieces, along with enterprising choices of music by Judith Weir (*Advent Prose*) and Nico Muhly (*Bright Star Carol*).

There’s plenty of familiar repertoire, ranging from the reflective music of Tavener’s *The Lamb*, Harold Darke’s *In the bleak midwinter* and Michael Head’s *The Little Road to Bethlehem* to more outgoing carols like William Mathias’s *Sir Christèmas*, John Gardner’s *Tomorrow Shall be my Dancing Day* and Simon Preston’s arrangement of *I saw three ships*. All are performed confidently. I certainly hadn’t come across the solo organ *Paeon on ‘Divinum mysterium’* by John Cook (1918-84), but it’s most effective here as played by Timothy Lambourn, and it’s a very apt choice too, since Cook was a student at Jesus College before going on to work with Vaughan Williams (as copyist for *Scott of the Antarctic*) and a successful career as an organist in Canada and the United States. This is followed by Judith Bingham’s *Epiphany*, a haunting work that combines grave austerity with moving power.

We’re back on more familiar ground with Howells’s *Here is the little door* and Warlock’s *Bethlehem Down*. Geoffrey Burgon’s *Nunc dimittis* gets off to a slightly tentative start (the boys seem a fraction under the note) but is greatly enhanced by the lovely trumpet playing of Rebecca Crawshaw. The last track may come as something of a surprise. I’d be willing to bet that anyone hearing the first few minutes of this seven-minute unaccompanied *Hymn to the Creator of Light* might not come up with John Rutter as the composer. It was written for the dedication of the Howells memorial window in Gloucester Cathedral and there’s more than a hint of Howells about some of the music, which is beautifully crafted and very different from Rutter’s usual Christmas style.

Organ playing on the disc is shared by Timothy Lambourn and Robert Dixon and both are admirable. The sound is unobtrusively excellent and the booklet includes complete sung texts. If the programme appeals (as it certainly does to me), then my advice is to let yourself be tempted.

Nigel Simeone, *International Record Review*