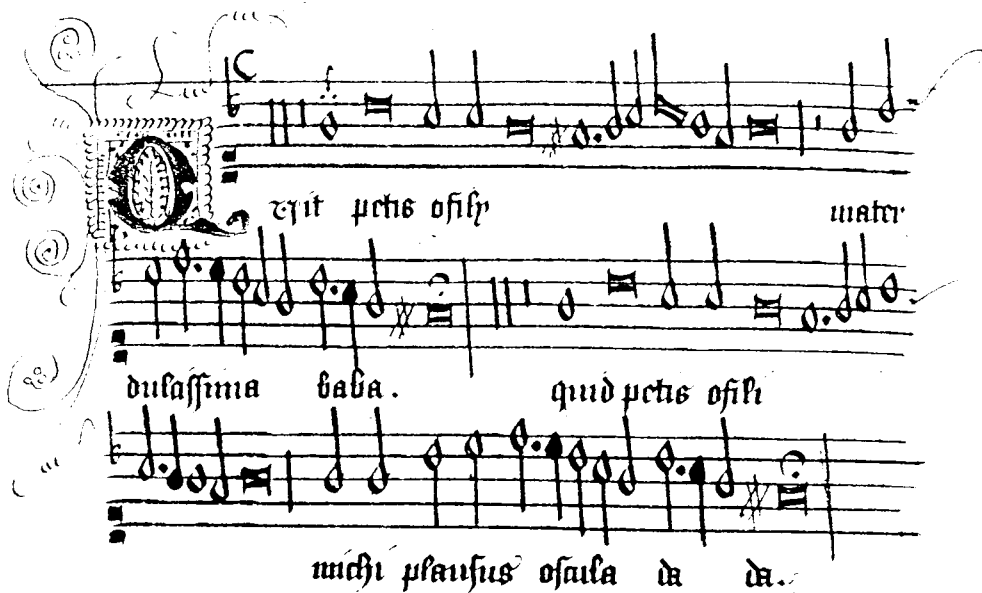


# WOLCUM YOLE

*Settings of Medieval English Carols by Tudor  
and twentieth-century composers*



**CAMBRIDGE TAVERNER CHOIR**  
*director Owen Rees*

**Jesus College Chapel**  
**Sunday 6 December 1992**  
**8.15 p.m.**

*Programme*

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BY KIND PERMISSION OF THE MASTER AND FELLOWS

- |    |  |   |
|----|--|---|
| 1. | Quid petis o fili?   | Richard Pygott<br>(fl. first half of sixteenth century) |
| 2. | Swete was the song the Virgine<br>soong                        | anon. (16th century)                                    |
| 3. | Jesu mercy, how may this be?                                   | (John?) Browne<br>(fl. late fifteenth century)          |
| 4. | Lully, lulla, thow littel tyne child<br>(‘The Coventry Carol’) | anon.   |
| 5. | Lulla, lullaby, my sweet little baby                           | William Byrd (1542/3-1623)                              |
| 6. | This day Christ was born                                       | William Byrd  |

**INTERVAL OF 15 MINUTES**

- |    |   |                              |
|----|---|------------------------------|
| 7. | A Ceremony of Carols (Op. 28)<br>with Emma Granger (harp)   | Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) |
|    | Procession<br>Wolcum Yole<br>There is no Rose<br>That yonge child; Balulalow<br>As dew in Aprille<br>This little Babe<br>Interlude<br>In Freezing Winter Night<br>Spring Carol<br>Adam lay i-bounden<br>Recession |                              |
| 8. | A Hymn to the Virgin  | Benjamin Britten             |

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**THE CAMBRIDGE TAVERNER CHOIR**

*Director:* Owen Rees

*Harp:* Emma Granger

*Sopranos:* Diana Baumann, Helen Garrison, Judith Henderson,  
Bernadette Nelson, Caroline Preston Bell, Sally Terris, Tanya Wicks  
*Altos:* Tim Dallosso, Simon Godsill, Martin Neill, Rupert Preston Bell  
*Tenors:* Paul Baumann, Finlay Lockie, Philip Mills  
*Basses:* James Durran, Frank Salmon, Gary Snapper, Paul Watson

Quid petis, o fili?  
Mater dulcissima baba.  
O pater, o fili,  
Michi plausus osculada.

The mother, full mannerly,  
And meekly as a maid,  
Looking on her little son,  
So laughing in lap laid,  
So prettily, so pertly,  
So passingly well apayd,  
Full softly and full soberly  
Unto her sweet son she said:

Quid petis, o fili?...

I mean this by Mary,  
Our maker's mother of might,  
Full lovely looking on our Lord,  
The lantern of light,  
Thus saying to our saviour,  
This saw I in my sight,  
This reason that I rede you now,  
I rede it full right.

Quid petis, o fili?...

Musing on her manners  
So nigh marr'd was my main,  
Save pleased me so passingly  
That past was my pain.  
Yet softly to her sweet son  
Methought I heard her sain:  
Now gracious God and good sweet babe,  
Yet once this game again:

Quid petis, o fili?...

\*\*\*

Swete was the song the Virgine soong  
When she to Bethlem Juda came  
And was deliver'd of hir sonne  
Who blessed Jesus hath to name.

Lullaby, swete babe, soong she,  
My sonne and eke my Saviour borne  
Which hath vouchsafed from an high  
To visit us that were forlorne.

Lullaby, swete babe, soong she,  
And rockt him featly on hir knee.

\*\*\*

Jesu mercy, how may this be?

Christ that was of infinite might,  
Egall to the father in deity,  
Immortal, impassible, the worldes light,  
And would so take mortality,

Jesu mercy, how may this be?

He that wrought this world of nought,  
That made both pains and joy also,  
And suffer would pain as sorrowful thought,  
With weeping, wailing, yea, sowning for woe,

Jesu mercy how may this be?

Ah Jesu! Why suffered thou such entreating,  
As beating, bobbing, yea, spitting on thy face?  
Drawn like a thief, and for pain sweating  
Both water and blood, crucified, an heavy case?

Jesu mercy how may this be?

"Lo, man, for thee, that were unkind,  
Gladly suffered I all this."  
And why, good Lord, express thy mind!  
"Thee to purchase both joy and bliss."

Jesu mercy how may this be?

\*\*\*

Lully, lulla, thow littel tyne child,  
By, by, lully, lulla.  
Thou littel tyne child, by, by, lully, lullay

O sisters too, how may we do,  
For to preserve this day  
This pore yongling for whom we do sing:  
By, by, lully, lullay

Herod the King, in his raging,  
Chargid he hath this day  
His men of might, in his owne sight  
All yonge children to slay.

That wo is me, pore child, for thee,  
And ever morne and say  
For thi parting, nether say nor singe:  
By, by, lully, lullay.

\*\*\*

Lullaby, my sweet little baby,  
What meanest thou to cry?  
Lullaby, my sweet little baby.

Be still my blessed babe,  
Though cause thou hast to mourn,  
Whose blood most innocent to shed  
The cruel king hath sworn;

And lo, alas, behold,  
What slaughter he doth make,  
Shedding the blood of infants all,  
Sweet saviour, for thy sake.

A king is born they say,  
Which king this king would kill.  
Oh woe and woeful heavy day,  
When wretches have their will.

Lullaby, my sweet little baby...

But thou shalt live and reign  
As Sybils have foresaid,  
As all the prophets prophesy,  
Whose mother yet a maid.

And perfect virgin pure  
With her breasts shall upbreed  
Both God and man that all hath made,  
The son of heavenly seed,

Whom caitiffs none can 'tray,  
Whom tyrants none can kill.  
Oh joy, oh joyful happy day,  
When wretches want their will.

Lullaby, my sweet little baby...

\*\*\*

This day, Christ was born; this day, our Saviour did  
appear; this day, the Angels sing in earth, the  
Archangels are glad. This day, the just rejoice,  
saying: Glory be to God on high, Alleluia!

Hodie Christus natus est; hodie salvator apparuit;  
hodie in terra canunt angeli: laetantur archangeli.  
Hodie exsultant justi dicentes: Gloria in excelsis Deo.  
Alleluia!

\*\*\*

Wolcum be thou hevene king,  
Wolcum born in one motning,  
Wolcum for whom we sall sing  
Wolcum Yole!

Wolcum be ye Stevene and Jon,  
Wolcum Innocentes everyone  
Wolcum Thomas marter one  
Wolcum Yole!

Wolcum be ye good New Yere,  
Wolcum Twelfth the day both in fere  
Wolcum seintes lefe and dere  
Wolcum Yole!

Wolcum be ye Candelmess  
Wolcum be ye Quene of bliss  
Wolcum bothe to more and lesse  
Wolcum Yole!

Wolcum be ye that are here  
Wolcum alle and make good cheer  
Wolcum alle another year  
Wolcum Yole!

\*\*\*

There is no rose of such vertu  
As is the rose that bare Jesu.  
Alleluia.

For in this rose conteined was  
Heaven and earth in little space.  
Res miranda.

By that rose we may well see  
There be one God in persons three.  
Pares forma

The aungels sungen the shepherds lo:  
Gloria in excelsis deo.  
Gaudeamus.

Leave we all this werldly mirth,  
And follow we this joyful birth,  
Transeamus.

\*\*\*

That yonge child when it gan weep  
With song she lulled him asleep.  
That was so sweet a melody  
It passed alle minstrelsy.

The nightingale sang also:  
Her song is hoarse and nought thereto.  
Whoso attendeth to her song  
And leaveth the first, then doth he wrong.

\*\*\*

O my deare hert, young Jesu sweat,  
Prepare thy creddil in my spreit,  
And i sall rock thee to my hert,  
And never mair from thee depart.

But I sall praise thee evermoir  
With sanges sweet unto they gloir.  
The knees of my hert sall I bow,  
And sing that richt Balulalow.

\*\*\*

I sing of a maiden  
That is makeles:  
King of all kings  
To her son she ches.

He came al so still  
There his moder was,  
As dew in Aprille  
That falleth on the grass.

He came al so stille  
To his moder's bour,  
As dew in aprille  
That falleth on the flour.

He came al so stille  
There his moder lay,  
As dew in aprille  
That falleth on the spray.

Moder and mayden  
Was never none but she.  
Well may such a lady  
Goddes moder be.

\*\*\*

This little babe so few days old  
Is come to rifle Satan's fold.

All hell doth at his presence quake,  
Though he himself for cold do shake.  
For in this weak unarmed wise  
The gates of hell he will surprise.

With tears he fights and wins the field,  
His naked breast stands for a shield.  
His battering shot are babish cries,  
His arrows looks of weeping eyes.  
His martial ensigns Cold and Need,  
And feeble Flesh his warrior's steed.

His camp is pitched in a stall,  
His bulwark but a broken wall.  
The crib his trench, haystalks his stakes,  
Of shepherds he his muster makes.  
And thus, as sure his foe to wound,  
The angels trumps alarum sound.

My soul, with Christ join thou in fight.  
Stick to tht tents that he hath pight.  
Within his crib is surest ward,  
This little babe will be thy guard.  
If thou wilt foil thy foes with joy,  
Then flit not from his heavenly Boy.

\*\*\*

Behold, a silly tender babe,  
In freezing winter night,  
In homely manger teembling lies  
Alas, a piteous sight!

The inns are full, no man will yield  
This little pilgrim bed.  
But forced he is with silly beasts  
In crib to shroud his head.

This stable is a Prince's court,  
This crib his chair of state;  
The beasts are parcel of his pomp,  
The wooden dish his pate.

The persons in that poor attire  
His royal liveries wear:  
The Prince himself is come from heav'n;  
This pomp is prized there.

With joy approach, O Christian wight,  
Do homage to thy King,  
And highly priase his humble pomp,  
Which he from Heav'n doth bring.

\*\*\*

Pleasure it is  
To hear iwis  
The Birdes sing.  
The deer in the dale,  
The sheep in the vale,  
The corn springing.

God's purveyaunce  
For sustenance,  
It is for man.  
Then we always  
To give him praise  
And thank him than.

\*\*\*

Deo gracias!

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

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

Ne had the appil take ben,  
The appil take ben,  
Ne hadde never our lady  
A ben hevene quene.

Blessed be the time  
That appil take was.  
Therefore we moun singen  
Deo gracias!

\*\*\*

Hodie Christus natus est ... Alleluia!

\*\*\*

Of one that is so fair and bright  
Velut maris stella  
Brighter than the dayes light  
Parens et puella  
I cry to thee; thou see to me!  
Lady, pray thy son for me  
Tam pia  
That I mote come to thee  
Maria

All this wored were forlore  
Eva peccatrice  
Till our loverd was ybore  
De te genetrice  
With "Ave" it went away  
Thuster night, and com'th the day  
Salutis  
The welle springeth out of thee  
Virtutis

Lady, flower of alle thing  
Rosa sine spina  
Thou bare Jesu, hevnes king  
Gratia divina  
Of alle thou barest the prize  
Lady queen of Paradise  
Electa  
Maide milde mother is  
Effecta

\*\*\*

In the medieval period the celebration of Christmas both within church and outside it attracted music in a wide variety of styles. The term 'carol' - as it applies to medieval English texts - refers to vernacular lyrics (although some include an admixture of Latin), usually with a devotional theme (most often connected with Christmas or Easter), and employing a form in which a repeated 'burden' acts as a frame for a series of verses. There survives a particularly rich repertory of carols for Christmas in English sources of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and medieval English carol texts have also (as the second part of the concert seeks to show) provided inspiration to English composers of the present century.

The two earliest pieces in tonight's concert, dating from the end of the fifteenth century or the opening of the sixteenth, are Richard Pygott's *Quid petis, o fili?* and the setting of *Jesu mercy, how may this be?* which is attributed to 'Browne' - possibly the John Browne whose Latin works in the Eton Choirbook reveal him as one of the finest English composers of the period. Pygott was Master of the Children in the household chapel of Thomas Wolsey, and also held a post as Gentleman of the Chapel Royal from 1524 until his death nearly thirty years later. The style of both works is a striking combination of vocal virtuosity and directness of expression. The text so poignantly set by Pygott portrays Mary playing with the baby lying in her lap, while Browne's carol is concerned principally with Christ's passion, with vivid portrayal of the 'beating' and 'spitting' of the crowd before the crucifixion.

The English carol tradition represented by these pieces was disrupted by the reformation of the mid-sixteenth century, and works which could be termed 'carols' are remarkably rare from the later Tudor period. One lucky survival is the so-called 'Coventry carol', which was sung as part of a mystery play - the Pageant of the Shearman and Tailors - performed annually in the streets of Coventry. Towards the end of the play is a representation of the massacre of the innocents (upon the orders of Herod). As Mary and Joseph leave with the baby Jesus, the women sing the present piece as a lullaby to their children, so that their crying will not attract the attention of the searching soldiers. It is likely that *Swete was the song the Virgine soong* also dates from the sixteenth century, although the manuscript sources which preserve it are later. The version performed tonight is an arrangement by a musical connoisseur of the early seventeenth century - Thomas Hamond.

Marys' lullaby to the baby Jesus and the slaughter of the Holy Innocents - the themes of the two pieces just described - are combined to form the subject of William Byrd's *Lullaby, my sweet little baby*. Byrd conceived the piece originally for performance by one singer (the first alto part) and four viols, but when the piece appeared in the *Psalmes, Sonets and Songs* of 1588, Byrd added text to these four instrumental parts to allow for the option of all-vocal performance (which is how we present the piece tonight). The refrain structure of the earlier carol repertory here re-appears; Byrd differentiates between refrain and verse through a change to triple metre for the latter.

The first half of the concert ends with another work by Byrd, dating perhaps from the very end of the Tudor period (it was published in the *Psalmes, Songs and Sonnets* of 1611). *This day Christ was born* (described in the 1611 edition as 'A Caroll for Christmas Day') might well have been used in church as an anthem, given its elaborate style and rich six-voice scoring. The text is simply a translation of the Latin text 'Hodie Christus natus est', which - with its associated chant - begins Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols*, heard in the second part of our concert.

Britten composed *A Ceremony of Carols* in March 1942, on board ship while travelling back to this country after spending several years in the United States. The work itself is a type of 'voyage home', an acknowledgment and exploration of the composer's ties to English musical traditions and poetry. The texts are mainly medieval carols, although several date from the sixteenth century (*This little Babe* and *In Freezing Winter Night* are by Robert Southwell). Britten's treatment of them is both original and powerful. This power is often derived from the skillful employment of ostinato techniques: the rocking bass of *There is no Rose* is broken just once, towards the end, to produce a telling climax; the ominous two-note ostinato motive of *That yonge child*, on the other hand, remains obtinately as a bitter touch against changing harmonies; *In Freezing Winter Night* is a series of massive crescendos and diminuendos over the (again ominous) rhythmic ostinato of the harp. The bitter-sweet quality of much of the *Ceremony* is clearly heard, for example, in *Balulalow*, with its alternation of major and minor mode. At the centre of the work is the marvellously evocative harp *Interlude*, drawing on the plainsong melody which frames the *Ceremony*.

Ten years before he conceived the *Ceremony*, Britten had composed a youthful masterpiece which inhabits the same textual and (to some extent) stylistic world. *A Hymn to the Virgin* sets a fourteenth-century macaronic English carol, dividing the text between the main chorus and a semi-choir of four solo voices. The clearly modal style which Britten employed here suggests his close identification with the English musical tradition of the late middle ages.

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