

5137

Choral Programme Series

Consultant Editor: Simon Halsey

A Christmas Celebration

11 CAROLS FROM
GEORGIAN ENGLAND

(SATB / Keyboard)

EDITED BY PETER HOLMAN AND SALLY DRAGE



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FABER *ff* MUSIC

4,70

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INTRODUCTION

English parish church music of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries originated in a late seventeenth-century movement to revitalise worship. Amateur choirs were originally formed to support and improve congregational singing, though as they grew more competent a distinctive repertory of polyphonic 'psalmody' (metrical psalms, hymns and anthems) too complex to allow the participation of ordinary parishioners was developed for them by provincial composers. It is usually called 'gallery music' today because it was often performed in the west galleries of country parish churches. But not all parish choirs sang in galleries, not all the composers were provincial or rural, and not all of it comes from the Church of England; there is a related but distinctive repertory of Nonconformist music. This volume is a wide-ranging anthology of Christmas music from these traditions, ranging from early rural psalmody to elaborate Christmas anthems with obligato instruments and pieces in the parish church idiom by urban composers. Most of the pieces can be heard on *While Shepherds Watched*, Hyperion CDA66924, performed by Psalmody and The Parley of Instruments directed by Peter Holman.

The Puritans tried to suppress Christmas as a superstition, and Christmas hymns and carols were only gradually accepted by the Anglican church in the eighteenth century, though they proliferated among Nonconformists. 'While shepherds watched' was the only Christmas hymn text accepted in parish churches between 1700, when it appeared in a supplement to the *New Version of the Psalms of David* by Nicholas Brady and Nahum Tate, and 1782, when it was joined by a version of Charles Wesley's 'Hark! the herald angels sing' and one other. For this reason dozens of tunes were associated with 'While shepherds watched' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; Nonconformists, on the other hand, sometimes used secular tunes (nos.7,9).

Early psalmody (no.2) retained the Renaissance practice of placing the 'air' or tune in the tenor rather than the soprano, though the practice grew up of doubling it at the octave, making five parts out of four, and sometimes it is not clear which part is the tune (no.5). It is most likely that the 'air' was performed by tenors and sopranos together, and modern choirs are advised to divide their sopranos between the soprano line and the 'air' in such pieces. Later psalmody composers adopted the normal SATB layout and doubling seems eventually to have died out (nos.9-11). The tune can also be doubled by high and low voices at the octave in three-part Nonconformist psalmody (nos.1,3) and the urban parish church music which it influenced (nos.6,7). Alto parts were routinely printed at the upper octave, and may also sometimes have been sung at that pitch by sopranos (no.1 works particularly well that way); the clefs

of those we have transposed down an octave are marked with an asterisk. This is vigorous, straightforward music which should be sung with a clear, direct sound. The elaborate shaping and carefully gradated dynamics of cathedral music should be avoided, though simple dynamic schemes based on the text can be effective.

Choirs in the many rural churches where there was no organ originally sang unaccompanied; at a later date a cello or a bassoon was added doubling the bass, though other instruments such as flutes, oboes, clarinets and violins were increasingly used in the late eighteenth century to double the upper parts. In some churches instrumentalists would play part or all of the tune as a prelude and as interludes between the verses, though independent 'symphonies' were sometimes written. The organ was the normal accompanying instrument in urban parish churches, and choral collections by organists such as Samuel Arnold (no.6) and Edward Miller of Doncaster (no.7) usually include a figured bass or a written-out keyboard part. Organists routinely improvised preludes and interludes, and sometimes published them for the instruction of beginners. We have provided no.3 with a prelude devised by Timothy Roberts for the Hyperion recording and a set of interludes published by the London organist Starling Goodwin in about 1775. Organs were occasionally used with groups of instrumentalists in the more elaborate pieces, such as no.11 and possibly no.9. Organs in Georgian England had no pedal division, so all organ parts should be played on the manuals.

Commentary

The aim of this edition is to provide a scholarly but practical performing edition of the earliest surviving text of each piece; later printed and manuscript copies have been disregarded. Editorial additions are distinguished by the use of square brackets, small notes or slashed slurs. Spelling, punctuation and part names have been modernised. Redundant accidentals have been omitted, and missing portions of text added, without notice. Original material in the keyboard parts is printed in large notation; editorial additions are printed in small.

1. A Christmas Carol

A simple setting of the tune 'A virgin unspotted' (published by John Arnold in *The Compleat Psalmist*, 1741) by a Lancastrian Nonconformist who was Principal of the Dissenting Academy in Daventry.

2. The Song of the Angels at the Nativity of our Blessed Saviour

A fuguing tune published by a rural psalmody teacher to the words 'O thou to whom all creatures bow', Psalm 8, New Version, and later used for 'While shepherds watched'. Emendations: alto part in original is in alto clef; b. 14, alto, e' originally d'.