



SOMERVILLE
COLLEGE

Somerville London Group
Christmas Carol Concert



Temple Church
Tuesday 9th December 2025
7 pm



Before the service, one of the organ scholars will perform:
Noëls for Organ – Louis-Claude Daquin (1694-1772)
Toccata (Symphony No.5) – Charles-Marie Widor (1844-1937)

Gitanjali Chants

Ever in my life
Have I sought thee with my songs.
It was they who led me from door to door,
And with them have I felt about me,
Searching and touching my world.
It was my songs that taught me all
The lessons I ever learnt;
They showed me secret paths,
They brought before my sight
Many a star on the horizon of my heart.
They guided me all the day long to
The mysteries of the country of pleasure and pain,
And at last to what palace gate have they
Brought me at the end of my journey?
You came down from your throne
And stood at my cottage door.
I was sitting all alone in a corner,
And the melody caught your ear.
You came down and stood at my cottage door
Masters are many in our hall,
And songs are sung there at all hours.
But the simple carol of this novice
Struck at your love.
One plaintive little strain,
One plaintive little strain,

Mingled with the great music of the world,
And with a flower for a prize,
You came down and stopped at my cottage door.
You came down.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941)

Music: Craig Hella-Johnson (b.1962)

Welcome

Catherine Royle (1982)
College Principal

Please stand to sing the hymn

Once in Royal David's City

CHOIR ONLY

*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.*

*He came down to earth from heaven
Who is God and Lord of all,
And his shelter was a stable,
And his cradle was a stall:
With the poor and mean and lowly,
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.*

ALL

For he is our childhood's pattern,
Day by day like us he grew,
He was little, weak and helpless,
Tears and smiles like us he knew;
And he feeleth for our sadness,
And he shareth in our gladness.

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

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.

C. F. Alexander (1818–1895)

IRBY

Henry J. Gauntlett (1805–1876)

Harmonised: Arthur Henry Mann (1850–1929)

vv5 arr. Sir David Willcocks (1919–2015)

‘Christmas Eve’, by Julian Elizabeth McMaster Harvey (1948)
Read by Nermeen Varawalla (1989)

The wild briar makes an aureole of thorn
Round God’s deserted house upon the hill.
Under the moon the rose fruit, muted still,
Cradles the house whose Heir will soon be born.

Elm, earth and sloe are silent as eclipse;
All watch miraculous divinity
Upon the brink of this world’s rounded side
Prepare to drive through time’s finality.

(As with some saints – but more than once – to appear
In many places simultaneously)
– Burn down our sin-made walls; bring back our fear,
Our joy in his originality!

The waiting cornucopia of the hip,
Red as the blood that he for ever shed,
Is both the cup from which we, exiled, sip,
King’s gift, and precious jar for which he bled.

Holy Night

O holy night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Saviour’s birth;
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till he appeared, and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices!
O night divine! O night when Christ was born.

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming,
with glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,
there came the wise men from Orient land.
The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger;
in all our trials born to be our friend.
He knows our need, to our weakness is no stranger.
Behold your King; before Him lowly bend!
Behold your King; before Him lowly bend!

Truly he taught us to love one another;
His law is love and his Gospel is peace.
Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother,
And in his Name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
Let all within us praise his holy Name.
Christ is the Lord, then ever, ever praise we,
His power and glory evermore proclaim.

Words: Placide Cappeau (1808-1877)
trans. John Sullivan Dwight (1813-1893)

Music: Adam Adolphe (1803-1856)
arr. John Rutter (b. 1945)

**From *The Children of Green Knowe*, Lucy M. Boston (1914)
Read by Baroness Lucy Neville-Rolfe (1970)**

As he looked up at St Christopher's face a snowflake drifted past it, then another, and suddenly it was snowing thickly. Like millions of tiny white birds circling home to roost, the flakes danced in the air. They filled the sky as far up as he could imagine. At the same time all the sounds in the world ceased. The snow was piling up on the branches, on the walls, on the ground, on St Christopher's face and shoulders, without any sound

at all, softer than the thin spray of fountains, or falling leaves, or butterflies against a window, or wood ash dropping, or hair when the barber cuts it. Yet when a flake landed on his cheek it was heavy. He felt the splosh but could not hear it. He went in plastered with snow, and here tea was ready, with Mrs Oldknow sitting by the fire waiting for him. In the fire the snow drifting down the chimney was making the only noise it ever can – a sound like the striking of fairy matches; though sometimes when the wind blows you can hear the snow like a gloved hand laid against the window.

Tolly made the toast and his great-grandmother spread it with honey. They talked about Christmas. Mrs Oldknow said Boggis was going to buy the tree the next day, unless they were snowed up. Tolly hoped they would be. He liked the idea of being snowed up in a castle. By the light of the candles he could see the flakes drifting past the windows.

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Words: Robert Frost (1874–1963)

Music: Eric Whitacre (b.1970)

Please stand to sing the hymn

O Little Town of Bethlehem

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 wondering love.

How silently, how silently,
the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming;
but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him still
the dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem,
descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin, and enter in,
be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
the great glad tidings tell:
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel.

Words: P. Brooks (1835–1893)

Music: FOREST GREEN, arr.
Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)
vv4 arr. Thomas Armstrong (1898–1994)

**‘Carol’, from *‘The Last Castle’*, by Dorothy L Sayers (1912)
Read by Caroline Totterdill (1984)**

O know you how Queen Mary sits
In heaven’s brightest bowers,
Tall lilies in her garden-beds,
Set round with gilly-flowers?

And know you how Queen Mary sits,
With rings upon her hands,
While the seven blessed Virgins bind,
Her hair in golden bands?

And when the Lord will comfort her
For her seven swords of pain,
He comes to stand beside her knee,
A little child again.

The Holly and the Ivy

The holly and the ivy,
When they are both full grown,
Of all the trees that are in the wood,
The holly bears the crown.

*O the rising of the sun,
The running of the deer,
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweet singing in the choir.*

The holly bears a prickle
As sharp as any thorn,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
On Christmas Day in the morn,

The holly bears a bark
As bitter as any gall;
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
For to redeem us all.

The holly and the ivy,
When they are both full grown,
Of all the trees that are in the wood,
The holly bears the crown.

From *Anderby Wold*, by Winifred Holtby (1917)

Read by Karen Richardson (1972)

Everything had gone very well. Perhaps she had been a little too prompt in speeding her parting guests. Uncle Dickie had looked almost hurt when she bustled him into his carriage. But then such a busy person as Mary would never have time for anything if she always stopped to consider other people's feelings. There were so many really important things to be done. The Christmas Tree was important. She had superintended its decoration ever since she was fifteen. There was literally no one else who could do it properly.

Then it was a singularly pleasant thing to do. All the way up the Church Hill, Mary was repicturing former trees and former decorations. She always felt a little awed by the tall, tapering tree, standing darkly green against the whitewashed walls of the schoolroom. Still untouched by frivolous hands, its regal austerity retained something of the frosty stillness of pinewoods on a starlit night. For a moment – this silent dignity; then with the arrival of noisy helpers the scene became one of riotous carnival. For they carried boxes of coloured balls, bales of scarlet and yellow bunting, baskets laden with glittering tinsel, trumpets painted silver and vermillion, dolls in vivid muslin dresses, stars and medallions, tops and skipping ropes, and tumbled them in festive profusion over baskets and chairs. They tied the oranges on first and the tree was rich with the gold of alien fruit, then the stars and balls and spangled disks, and finally the gaily tinted candles in fragile metal stands, till the tree stood in many-coloured splendour ripe for its fantastic harvest.

Noe, Noe: Pastores

Noe, Noe! Pastores, cantate Domino canticum novum.

Noel, Noel! Shepherds, sing to the Lord a new song.

Dum silentium tenerent omnia, et nox in suo cursu iter haberet.

While all things were in silence, and the night was in the midst of its course.

Angel: Gloria, Gloria!

Angel: *Glory, glory!*

Shepherds: Quis est hoc?

Shepherds: *Who is this?*

A: Gabriel ego sum.

A: *I am Gabriel.*

Annuntio vobis gaudium magnum.

I announce to you great joy.

S: Quale?

S: *What kind?*

A: Natus est vobis

A: *Born to you is*

S: Quis?

S: *Who?*

A: Salvator

A: *The Saviour.*

S: Ubi?

S: *Where?*

A: In Bethleem Juda

A: *In Bethlehem of Judah.*

Noe! Canticum novum.

Noel! A new song.

Shepherds: Gabriel!

Shepherds: *Gabriel!*

Angel: Pastores ecce ego!

Angel: *Shepherds, behold, it is I!*

S: Ubi est Pan noster

S: *Where is our Bread?*

A: Dixi, in Bethleem

A: *I told you, in Bethlehem.*

S: Ubi reclinat caput?

S: *Where does he lay his head?*

A: Sub fano.

A: *In a shelter.*

S: Gabriel!

S: *Gabriel!*

A: Pastores!

A: *Shepherds!*

S: In palatio?

S: *In a palace?*

A: Non, in stabulo

A: *No, in a stable.*

S: O bonitas

S: *Oh, goodness!*

A: O pietas!

A: *Oh, piety!*

S: Cur Deus factus homo?

S: *Why did God become man?*

A: Ut homo Deus fieret

A: *So that man might become God.*

S: Cur mortalis?	S: <i>Why mortal?</i>
A: Ut vos immortales rederet	A: <i>So that he might make you immortal.</i>
S: Cur humilis?	S: <i>Why humble?</i>
A: Ut vos elevaret!	A: <i>So that he might lift you up!</i>

Sic contraria contraries curanrur

Thus opposites are healed by opposites.

Pro sole nascente, Noe, Noe! Triumphe.

For the rising sun, Noel, Noel! Triumph!

Pro aurora eius Noe, Noe! Triumphe.

For his dawn, Noel, Noel! Triumph!

Et pro ludovico nostro, Noe, Noe! Triumphe.

And for our Louis, Noel, Noel! Triumph!

Words: Anonymous

Music: Guillaume Bouzignac (1587-1643)

Please stand to sing the hymn

The First Noel

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.*

They lookèd up and saw a star
shining in the east beyond them far;
and to the earth it gave great light,
and so it continu'd both day and night.

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.

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.

Then enter'd in those wise men three,
full rev'rently upon their knee,
and offer'd there in his presence
their gold, and myrrh, and frankincense.

Then let us all with one accord
sing praises to our heav'nly Lord,
that hath made heav'n and earth of nought,
and with his blood mankind hath bought.

Words: Anonymous

Music: Traditional Cornish Carol
arr. Sir David Willcocks (1919–2015)

**Christmas Morning, from *Personal Pleasures*, by Rose Macaulay (1900)
Read by Jenny Ladbury (1981)**

Christmas woke me early, in the small dark hours, as if someone had touched me on the shoulder and said, Wake up, wake up, it's Christmas. I woke up and it was dark, and would not be Christmas for hours. I crawled to the foot of the bed, to where it hung on the painted iron bedrail, the large woollen stocking that had yawned so emptily overnight, but now so stiffly, bulkily, swollenly bulged. It might not be opened until daylight, but I felt it outside, pinching and poking its various protuberances, from the square cornery one above the knee to the round one in the toe that might be an orange or a glass witchball.

Shivers of ecstasy curdled my blood as I fingered and felt; my hair stared, my skin goosed, my pulses hammered in heart and head. It was Christmas Day. However often I whispered it, I could scarcely credit so strange, so preposterous, so heavenly a fact. Christmas Day had indeed arrived. But how could it really, actually, in point of fact, have come, and I in bed as usual, in the same red flannel pyjamas as on any other night? Yet Christmas Day must come; one had long expected it, and here it was. Perhaps it was a dream.

But of a sudden the still dark was shaken and shattered and a-clamour with bells. Not the gay sweet chiming of an English church peal, but harsh, clanging, iron, tremendous, a very roar and tumult of noise. The great Roman brick tower of Sant Ambrogio in the large piazza outside the windows, the striped black and white tower of San Domenico in the small piazza up the street, the more distant, but patronal, Santa Caterina along the sea road beyond the town, the church of the Collegio up the hill path, the chapel of the convent school, all with one accord awoke to Christmas morning and clanged their summons to Mass. They were insistent, commanding, almost menacing. English bells, sweetly and uncertainly tumbling as they chime, seem to sing. Come along to church, good people if you please, come along to church on Christmas Day. These bells cry, *Venite, venite, il Signore v'aspetta, levatevi pronto, pronto, e fatto il dovere.**

But to me they only shouted, Christmas Day! Christmas Day!

*Come, come, the Lord is waiting for you, get up quickly, quickly, and do your duty.

Nova Nova

Nova! Nova!
Gabriel of high degree,
He came down from the Trinity
From Nazareth to Galilee,

He met a maiden in a place;
He kneeled down before her face;
He said: "Hail, Mary, full of grace!"

When the maiden saw all this,
She was sore abashed, ywis,
Lest that she had done amiss.

Then said the angel: "Dread not you,
You shall conceive in all virtue
A child whose name shall be Jesu."

Then said the maid: "Verily,
I am your servant truly,
Ecce ancilla Domini."
Nova! Nova!

Words: Traditional 15th Century

Music: Ian Farrington (b. 1977)

Closing Words

Catherine Royle (1982)
College Principal

Please stand to sing the hymn

O Come, All Ye Faithful

O come, all ye faithful,
joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
come and behold him
born the King of Angels:

*O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!*

God of God,
Light of Light.
Lo! he abhors not the Virgin's womb;
very God,
begotten, not created:
O come, let us adore him...

See how the Shepherds,
summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks, draw nigh with lowly fear;
we too will thither
bend our joyful footsteps:
O come, let us adore him...

Sing, choirs of Angels,
sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;
glory to God
in the highest:
O come, let us adore him...

Words: Anon. Latin C.18th
tr. J. F. Wade (1711–86) &
F. Oakeley (1802–80)

Music: Traditional, vv5 arr.
Sir David Willcocks (1919–2015)



*After the service, one of the organ scholars will perform:
In Dulci Jubilo, BWV 729 - J.S. Bach (1685-1750)*

Everyone is warmly invited to join us for
drinks after the service.

The Choir of Somerville College

Will Dawes

Director of Chapel Music

Alfred Kelsey (Music, 2023)

William Morrison (Physics, 2025)

Organ Scholars

The committee of the Somerville London Group is grateful to all those who support our events. By buying tickets for SLG events, you have allowed us to donate almost £50,000 to College over the past 15 years.