



The Choir of St John's College, Cambridge, releases its first ever Ash Wednesday album, featuring Allegri's *Miserere*



The Choir of St John's College, Cambridge releases *Ash Wednesday* on 21 February 2020, featuring the live recording of their 2019 Ash Wednesday service, an annual event made famous by over 40 live broadcasts from the BBC

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"In this recording we are not seeking to be compared against studio and concert performances by mixed-voice professional choirs. Rather we are wanting to present a snapshot of an honest, reverential service - a real act of liturgy using the beautiful Book of Common Prayer, as we do each day."

-Andrew Nethsingha

In their first ever release of a live Ash Wednesday service, Andrew Nethsingha and the Choir of St John's College, Cambridge, are releasing the live recording from their 2019 Ash Wednesday Evensong, featuring Gregorio Allegri's famous *Miserere mei, Deus* with one of the Choir's best trebles performing the solo.

Evensong on Ash Wednesday has always been a particularly important service for the Choir, and the BBC have been transmitting their dedicated service live since 1972. For the first time in the choir's history, they are releasing the music captured live from this service.

Alongside Allegri's *Miserere* the album will feature music by Byrd, Weelkes and Bach. Andrew Nethsingha, the Choir's Director of Music, particularly wanted to include the *Miserere* on the disc due to its hypnotic and healing atmosphere conducive to meditation, reflection and worship. In the comprehensive and illuminating booklet notes, Nethsingha reminisces on this particular performance of the piece, in which the famous top C solo was intended to be shared, but was last minute thrust onto just one 13-year-old boy. As you can hear in the recording, he sails through the top line with 'extraordinary composure and artistry', all whilst being broadcast to half a million people. By the time this recording comes out, this soloist's voice will most likely have dropped, and he'll never be able to sing treble again.

The choir utilised various spaces within the chapel for this performance and recording, in order to best serve the individual musicality of each work. The choir sang in the sanctuary for *Miserere mei, Deus*, to create a sense of space and distance from the congregation; the choir stalls for Weelkes' *Short Service*, so as to facilitate antiphonal effects; the sanctuary again for the Byrd motet *Ne irascaris, Domine* - this time striving for a sense of intimacy on the radio, engendered by a reduced number of singers standing close to one another.

Andrew Nethsingha, Director of Music, said:

"The treble soloist and I had discussions about the best word underlay for Jerusalem in the final phrase containing a top C. It seems we didn't come to a definite conclusion, and I smile when I hear him hurriedly change vowel during the final high note - a record of a unique event in time. Ash Wednesday would be pointless if we didn't have imperfections!"

Next year's Ash Wednesday service will be at St John's Chapel, Cambridge on 26 February 2020, at 6:30pm. The *Ash Wednesday* disc will be available from 21 February 2020 on Signum Records.

www.sjcchoir.co.uk

-ENDS-

For more information or for review copies, please contact Tessa Deterding at Premier
tessa.deterding@premiercomms.com | 0207 292 7355

Notes to Editors

Track listing

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|------|--|-------------------------------------|
| [1] | The Preces | William Byrd (1539/40-1623) |
| [2] | Miserere mei, Deus | Gregorio Allegri (1582-1652) |
| [3] | The First Lesson
Isaiah 1 vv. 10-18 | |
| [4] | Magnificat
The Short Service | Thomas Weelkes (baptised 1576-1623) |
| [5] | The Second Lesson | Luke 15 vv. 11-end |
| [6] | Nunc Dimittis
The Short Service | Thomas Weelkes (baptised 1576-1623) |
| [7] | The Apostles' Creed | |
| [8] | The Responses | William Byrd (1539/40-1623) |
| [9] | Ne irascaris, Domine | William Byrd (1539/40-1623) |
| [10] | The Prayers | |
| [11] | Prelude in E minor (BWV 548i) | Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) |

The Choir of St John's College, Cambridge

The Choir of St John's College, Cambridge is one of the finest collegiate choirs in the world – known and loved by millions from its broadcasts, concert tours and 100 recordings. Founded in the 1670s, the Choir is known for its rich, warm and distinctive sound, its expressive interpretations and its ability to sing in a variety of styles. Alongside this discipline, the Choir is particularly proud of its happy, relaxed and mutually supportive atmosphere. The Choir is directed by Andrew Nethsingha following in a long line of eminent Directors of Music, recently Dr George Guest, Dr Christopher Robinson and Dr David Hill. Their first release on their imprint with Signum Classics, *Deo*, won the Choral Award at the BBC Music Magazine Awards 2017.

Andrew Nethsingha

Performing in North America, South Africa, the Far East, and throughout Europe, Andrew Nethsingha has been Director of Music at St John's College, Cambridge since 2007. He has helped to set up a new recording label, 'St John's Cambridge', in conjunction with Signum. His first disc on the new label, *DEO* (music by Jonathan Harvey), was a 2017 BBC Music Magazine Award winner.

Andrew Nethsingha was a chorister at Exeter Cathedral, under his father's direction. He later studied at the Royal College of Music, where he won seven prizes, and at St John's College, Cambridge. He held Organ Scholarships under Dr Christopher Robinson at St George's Windsor, and Dr George Guest at St John's College, before becoming Assistant Organist at Wells Cathedral. He was subsequently Director of Music at Truro and Gloucester Cathedrals, and Artistic Director of the Gloucester Three Choirs Festival.