

AMERICAN CHORAL CLASSICS

| Alban Voices | Barbara Naylor - *mezzo-soprano* |
| Peter Jaekel - *piano* | Robin White - *conductor* |



divine art

★ American Choral Classics ★

1.	Randall Thompson (1899 - 1984) Alleluia	5:25
2.	Samuel Barber (1910 - 1981) Agnus Dei	6:28
3.	Eric Whitacre (1970 -) Lux Aurumque	3:54
4.	Aaron Copland (1900 - 1990) Simple Gifts	1:21
5.	In the Beginning	16:11
6.	Samuel Barber (1910 - 1981) Sure on this Shining Night	2:09
7.	Charles Ives (1874 - 1954) Psalm 67	2:18
8.	George Gershwin (1898 - 1937) Summertime (from Porgy & Bess)	2:26
9.	Shenandoah (trad., arr. Robin White)	1:52
10.	Aaron Copland (1900 - 1990) I bought me a cat	2:29
	Total playing time	45:50



Randall Thompson: *Alleluia*.

When maestro Serge Koussevitsky commissioned Thompson to write a piece for the opening of *Tanglewood* (summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra), he was expecting a choral fanfare. What he received instead was a reflective, rather melancholy piece, based on the single word ‘*Alleluia*’. But this was 1940: Europe was ablaze, and America, not yet part of the conflict, was clearly on the side of freedom and democracy. It was against this background that Randall Thompson felt compelled to write the piece that was to become his best-known and most frequently performed, expressing everyone’s longing for peace and reason to prevail.

Samuel Barber: *Agnus Dei*.

Barber is to America what Edward Elgar is to the British: the personification in music of their national spirit, especially its perceived nobility. Consequentially each has provided his people with an anthem, to be sung or played on solemn occasions: namely, Elgar’s *Nimrod (Enigma Variations)* and Barber’s *Adagio for Strings*. The *Agnus Dei* is Barber’s own transcription for voices of the string original: set to the final section of the Latin Mass (*Lamb of God, who carries the sins of the world, have mercy on us – grant us peace*), it combines the expressive gravity of the original with the innate appeal of the human voice.

Eric Whitacre: *Lux Aurumque*.

As the only living composer represented here, in this work Whitacre clearly aims to seduce rather than shock us. This he does by means of a Latin text and soft, often unresolved and mildly dissonant harmonies. During the recent pandemic, this piece was introduced to a worldwide audience through his ‘Virtual choir’ internet performance. The original English poem, thought by some to be by Whitacre himself, was translated into Latin by Charles Anthony Silvestri: “Light, warm and heavy as pure gold, and the angels sing softly to the new-born babe”.

Aaron Copland: *Simple Gifts*.

In common with other religious sects, the Shaker movement originated in the north of England, but became firmly established in the US. The tune known as *Simple Gifts* was written by one of the movement's elders, Joseph Brackett. It was taken up by Copland to form the main theme of his ballet *Appalachian Spring*: he also provided us with this straightforward yet appealing choral setting. More recently, the British hymn-writer Sydney Carter adapted it with his own lyric as *Lord of the Dance*, after the traditional theme "Tomorrow shall be my dancing day".

Aaron Copland: *In the Beginning*.

Best known for his cowboy ballet scores and *Fanfare for the Common Man*, Copland's complex and evocative setting of the biblical Creation allegory may come as a surprise to those outside the choral community. Led by a mezzo-soprano soloist (the cantor), the choir is as vivid as any orchestra in its description of the symbolic seven days' events, culminating in the introduction of Mankind as a living soul. Like Bernstein with his *Chichester Psalms*, Copland provides a musical meeting-point for at least 2 major faiths, and all can enjoy the drama at whatever level they please.

Samuel Barber: *Sure on this Shining Night*.

The writer's comparative unfamiliarity with this piece, prior to the recording session, was shared by many of the choir. What we discovered was an exquisite miniature of breathtaking simplicity and beauty. The rival setting of this text by Morten Lauridsen will have its advocates: it is for the listener to decide as to their own preference.

Charles Ives: *Psalm 67*.

It's a cliché to say that Charles Ives was way ahead of his time, stylistically: indeed, the innocent ear – comparing this work with *Lux Aurumque* – might well suppose that Whitacre was the earlier of the two. The fact is that all the shocking techniques of the *Enfants Terribles* of the 1960s – polytonality, note-clusters, quarter-tones etc. – were pioneered by Ives more than half a century earlier.

Having said that, this work – although technically polytonal – is nevertheless one of his more approachable, the 2 keys being combined skilfully into one complex harmony. After a joyous climax, he lets us rest with a bit of pure Anglican chanting, emphasizing the universality of the closing lines.

George Gershwin: *Summertime (from Porgy & Bess)*.

From the original crossover opera/musical, the haunting lullaby *Summertime* is its most performed piece. The lyric is full of reassurance and optimism, yet the composer's choice of a minor key and shifting, slightly worrying harmonies seems to foretell the tragedy of the unfolding story.

Shenandoah (*trad., arr. Robin White*).

This universally-known sea shanty seems to have originated with Canadian fur-traders on the Missouri river. The lyrics (of which there are many versions) appear at one time to address the river itself, at another the native-American chief Oneida, whose daughter is sought by the tenors in verse 2. However, its main function is to provide some enjoyable, close-harmony singing.

Aaron Copland: *I bought me a Cat*.

Here Copland raises what is essentially a piece of doggerel, if not quite to high art, at least to something that serious choirs can sing and enjoy unashamedly. Admittedly the fair sex must forgive him (and us) for the misogyny of the final verse, rejoicing instead in the triumph of the feline species!



The Performers



Robin White - conductor

Robin White trained at Imperial College, London and the Royal College of Music, studying conducting with Vernon Handley and orchestration with Bryan Kelly.

He has conducted open-air, pop-classics concerts at National Trust and other venues across the south-west of England and the midlands. He has also worked with leading soloists such as John Lill, Christopher Warren-Green, Alexander Baillie and Emma Johnson in concerts in Bristol and the Channel Islands. His 1992 recording of Edwardian light music for Chandos Records was played extensively on Classic FM.

As an arranger, his work has been recorded and broadcast on Radio 2 and Classic FM, and played live in Melbourne by the Australian Pops Orchestra.

Barbara Naylor - mezzo soprano

Barbara Naylor has appeared on opera stages and concert platforms throughout Europe and the Far East, including Tokyo's NHK Hall and Bunka Kaikan, Hong Kong Festival, Salzburg Festival, Dubrovnik Festival, Opera North and Edinburgh International Festival.

Her operatic roles include Fox (Cunning Little Vixen), Octavian (Der Rosenkavalier), Baba the Turk (Rake's Progress), Jocasta (Oedipus Rex) and Suzuki (Madama Butterfly).

In recital she has made a specialism of programming works by modern and contemporary English composers, including Horowitz, Weir, Dove, Wallen, Macmillan, McNeff, Marsh, Frances-Hoad, Bussey, Young and Turnage.

Peter Jaekel - piano

Peter Jaekel studied at the Royal Academy of Music where his tutors included John Scott (organ) and Geoffrey Pratley and David Willison (piano accompaniment). In 2007 he was appointed accompanist to Crouch End Festival Chorus and he regularly deputises for the London Symphony Chorus and London Philharmonic Choir. He has worked with some of the world's finest conductors including Sir Colin Davis, Valery Gergiev, Vladimir Jurowski, Michael Tilson Thomas and Edward Gardner. He has held appointments as organist at Tiffin School and St Paul's Knightsbridge. Away from classical music Peter has performed as pianist with the Ben Sanders Scottish Country Dance Band throughout Britain and abroad.

Peter is in huge demand as a piano accompanist. He is also much sought after as a vocal coach for contemporary music; repertoire includes operas by Jonathan Dove, Stephen McNeff and Tansy Davies. He has been principal repetiteur for Eastern Opera and has also worked for European Chamber Opera.

He has given performances of Janacek's Glagolitic Mass and Arvo Part's Credo with Crouch End, Handel Organ Concerti and Saint-Saens' Organ Symphony, and he has appeared at the Swaledale, Ryedale, Brighton and Deal festivals. His work has taken him to France, Belgium, Holland, Spain, Italy, Germany, Portugal, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Norway, the Baltic States, Hong Kong and New York. Recent performances have included Jonathan Dove's The Passing of the Year with the Arcubus Ensemble and concerts in France and Estonia.

Alban Voices - choir

Alban Voices is a chamber-choir formed over 20 years ago by Robin White and his late wife, Freda, originally as a relief choir for services in St. Albans Abbey.

It has always been an ad-hoc grouping, drawn together as and when required: many of the current members sing regularly in London's top symphonic choirs. Among other appearances, it featured most notably in a pivotal episode of the BBC TV soap opera EastEnders in December 2003. More recently, the group's recording of Robin's original Christmas song, Light of the World, accompanied by the Royal Ballet Sinfonia, has been well received, and was played on Scala Radio and Classic FM in the run-up to Christmas 2022.

Alban Voices 2022-23

Sopranos

Rosamund Bell
Julia Blinko**
Mary Clayton
Margaret Ellerby
Rachel Johnson
Liz Langley
Marika Rauscher
Kate Screen
Jocelyn Miles
[**Soloist in Agnus Dei
& Lux Aurumque]

Altos

Paula Miller
Hannah Leonard
Hila Harrison
Francesca Caine
Ida Griffith
Rachel Johnston
Naomi Wordsworth
Marianne Johnson
Lauren Patman
Noel Chow

Tenors

Bob Bishop
Joshua Blunsden
Matt Griffin
Ron Hollings
Steve James
John Featherstone
Martin Dowling
Simon Ashmead
Andrew Woodmansey

Basses

Hugh Bowden
Edward Gerrie
Robert Gorrie
John Rayfield
Peter Redingius
Alistair Scott
Chris Wetherall
Des Turner



Alban Voices



Robin White - conductor



Peter Jaekel - piano



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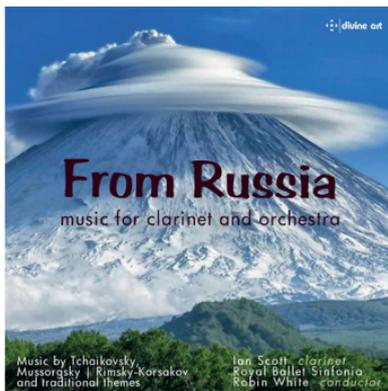
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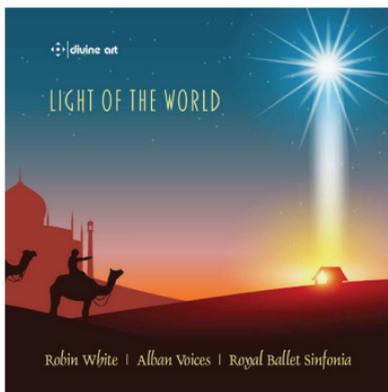


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Ian Scott - clarinet
Royal Ballet Sinfonia
Robin White - conductor

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Royal Ballet Sinfonia
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