



# UNCERTAIN SEA

Choral music by John Casken

Joyful Company of Singers  
Peter Broadbent, conductor

# UNCERTAIN SEA

## CHORAL MUSIC BY JOHN CASKEN

### FAR FROM LAND

- |    |                      |      |
|----|----------------------|------|
| 1. | Uncertain Sea (2014) | 7:56 |
|----|----------------------|------|

### SACRED SHAPER

- |    |                             |      |
|----|-----------------------------|------|
| 2. | For Dappled Things (2019)   | 2:50 |
| 3. | The Land of Spices (1990)   | 5:21 |
| 4. | Caedmon's Hymn (2021)       | 3:49 |
|    | From this Red Earth (2019)  |      |
| 5. | I. The Father               | 3:12 |
| 6. | II. The Son                 | 4:06 |
| 7. | Floore of Allegories (2023) | 6:29 |

### STONE AND THORN

- |     |  |       |
|-----|--|-------|
| 8.  | Tree of Angels for cello and organ (2024)  | 14:29 |
|     | Kim Vaughan (cello), Tom Wilkinson (organ) |       |
| 9.  | The Knight's Stone (2011)                  | 9:20  |
|     | Philippa Davies (flute)                    |       |
| 10. | Returning from the Tomb (2013)             | 4:32  |
| 11. | Sunrising (1993)                           | 6:05  |

### FARE THEE WEEL

- |     |  |       |
|-----|--|-------|
| 12. | From One Thread for solo viola (2020)  | 7:31  |
|     | Fantasia – Sarabande – Courante  |       |
|     | Bridget Carey (viola)  |       |
| 13. | Ae Fond Kiss (2020)  | 5:54  |
| 14. | Memorial (2014)  | 11:18 |
|     | Rozanna Madylus (mezzo-soprano), Marcus Farnsworth (baritone),<br>Owen Gunnell and Aaron Townsend (percussion) |       |

Total playing time 92:52

# INTRODUCTION

I live in Northumberland, within easy reach of its magnificent landscape and historic coastline, so it is perhaps inevitable that a sense of this place, its history and poetry, finds its way into my music. Of the pieces on this new recording, *Uncertain Sea*, *Caedmon's Hymn* and *Memorial* have Northumbrian themes; others were written for performance by choirs in Durham, Newcastle and Northumberland.

The sea is the key element of *Uncertain Sea*, but stones also play a part ('the sea inside us. It rolls us round like stones'). Different kinds of stone are important in *Memorial* ('Sons remembered/On memorials of stone'); *Returning from the Tomb* focuses on the image of 'the stone rolled away' from Christ's tomb; and in *The Knight's Stone*, by the knight's bed, 'there standeth a stone, Corpus Christi written thereon'.

John Donne's poem in 'From this Red Earth' includes not stone but the image of the heart 'by dejection, clay, And by self-murder, red'. George Herbert's poem 'The Church-floore', which I set in *Floore of Allegories*, takes the church and its stone floor as an allegory for the different virtues of Patience, Humilitie, Confidence, Love and Charitie, with God as the architect.

My painting for the cover of this recording includes the stones of Dunstanburgh Castle bordering the sea; in Katrina Porteous's words, 'Black Dunstanburgh withstands/The waves, the years'.

The pieces on this recording are arranged in groups with headings drawn from their texts. Northumberland's seascape and dialect are central to *Uncertain Sea*, the single work in **Far from Land**. Christianity from early times (**Sacred Shaper**), an Easter sequence (**Stone and Thorn**) and music of farewell (**Fare thee weel**) form the content of the remaining groups.

Working with the Joyful Company of Singers and Peter Broadbent for a couple of years before we made this recording, and hearing my works included in their repertory, has helped to build a strong, rewarding and continuing relationship, the fruits of which may be heard on this recording.

## FAR FROM LAND

***Uncertain Sea*** is a setting of two poems by the Northumbrian poet Katrina Porteous about the difficult and precarious lives of men and women in the fishing communities on the Northumbrian coast and the decline of the fishing industry. The first poem, 'The Sea Inside', captures the uncertain sea as it sets free 'Rhythms that rock our boat and ropes/And shift us restlessly'. There are no fish in this place 'Unsheltered, far from land', with Cheviot and black Dunstanburgh in the distance. The wind is cold, there is a stink of seaweed and salt, and the sea, 'Unknowable, unknown... rolls us round like stones'.

The second poem, 'The Bottom o' the Sea', is written in the Northumbrian dialect of the north-east coast. A local character vividly describes the harsh working conditions, the hours the men and women had to put in, 'Wearin' oot w' women wi' mushels an' lines, lads', and how it has all come to an end. We hear of the death of 'aa'd Dick Haa', wha was drooned at the trootin' nets' and of Jackie on his deathbed who, in the next life, will 'nivor be a fisherman,/Or gi' ony thowt t' the bottom o' the sea, lad'. This is a tragic but witty poem, and any smiles Katrina's lines might bring are tinged with a deep sadness.

Rather than setting the first poem and then the second, I interleaved the two and chose a different music for each. The melancholic mood of the first, initially with its gentle rocking motion, is contrasted with the livelier and more rhythmic music of the second, which I have set as if it were an old sea-song.



*Uncertain Sea* was commissioned by the National Youth Choir of Great Britain for its premiere performance at Sage Gateshead, conducted by Ben Parry, on 30 August 2014.

## SACRED SHAPER

***For Dappled Things*** was composed as a 60th birthday gift for James MacMillan. It was first performed by the Novantae Singers, directed by Andrew McTaggart, at the Cumnock Tryst Festival on 6 October 2019. Gerard Manley Hopkins's poem 'Pied Beauty' praises God and celebrates many dappled things in God's kingdom — the skies, the trout that swim, 'Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls', 'Landscape... fold, fallow, and plough'.

***The Land of Spices*** is a setting of George Herbert's 'Prayer', each line offering a different metaphysical definition of the word. This sequence is rich in images and in its references to the noises of the universe, to music, and finally to 'Church-bells beyond the starres heard'. The most eloquent expression of prayer comes in the last two words: 'something understood'.

*The Land of Spices* was written for Hatfield College Choir, University of Durham, and first performed, conducted by Gerald Cornelius, on 22 June 1990.

***Caedmon's Hymn*** is a late 7th-century poem created by Caedmon, a simple cow-herder employed by the monastery of Whitby, who was given the gift to sing a hitherto unheard song in praise of God. The oldest Old English poem, it was originally sung from memory, subsequently written down after Caedmon's time and later translated into Latin by Bede. There are over 20 surviving manuscripts; one of the earliest is a mid-8th-century Northumbrian text from which the Reverend Canon Clare MacLaren, former Canon for Music and Liturgy of Newcastle Cathedral, made a unique translation that preserves both the vividness and alliteration of the original poem.

Caedmon's words (in Clare MacLaren's version) sing out in praise of 'protector of heavenrealm... aeons' weaver, origins' author'. God, the 'sacred shaper' did 'craft heav'n-rafter'd roof' and then 'did soul-shepherd mould/field, farm and fold/the middle earth/for fowk to tend/and fend and hold'. Not only does the translation evoke Anglo-Saxon literature, perhaps echoing something of Manley Hopkins, but it is also clearly rooted in the Northumbrian landscape.

*Caedmon's Hymn* was commissioned by the Choir of Newcastle Cathedral and first performed by the Cathedral Choir under Ian Roberts, its Music Director, on 25 July 2021.

***From this Red Earth*** was commissioned by the Choir of Lincoln's Inn, who gave its premiere in Lincoln's Inn Chapel, London, on 5 June 2019, conducted by Nicholas Shaw. John Donne's monumental, rich and complex 'A Litany', comprising 28 poems, was proposed as a source, and I set the first two, contemplating The Father ('From this red earth, O Father, purge away/All vicious tinctures, that new fashioned/I may rise up from death') and The Son ('O be thou nailed unto my heart,/And crucified again').

***Floore of Allegories*** is a setting of George Herbert's 'The Church-floore'. The floor is an allegory for the virtues of Patience (the 'square and speckled stone... so firm and strong), Humilitie (the other stone 'black and grave... checker'd all along'), Confidence ('The gentle rising, which on either hand/Leads to the Quire above') and Love and Charitie ('the sweet cement, which in one sure band/Ties the whole frame').

When 'Sinne' sometimes 'steals, and stains' the floor, it is cleansed when the marble weeps. And when Death puffs at the door, thinking 'to spoil the room', he blows and sweeps the dust from the floor. As Herbert says, 'Blest be the *Architect*, whose art/ Could build so strong in a weak heart', and these words are repeated at the end of the work as an emphatic climax.

*Floore of Allegories* is dedicated to the Joyful Company of Singers and their conductor Peter Broadbent, who gave the premiere in St Mary's Church, Wooler, Northumberland, on 4 May 2024.

*Tree of Angels* for cello and organ continues my fascination for trees. In *The Dream of the Rood* (2008), I adapted the text of the Early English poem in which the tree where Jesus hung appears to a man in a dream. Even though *Tree of Angels* makes no musical reference to this earlier work, I created an imaginary scenario in which the rood-tree was also occupied by angels alongside Jesus — watchful, guarding, defending, singing, defiant, lamenting. I see this as a work for solo voice with organ, the cello embodying vocal traits in its solo line. A number of sections are in the style of a 13th-century motet; they call for a pure sound from both instruments that exists outside time, in contrast to the more dramatic passages.

## STONE AND THORN

*The Knight's Stone* alludes to early music in its setting of the words of the 15th-century *Corpus Christi Carol*. Unusually, it includes a part for solo flute that begins in imitation of a bird of prey: the falcon. It is not certain who the narrator is, but it could be the maid lamenting that the falcon has taken her love away. The poem is rich in vivid descriptions of the landscape and of the hall in which the maid's love, the Christ-like knight, lies dying, the two being united in earthly love, and soon to be in spiritual love.

*The Knight's Stone* was written for Northern Sinfonia Chorus and the flautist Gavin Osborn, who gave the premiere in Alwinton Church, Upper Coquetdale, on 23 July 2011, conducted by Alan Fearon.

***Returning from the Tomb*** was composed for Coquetdale Chamber Choir (of which I was Music Director) to sing in an Easter Vigil on 30 March 2013 in All Saints' Church, Rothbury, Northumberland. Telling the story of the women coming to Jesus' tomb on the Sunday morning and finding the stone rolled away, it ends with Peter running to the tomb, seeing 'the linen cloths and nothing more'. The text is from St Luke's Gospel.

***Sunrising*** is a setting of 'Early One Morning', a rare religious poem by Sylvia Townsend Warner, written in 1928 but not published until after her death. Someone rises early, 'in a morning mist... sorrowful' and goes out alone to meet Christ. He is recognised instantly, with his worn clothes and his carpenter's gear. Between the two figures grows a winter thorn, an image highly charged with symbolism, its apparent brutality softened by drops of dew; a silent, and 'More lovely, more innocent/Tree never grew'.

*Sunrising* was written as a gift to Durham Cathedral in 1993, the year of its 900th anniversary. It was given its first performance there on 15 May 1992 by the Choir of Durham Cathedral, directed by James Lancelot, who subsequently recorded it.

## FARE THEE WEEL

***From One Thread*** is a single-movement piece for solo viola. Writing for a solo instrument is about tracing a single line, such as we find in the visual arts, and in particular in the work of the English textile artist Alice Kettle, to whom the piece is dedicated. Alice has said that 'A piece can develop from one thread'. In music, as in Alice's work, the opening musical idea, or thread, can go in a number of directions: it can loop back on itself, present versions of the idea in different guises, change shape and colour, and move through areas of varying density.

The work has three clearly defined sections that draw on the Baroque suite: a capricious Fantasia, a short, stately Sarabande and an urgent Courante. *From One Thread* was written to mark the 200th anniversary of the Royal Academy of Music, where it was given its premiere by Miguel Sobrinho on 10 November 2020

***Ae Fond Kiss*** is a setting of Robert Burns's poem 'Ae fond kiss', which dwells on lovers parting for ever. In 'Dark despair' the poet remembers the blind love that bound them, their final kiss, and then 'fareweel'.

I made an arrangement of this song to accompany Elaine Gould, who was to sing it at the funeral in Edinburgh of her friend Maureen Webster. From that organ arrangement I realised that it could make an effective choral piece, and I wrote this version for Coquetdale Chamber Choir in 2020. The premiere was in the United Reformed Church, Rothbury, Northumberland, on 12 July 2022. As an emotional, parting gift for Maureen, the choral setting became imbued with an even greater sense of farewell.

***Memorial*** is concerned with farewells on a different scale. Sub-titled 'for the fallen and lost', it is a tribute to men from Upper Coquetdale, in north Northumberland, who perished during the First World War and who were never found, their names alone recorded on the many stone memorials. I directed the premiere with Coquetdale Chamber Choir in St Michael and All Angels Church, Alwinton, Northumberland, on 2 August 2014 as part of Upper Coquetdale's commemoration of the First World War.

The work is for choir, two soloists and percussion and my own text alludes to First World War poetry and Remembrance Day prayers. There are two separate roll-calls of 12 men lost, consisting of their names, ages and their villages. In addition, I was able to use fragments of an account of the Battle of Mametz Wood written by Corporal Briton Smallman of the Northumberland Fusiliers; he was great-uncle of Frances Thropton and uncle of Clare Friend, a resident of Harbottle and someone I knew.

Centred on individuals from a small community, the text and music of *Memorial* hold up a mirror to the universal and tragic loss of loved ones, of neighbours as well as strangers, through war and conflict, and it seems especially relevant in today's world. With human voices collectively expressing feelings of loss through music, we will and we must remember.

© John Casken

## FAR FROM LAND

### Uncertain Sea

Into a different element  
We pull from the stony quay.  
A chill wind breathes warm land away  
And the uncertain sea,  
Rippling light into darkness,  
Dark into light, sets free  
Rhythms that rock our boat and ropes  
And shift us restlessly.

*Naebody knas the hoors w' put in, lads,  
Barkin' an' tarrin' an' workin' on wi' creeves,\*  
Wearin' oot w' women wi' mushels an' lines,  
lads;  
Aah've gi'en ma life t' the bottom o' that sea,  
lads,  
Aah've gi'en ma life t' the bottom o' that sea.*

'There's nowt t' dae but wait, man.  
There's nae fish.' Charlie scans  
The empty miles. Why do I feel  
Unsheltered, far from land?  
Beyond, the Cheviot crouches,  
Black Dunstanburgh withstands  
The waves, the years; between them reach  
The sea, the sky, the sand.

*Noo we're dyen wi' the fishin' an' the fishin's  
dyen wi' us, lads —  
Piercy an' Fiddler an' Jackie an' Skee,  
An' aa'd Dick Haa', wha was drooned at the  
trootin' nets,  
Quiet as a salmon on the bottom o' the sea, lads,  
Quiet as a salmon on the bottom o' the sea.*

*Whae, naebody wants t' listen tae the  
fishermen.  
Everybody tell ye what ye can dae an' ye  
cannot dae —  
Haal a grand bag, then hoy the hyel lot  
owerboard,  
Ploo'in' up the guts for' the bottom o' the sea,  
lads,  
Ploo'in' up the guts for' the bottom o' the sea.*

This is our forebears' country:  
So the cold wind moans.  
The stink of ware\*\* and salt on the fingers  
And, in the bones,  
The rush and heave of water,  
Unknowable, unknown —  
This is the sea inside us.  
It rolls us round like stones.

*Jackie haa'd ma hand as he lay upon his deeth-  
bed;  
'See ye i' the next life on the shores o' Galilee'.  
Aah says, 'Ye'll no, 'cos Aah'll nivvor be a  
fisherman,  
Or gi' ony thowt t' the bottom o' the sea, lad,  
Or gi' ony thowt t' the bottom o' the sea'.*

[\*creeves = crab or lobster pots; \*\*ware = seaweed]

© Katrina Porteous: 'The Sea Inside' and 'The Bottom o' the Sea' (interleaved), from the second part of *The Lost Music* (Bloodaxe Books, 1996)  
Reproduced with permission of Bloodaxe Books

## SACRED SHAPER

### For Dappled Things

Glory be to God for dappled things —  
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;  
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout  
that swim;  
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;  
Landscape plotted and pieced — fold,  
fallow, and plough;  
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;  
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows  
how?)  
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle,  
dim;  
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:  
Praise Him.

*Gerard Manley Hopkins: 'Pied Beauty'*

### The Land of Spices

Prayer the Churches banquet, Angels age,  
Gods breath in man returning from his birth,  
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,  
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and  
earth;  
Engine against th' Almighty, sinners towre,  
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,  
The six-daies world transposing in an houre,  
A kind of tune, which all things heare and feare;  
Softnesse and peace, and joy, and love, and  
blisse,

Exalted Manna, gladnesse of the best,  
Heaven in ordinarie, man well drest,  
The milkie way, the bird of Paradise,  
Church-bels beyond the starres heard, the  
souls bloud,  
The land of spices; something understood.

*George Herbert: 'Prayer'*

### Caedmon's Hymn

Now must we praise  
protector of heavenrealm:  
the measurer's might  
and method of mind;  
works of wonder-father  
wrought beyond number —  
aeons' weaver,  
origins' author.

First did sacred shaper,  
craft heav'n-rafter'd roof  
as earth-bairns' bourn.  
Then did soul-shepherd mould  
field, farm and fold  
the middle earth  
for fowk to tend  
and fend and hold:  
Lord, loaf-ward,\*  
all might untold.

[\*loaf-keeper (hlaf-weard) = Lord]

*Northumbrian Old English: translated (2021) by the  
Reverend Canon Clare MacLaren  
Reprinted by kind permission*



## From this Red Earth

### *The Father*

Father of heaven, and him, by whom  
It, and us for it, and all else, for us

Thou mad'st, and govern'st ever, come  
And re-create me, now grown ruinous:  
My heart is by dejection, clay,  
And by self-murder, red.

From this red earth, O Father, purge away  
All vicious tinctures, that new-fashioned  
I may rise up from death, before I'm dead.

### *The Son*

O Son of God, who, seeing two things,  
Sin, and death crept in, which were never  
made,  
By bearing one, tried'st with what stings  
The other could thine heritage invade;  
O be thou nailed unto my heart,  
And crucified again,  
Part not from it, though it from thee would  
part,  
But let it be by applying so thy pain,  
Drowned in thy blood, and in thy passion slain.

*John Donne: 'A Litany', verses I and II*

## Floore of Allegories

Mark you the floore? that square and speckled  
stone,  
Which looks so firm and strong,  
Is *Patience*:

And th'other black and grave, wherewith each  
one  
Is checker'd all along,  
Is *Humilitie*:

The gentle rising, which on either hand  
Leads to the Quire above,  
Is *Confidence*:

But the sweet cement, which in one sure band  
Ties the whole frame, is *Love*  
And *Charitie*.

Hither sometimes Sinne steals, and stains  
The marbles neat and curious veins:  
But all is cleansed when the marble weeps.  
Sometimes Death, puffing at the doore,  
Blows all the dust about the floore:  
But while he thinks to spoil the room, he  
sweeps.

Blest be the *Architect*, whose art  
Could build so strong in a weak heart.  
*George Herbert: 'The Church-Floore'*

## STONE AND THORN

### **The Knight's Stone**

Lully, lullay, lully, lullay,  
The falcon hath borne my make\* away.  
He bore him up, he bore him down;  
He bore him into an orchard brown.  
In that orchard there was an hall,  
That was hangèd with purple and pall.  
And in that hall there was a bed,

It was hangèd with gold so red.  
And in that bed there lieth a knight,  
His woundès bleeding day and night.  
By that bed's side there kneeleth a may,\*\*  
And she weepeth night and day.  
And by that bed's side there standeth a stone,  
Corpus Christi written thereon.

[\*make = mate or love; \*\*may = maid or maiden]

Corpus Christi Carol (anonymous, 15th-century)

### **Returning from the Tomb**

On the Sunday morning, at early dawn, the  
women came to the tomb,  
bringing their spices they had prepared.  
They found the stone rolled away.  
They went in, but the body was not there.  
They stood, at a loss; suddenly two men in  
dazzling garments were at their side.  
The women were terrified and stood with eyes  
cast down;  
The men said, 'Why?  
Why search among the dead for one who  
lives?  
Remember what he told you while still in  
Galilee,  
that he must be given up into the power of  
sinful men and be crucified,  
and must rise again on the third day'.  
Then they remembered his words.  
Returning from the tomb, Mary Magdalene,  
Joanna, Mary the mother of James,

and the other women with them told this to  
the apostles.  
But the words seemed to them an idle tale,  
and they did not believe them.  
Peter got up and ran to the tomb; peering in  
he saw the linen cloths and nothing more.  
He went home amazed at what had happened.

*after St Luke 24, 1-12*

### **Sunrising**

Early one morning  
In a morning mist  
I rose up sorrowful  
And went out solitary,  
And met with Christ.

I knew him instantly,  
For his clothes were worn;  
Carpenter's gear he carried,  
And between us was growing  
A winter thorn.

For leaf and blossom  
It had drops of dew,  
For birdsong, silence —  
More lovely, more innocent  
Tree never grew.

'Give me', said I,  
And my hands forlorn  
Held out, 'be it only  
One of these dewdrops  
Hanging on the thorn.'  
'Of all these dewdrops,

Hung betwixt you and me,  
That must die at daybreak  
I own not one of them  
My own', said he.

Hearing him speak thus,  
Each dewdrop shone  
Enfranchised diamond;  
And with sunrising  
All was gone.

*Sylvia Townsend Warner: 'Early One Morning', from  
New Collected Poems (2008), ed. Claire Harman  
© The Estate of Sylvia Townsend Warner, 1932  
Reprinted by permission of Carcanet Press, UK*

Had we never lov'd sae kindly,  
Had we never lov'd sae blindly,  
Never met — or never parted,  
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

Fare thee weel, thou first and fairest!  
Fare thee weel, thou best and dearest!  
Thine be ilka joy and treasure,  
Peace, enjoyment, love, and pleasure!  
Ae fond kiss, and then we sever;  
Ae fareweel, alas, forever!  
Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,  
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.

*Robert Burns: 'Ae fond kiss'*

## FARE THEE WHEEL

### Ae Fond Kiss

Ae fond kiss, and then we sever;  
Ae fareweel, alas, forever!  
Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,  
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee!  
Who shall say that Fortune grieves him,  
While the star of hope she leaves him?  
Me, nae cheerfu' twinkle lights me,  
Dark despair around benights me.

I'll ne'er blame my partial fancy,  
Naething could resist my Nancy;  
But to see her was to love her;  
Love but her, and love forever.

### Memorial

*for the fallen and lost, 1914–18*

We will remember  
Those lost  
In foreign fields,  
In death's dark land

The battering of guns,  
Tentacles of wire,  
Gasping death  
From deadly gas and  
Graves of sucking mud

The madness of it all  
In foreign fields  
Where sleep  
Lost sons of Harbottle,  
Heppele, Thropton, Alwinton

Joseph Edmonson, twenty-one  
Henry George Clark, thirty-eight  
Robert Gutherson, thirty-three  
William Forster, twenty-four

Sons remembered  
On memorials of stone:  
Loos, Thiepval

In foreign fields  
Trampled, crushed,  
Smothered mouths  
Forced shut, face-down

'Shells started to burst in the trenches...  
So narrow, two men could not pass each  
other...  
Lie down... your only chance...  
Not strong enough... no stretcher-bearers...  
Exhausted for want of food and sleep...  
Buried up with shell fire...'\*

In foreign fields  
Where sleep  
Lost sons of Rothbury

Thomas Murray, thirty-one  
James Robert Richardson, twenty

William John Harvey, twenty-one  
Thomas Gregory, thirty-four  
Thomas Murray Trotter, twenty-two  
Robert William Renton, thirty  
John Thomas Wintrip, thirty-five  
Thomas Tate, twenty-two

Sons remembered  
On memorials of stone:  
Thiepval, Doiran, Tyne Cot,  
Arras, Ploegsteert

Old age was not for them,  
Nor to see the life  
Their children's children lead

Sons and fathers  
Of these heathered hills,  
Erased  
From the blackened fields of hell

Remembered

We will remember  
Those lost

[\*fragments of an account by Corporal Briton  
Smallman of the Northumberland Fusiliers  
who fought at Mametz Wood]

© John Casken





Joyful Company of Singers, Philippa Davies (flute) and Peter Broadbent (conductor) recording *The Knight's Stone*

## JOHN CASKEN composer

John Casken (b 1949) is one of the most distinctive composers of his generation. His works range through every genre and their titles reveal that he can be inspired by literature and legend as well as landscape and the visual arts.

After studying at the University of Birmingham (1967–71), John Casken spent time in Warsaw, studying with Andrzej Dobrowolski at the Academy of Music; he also formed a long association and close friendship with the leading Polish composer Witold Lutosławski. John Casken became a Lecturer at the universities of Birmingham (1973–9) and Durham (1981–92), was a Research Fellow at Huddersfield Polytechnic (1980–81) and Professor of Music at the University of Manchester (1992–2008), with which he retains strong links as Emeritus Professor of Music.

John Casken has had close associations with the Royal Northern Sinfonia, Hallé and BBC Philharmonic Orchestras and has worked with the Nash Ensemble, Gould Piano Trio and, particularly, with the Lindsay String Quartet and Quatuor Danel. Nine of his pieces have been performed at the BBC Proms, four of them BBC commissions. He has been featured composer at several festivals in the UK and his music has been performed at many international concerts and festivals. Casken's first opera, *Golem*, has been seen in seven different productions internationally; his second opera, *God's Liar*, was performed in London, Brussels and Vienna.

*Golem* won the first Britten Award in 1990; the orchestral song cycle *Still Mine* was awarded the Prince Pierre de Monaco Prix de Composition Musicale in 1993; *The Dream of the Rood* for four voices and large ensemble won a British Composer Award in 2009; and in 2020 John Casken was awarded the first Tippet Medal by the Royal Musical Association for his chamber opera *The Shackled King* (based on *King Lear*). In 2024 he was invited to become Vice-President of the Joyful Company of Singers.



John Casken lives in Wooler, north Northumberland. The area's landscape, changing colours, huge skies, evidence of Early Christianity and poetry have influenced his works in different ways, forming a thread through his music and his own paintings.

[johncasken.com](http://johncasken.com)

[schott-music.com/en/person/john-casken](http://schott-music.com/en/person/john-casken)

## JOYFUL COMPANY OF SINGERS

The Joyful Company of Singers (JCS) is a leading British amateur chamber choir, committed to performing a wide and challenging repertoire of choral works from the 16th to the 21st centuries.

Formed in 1988 by the conductor Peter Broadbent, the choir came to prominence when it won the 1990 Sainsbury's Choir of the Year competition; it went on to win several national and international prizes. It has performed at most of the leading festivals in the UK and regularly tours in Europe, broadcasting abroad as well as for the BBC and Classic FM. It has worked with orchestras including the Britten Sinfonia, City of London Sinfonia, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and the Royal Philharmonic, London Philharmonic and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestras.

JCS has gained a reputation for championing under-represented 20th-century choral works, particularly by British composers. Among those who have written music for it are Kerry Andrew, David Bedford, Richard Rodney Bennett, Michael Berkeley, Judith Bingham, Zoe Dixon (the first JCS Composer-in-Association), Jonathan Harvey, Alun Hoddinott, Tarik O'Regan, Roxanna Panufnik, Paul Reade, Giles Swayne, John Tavener and Malcolm Williamson. It has also given first performances of commissioned works by Dmitri Valentinovich Smirnov, Kaija Saariaho and Thierry Pécou.

A policy of encouraging young artists and composers has led not only to commissions but also to providing a Junior Fellowship for Young Conductors to gain experience

in singing with and conducting JCS. Recording is an important part of the choir's activity and its discography extends to over 25 albums. It frequently features previously unrecorded works, including music by Vaughan Williams, Malcolm Williamson, Jonathan Harvey, Havergal Brian and Roxanna Panufnik.

[www.jcos.co.uk](http://www.jcos.co.uk)

The following members of the Joyful Company of Singers sang in one or more recording sessions for this album:

### **Sopranos**

Amanda Abbott  
Felicita Biskup  
Cath Caunt\*  
Yvonne Eddy  
Margaret Green  
Sarah Intrieri  
Clare Loosley  
Jane Metcalfe  
Wendy Norman  
Louisa Roberts  
Kathryn Salter-Kay  
Cressida Sharp\*  
Clare Vincent-Silk

### **Altos**

Hannah Bale  
Francesca Caine  
Alicia Robinson  
Denise Fabb

Elaine Gould  
Debbie Johnstone  
Ruth Kiang  
Alexandra Loewe  
Lorna Perry  
Yan Ee Toh

### **Tenors**

Geoff Blyth  
Nicholas Bowater\*\*  
Mark Johnstone  
Ian Kay  
Nick King  
Stephen Limbert-Mason  
Peter Murphy  
Christopher Nehaul  
Julian Tolan

### **Basses**

Kevin Bailey  
Tim Bull\*\*\*  
Peter Johnson  
Jonathan Lane  
David Loewe  
Andy Mackinder  
Robin Osterley  
Tom Spanyol  
Christopher Williams

### **Soloists**

\**The Land of Spices*  
\*\**Uncertain Sea*  
\*\*\**Ae Fond Kiss*

## PETER BROADBENT conductor

Peter Broadbent is the founder-conductor of the Joyful Company of Singers and a leading British choral conductor. He has conducted the London Mozart Players, Divertimenti Chamber Orchestra, the English Chamber Orchestra, the City of London Sinfonia, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Southern Sinfonia, the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra, Apollo Voices and the BBC Singers; he broadcasts frequently for BBC Radio 3 and Classic FM.

His engagements outside the UK include concerts with the Debrecen Philharmonic Orchestra and Kodály Chorus in Hungary, a broadcast with the National Chamber Choir in Dublin and a European tour with the World Youth Choir (2006). He gives workshops and masterclasses throughout Europe and was the first Director of Training for the Association of British Choral Directors. In 2007 he was presented with the Pro Cultura Hungarica Award by the Hungarian Ministry of Culture for his services to Anglo-Hungarian musical relations, and in early 2016 he was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Hungarian Order of Merit.

Peter Broadbent was made MBE in the 2022 New Year's Honours List.

## PHILIPPA DAVIES flute

Since her acclaimed performance of Mozart's Concerto in D major at the BBC Proms in 1988, Philippa Davies has built an international career. She has performed and recorded concertos with the New Stockholm Chamber Orchestra, all the BBC Orchestras, the English Chamber Orchestra, City of London Sinfonia and the London Mozart Players. She plays with the Nash Ensemble and London Winds, has a duo with Jan Willem Nelleke (piano) and Maggie Cole (harpsichord) and regularly plays as guest principal flute with London orchestras.

Her numerous recordings include Mozart's entire original concertos and quartets, Bach's flute sonatas, William Alwyn's flute music and the recent release on Signum

of Paul Reade's Flute Concerto and the Suite from *The Victorian Kitchen Garden*. Her commitment to contemporary music has attracted commissions and dedications from leading composers including Peter Maxwell Davies, Harrison Birtwistle, Robert Saxton, Jonathan Harvey and Giles Swayne

Philippa is a Professor at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London. She runs her own international flute course in France each summer and for the last five years she has taken part in Improvisation Projects in Den Haag, Tallinn and Finland; she is a Licensed Andover Educator teaching the Art of Movement in Music.

## MMARCUS FARNSWORTH baritone

Marcus Farnsworth studied at Chetham's School of Music, the University of Manchester and the Royal Academy of Music. He won first prize in the 2009 Wigmore Hall/Kohn Foundation International Song Competition and the Song Prize in the 2011 Kathleen Ferrier Competition. He has appeared as a principal artist with opera companies in the UK and abroad including English National Opera, Welsh National Opera, Bergen National Opera, Boston Lyric Opera and Teatro Real Madrid. Equally at home on the concert platform, he has performed and recorded extensively with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the London Symphony Orchestra, Gabrieli Consort, Academy of Ancient Music, Arcangelo and Aurora Orchestra. He is also a keen recitalist and an advocate for new music. He has given recitals at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, La Monnaie, the Oxford Lieder Festival, Leeds Lieder and the Wigmore Hall.

Marcus has sung in many new works, including Colin Matthews's *The Great Journey* and *A Visit to Friends* (Aldeburgh), Turnage's *The Silver Tassie*, Cheryl Frances-Hoad's *Last Man Standing* and Hubbard in John Adams's *Doctor Atomic*. He gave the premiere of John Casken's song cycle *Lines from a Wanderer*, which was written for him, with James Baillieu (piano) in 2016.

He is also a conductor, specialising in choral and vocal music. He is Head of Vocal Studies at Chetham's and the Founder and Artistic Director of the Southwell Music Festival.

## ROZANNA MADYLUS mezzo-soprano

The British-Ukrainian mezzo-soprano Rozanna Madylus graduated from the Royal Academy of Music (London) Opera Course and was a Young Artist of the Berlin Opera Academy, Georg Solti Accademia and the Oxford International Song Festival (formerly known as the Oxford Lieder Festival). She has appeared as a solo artist and chorus member internationally, including with English National Opera, Longborough Festival Opera, the Royal Opera, Garsington Opera, Festival d'Aix-en-Provence and Birmingham Opera Company. In recital she has sung in concert halls in the UK and abroad, among them the Wigmore Hall, St Martin-in-the-Fields, the Royal Festival Hall, Kings Place, Holywell Music Room, the Mendelssohn-Remise Berlin and the Prokofiev Hall in the Mariinsky Theatre.

Rozanna initially met John Casken when she sang in *The Art of Love*, which explored the early life and works of Alma Mahler; it was performed in a double bill, with Casken's *Kokoschka's Doll* (2017), a melodrama for small ensemble and bass with John Tomlinson as Oscar Kokoschka. Rozanna created the role of Cordelia/Fool in Casken's *The Shacked King* (2020), based on Shakespeare's *King Lear*, a chamber opera for bass (John Tomlinson), mezzo-soprano and ensemble. Casken subsequently composed *Four Ghost Songs* for her, setting poems by Thomas Hardy for voice and piano; she gave the premiere at St Martin-in-the-Fields in July 2024. Her first recording with John Tomlinson and Counterpoise, *Kokoschka's Doll/The Art of Love*, was released by Champs Hill Records.

## BRIDGET CAREY viola

Bridget Carey studied jointly at the Royal Academy of Music and the University of London and was one of the RAM's first Masters graduates. During her varied freelance career she has gained a particular reputation in contemporary chamber music. For many years she played in the premieres of chamber operas at the Almeida Theatre, which is where she first worked with John Casken on his opera *God's Liar*. She subsequently recorded his Second String Quartet during her ten years with the Kreutzer Quartet. She is a founding member of Britten Sinfonia and of Apartment House, the Royal Philharmonic Society prizewinning chamber ensemble, and she regularly performs with the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and the London Chamber Ensemble. She also works with composers and young people and in projects bringing music-making to the wider community.

Bridget plays a viola of 1596 attributed to Gasparo de Salò.

## KIM VAUGHAN cello

Kim Vaughan began her musical studies in Derry and in 2000 was Northern Ireland Young Musician of the Year. She then studied at the Royal Northern College of Music. In 2009 she was a recipient of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's Young Musicians' Platform, which led to concerto performances with the Ulster Orchestra and a recital at the Belfast Festival.

She was a founding member of the Benyounes String Quartet (2007–22), with which she studied at the Haute École de Musique in Geneva under Gábor Takács-Nagy, winning the conservatory's most esteemed prize. Further prizes included the 2012 International Sándor Végh String Quartet Competition. The Benyounes String Quartet performed at leading venues and festivals in the UK and Europe.

Committed to contemporary music, it gave premieres and performances of works by Thomas Adès, Poul Ruders, Philip Cashian, Simon Bainbridge, Francisco Coll, Deirdre Gribbin, Charlotte Bray, Mark-Anthony Turnage, Robert Saxton, Hugh Wood, Jonathan Harvey and John Woolrich.

Kim plays an English cello of c1770 by William Forster for which she is grateful for the support of Harriet's Trust.

## TOM WILKINSON organ

Tom Wilkinson studied at St Mary's Music School, Edinburgh, and was subsequently Organ Scholar of Truro Cathedral. In 2004 he took up the Organ Scholarship at the Queen's College, Oxford, and graduated with first-class honours in music in 2007. That year he took the Fellowship Diploma of the Royal College of Organists and from 2008 to 2009 he was Assistant Director of Music at Chelmsford Cathedral. He is now Lecturer and University Organist at the University of St Andrews and Cathedral Organist of St Mary's Catholic Cathedral, Edinburgh. His doctoral thesis, supervised by John Butt, was on the 19th-century Bach revival. His first solo CD is of Bach's trio sonatas for organ.

For this recording Tom played the Henry Willis organ of Morningside Parish Church in Edinburgh. It dates from 1901 and was redesigned and rebuilt in 1929 by Rushworth & Dreaper, who rebuilt it again in 1980. Harrison & Harrison carried out a further rebuild in 2004 and it is now one of the finest parish church organs in the city.





Peter Broadbent (conductor), Owen Gunnell and soloists



Peter Broadbent, John Casken and Vidda Lefebvre



John Casken and Philippa Davies



Kim Vaughan and Tom Wilkinson



Bridget Carey and John Casken

## Recording

*From One Thread* and the choral works on this album were recorded in the church of St John the Evangelist, Upper Norwood, on 21–2 and 29 September 2024

*Tree of Angels* was recorded in Morningside Parish Church, Edinburgh, on 21 January 2025

## Funding

This recording is generously supported by the following:

The Vaughan Williams Foundation



The Ida Carroll Trust

Royalties from Elaine Gould's book *Behind Bars: The Definitive Guide to Music Notation* (Faber Music, 2011); [www.behindbarsnotation.co.uk](http://www.behindbarsnotation.co.uk)

## Credits

Recording engineer, editor and mastering: Vidda Lefebber

Executive producer: Elaine Gould

Booklet editor: Alison Latham

Booklet designer: James Cardell-Oliver

Booklet cover: back, John Casken's painting 'Black Dunstanburgh' (2025), acrylic on wood (photograph: Sarah Jamieson); front, a detail from the painting

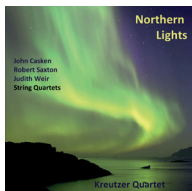
Photographs: Carolynne Cox (pp.16–17), Elaine Gould (p.26–7)

Tracks 1,3,5,6,8,9 & 10 published by Schott Music Ltd, London. All other works Copyright Control

All text, images and devices are copyright. All rights reserved

© & © 2026 Divine Art Ltd

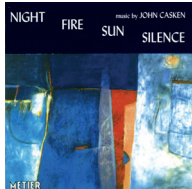
## Other Métier recordings of John Casken's music



### Northern Lights - Modern British String Quartets Kreutzer Quartet

"John Casken's [String Quartet No. 2] stands out on an excellent disc...touch and timbre beautifully captured by the Kreutzer Quartet."  
—Andy Hamilton, *The Wire*

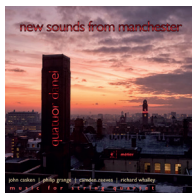
Métier MSV 28507



### Night Fire Sun Silence - Music by John Casken Various

"Eight works by a composer whose craftsmanship is as fastidious as his imagination is spirited." —Paul Driver, *The Sunday Times*

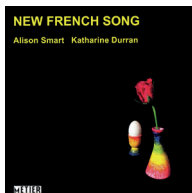
Métier MSVCD 92076 X2CD



### New Sounds from Manchester Quatuor Danel

"The intensity of [*Choses en moi*], its energy as well as its melodic impact, make this a particular treasure on this CD"  
—Jürgen Schaarwächter, *Klassik.com*

Métier MSV 28546



### New French Song Alison Smart (soprano), Katherine Durran (piano)

*New French Song* has created a whole new repertoire of songs by British composers, including Casken's *Colloque sentimental*.

Métier MSVCD 92100

# 6 FIRST INVERSION



Over 700 titles, with full track details, reviews, artist profiles and audio samples, can be browsed on our website. Available at any good dealer or direct from our online store in CD, 24-bit HD, FLAC and MP3 digital download formats.

email: [info@first-inversion.com](mailto:info@first-inversion.com)

**[www.metierrecords.com](http://www.metierrecords.com)**  
**find us on facebook, youtube, bluesky & instagram**

WARNING: Copyright subsists in all recordings issued under this label. Any unauthorised broadcasting, public performance, copying or re-recording thereof in any manner whatsoever will constitute an infringement of such copyright. In the United Kingdom, licences for the use of recordings for public performance may be obtained from Phonographic Performance Ltd, 1, Upper James Street, London, W1R 3HG.



**métier**

LC 15631

