

EX CATHEDRA

JEFFREY SKIDMORE OBE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



RACHMANINOFF 150 'VESPERS'

SUN 15 OCT, 4PM

Town Hall, Birmingham



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All-Night Vigil ('Vespers') op. 37

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

Ex Cathedra

Jeffrey Skidmore *conductor*

Martha McLorinan *mezzo soprano*

James Robinson *tenor*

Simone Rebello *bells*

BELL PRELUDE 1

1. Priidite poklonimsya Come, let us worship

BELL PRELUDE 2

2. Blagoslovi dushe moya Bless the Lord, O my soul

3. Blazhen muzh Blessed is the man

BELL PRELUDE 3

4. Svete tikhiy Gladsome light

BELL PRELUDE 4

5. Nyne otpushchayeshi Lord, now lettest thou thy servant

6. Bogoroditse devo, raduisya Rejoice O Virgin

7. Shestopsalmive The Lesser Doxology

BELL PRELUDE 5

8. Khvalite imya Ghospodne Praise the name of the Lord

~ INTERVAL of 20 minutes ~

BELL PRELUDE 6

13. Dnes spaseniye miru Troparion: Today salvation has come to the world

14. Voskres iz groba Troparion: Thou didst rise from the tomb

9. Blagosloven yesi, Ghospodi Blessed art thou O Lord

10. Voskreseniye Khristovo videyshe Having beheld the resurrection of Christ

11. Velichit dusha moya Gospoda My soul magnifies the Lord

BELL PRELUDE 7

12. Slabosloviye velikoye The Great Doxology

15. Vzbrannoy voyevode To thee, the victorious leader

The movement numbers match the sequence of the published score.

Bell preludes composed by Jeffrey Skidmore.

To ensure that everyone enjoys the performance, please ensure all mobile phones and alarms are turned off. Photography is welcome at Ex Cathedra events, but please do be discreet to avoid disturbing fellow audience members. We would suggest dimming the brightness of your screen, not using flash, and taking photographs during applause breaks. Filming and recording is not permitted.

Welcome

Welcome to the first concert of our new season, our 54th!

Summer is well and truly over but it is worth recalling a summer of musical pilgrimages when, travelling around the country, I was able to hear many Ex Cathedra alumni and admire prospective new talent and repertoire. This continues to refresh me and Ex Cathedra's work and is a defining characteristic of the ensemble. And it was good to see so many great audiences. Classical music is alive and kicking and like musical rainforests must be protected to maintain the diversity of the human spirit.

In Cheltenham our Student Scholars sang Byrd (Byrdwatching) in the homes of audience members and Associate Conductor George Parris conducted his talented young group The Carice Singers in a classic contemporary programme of Pärt, Harvey, Silvestrov, Ligeti and Byrd in Cheltenham College Chapel. George will be working with Ex Cathedra in December. I saw and heard Mozart and Handel at Glyndebourne and Elgar's *Gerontius* sung brilliantly by Gabrieli Roar in Ely Cathedral. The Gabrieli Roar project restores my faith in classical music education for all young people and makes me realise that we are not alone in thinking that all young musicians are capable of this very high-quality music-making. I heard a Stölzel Passion in Cirencester and in Gloucester I enjoyed Carolyn Sampson (one of our glittering alumni) playing the part of Anna Magdalena Bach performing, exquisitely, music from her 1725 Notebook. Also, in the Three Choirs Festival I heard Martha McLorinan sing ravishingly the role of Mary Magdalene in Elgar's *The Apostles*. My summer ended in Edinburgh with the dynamic Alvin Ailey Dance Company and a packed Usher Hall performance of Rachmaninoff *The Bells*. This made a significant contribution to the Rachmaninoff 150 anniversary which the wonderful BBC Proms had covered so extensively and persuasively.

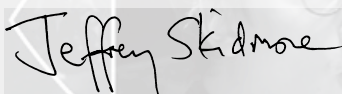
September began with our recording of Liz Dilot Johnson's amazing choral music (most of which she wrote for Ex Cathedra over the last few years as composer-in-residence) and which will be released in April next year in time for her 60th birthday. Alec Roth's new CD *The Traveller* has recently been released and coincides with his prestigious appointment as composer-in-residence with the world-renowned RIAS Kammerchor in Berlin. Alec was our composer-in-residence for over 15 years!

Dr Bill Hunt, one of my PhD students at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire recently awarded his doctorate, gave a performance in Hampstead of glorious Jacobean verse anthems with Fretwork, His Majesty's Sagbutts and Cornetts and many well-known singers, in preparation for his third CD in the series, *Chains of Gold*. A feast of music, much of which we performed in our Byrd's Great programme last January.

Quite a summer! And all these elements will feed into our new season and seasons to come.

At the beginning of the academic year we also welcome our four new graduate scholars and a cohort of student scholars from Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and, for the first time, from the University of Birmingham.

Enjoy the Rachmaninoff!



Jeffrey Skidmore © October 2023

Performers

Ex Cathedra

Jeffrey Skidmore conductor

SOLOISTS

Martha McLorinan mezzo soprano

James Robinson tenor

Soprano

Marianne Ayling, Alison Burnett, Sarah Colgan, Ros Crouch, Naomi Hedges, Sophie Henderson^, Margaret Langford, Rebecca Ledgard, Margaret Lingas, Imogen Russell, Shirley Scott, Sally Spencer, Beth Taylor, Katie Trethewey, Clover Willis**

Alto

Hannah Cooke, Rebecca Lloyd, Martha McLorinan, Andrew Round, Anna Semple, Nicola Starkie, Kate Thatcher

Tenor

Isaac Boulter, Declan Costello, Steve Davis, Tony Dean, Tom Hawkey-Soar^, Sid Imanol, James Robinson, Dan Marles*, Jeremy Reid, Iain Sloan, James Wells**

Bass

Robert Asher, Oliver Barker, Jeremy Burrows, John Cotterill, Richard Green, Jimmy Holliday, Tom Lowen, Ollie Neale, Nick Perfect, Bill Robinson, David Smith, Jeff Sutherland-Kay, Lawrence White

Bells

Simone Rebello

* denotes Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Enhanced Student Scholar

^ denotes Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Student Scholar

** denotes 2023-24 Scholars

Further performances:

TUE 10 OCT, 7.30PM

St Mary's Church, Warwick

SAT 10 FEB, 8PM

Hereford Cathedral

TUE 27 FEB, 7.30PM

St Martin-in-the-Fields, London



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Programme note

Introduction

Rachmaninoff's 'Vespers' is one of the great, iconic choral works which Ex Cathedra has performed many times and which has taken on a special significance in our development.

Our very first performance was on May 16th 1986 in St Francis Church, Bournville. It was in English using an American edition sanctioned by Rachmaninoff. John Joubert (the work was one of his favourites) was an enthusiastic member of the audience and Jim Clulee sang the tenor solo. Jim was a founder member of Ex Cathedra and we were both choristers together at St Francis, Bournville, a long time ago! Shortly after this performance Ex Cathedra performed the *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* in a BBC Radio 3 Choral Evensong, broadcast live from St Paul's Church in Birmingham's famous Jewellery Quarter. In a telephone conversation afterwards, John Rutter commended the boldness of our exciting programming.

Finding a usable Russian edition proved difficult. In 1978 Boosey & Hawkes had published a transliterated edition by Bill Tamblin, which confessed to not being 'scholarly' and unfortunately raised as many issues as it solved. We struggled with this edition through several performances. In 1989, during the period of perestroika and glasnost, Irina Artamonova (Walters), a first-class graduate of choral conducting at the Tchaikovsky Conservatoire in Moscow, came to Birmingham to briefly work with me, Ex Cathedra and Birmingham Schools' Chorale. I learnt much from her and she gave me a newly published Cyrillic edition of the *All-Night Vigil*. This was extremely valuable and interesting but of little practical use, because it was not transliterated. It was not until 1992 that Musica Russica, based in the USA, published a wonderful new edition which puts the work in the reach of good 'Western' choirs.

We have performed 'Vespers' as a late-night concert in Symphony Hall and Lichfield Cathedral, throughout the region and in Ireland.

It was the work I chose for our first Summer Vespers by Candlelight in Birmingham Oratory in 1993.

In 2015 Ex Cathedra celebrated the 100th anniversary of the composition of this wonderful work with a series of five performances beginning in Birmingham and visiting Southwell (a BBC Radio 3 live broadcast), Oswestry, Ryedale and London, where we were joined for a second time by the renowned pianist Steven Osborne playing a selection of Rachmaninoff's *Preludes* and *Etudes-Tableaux* interspersed in the liturgical gaps.

In July 2019 Ex Cathedra performed 'Vespers' to a packed Gloucester Cathedral as part of the Three Choirs Festival and subsequently started our 50th anniversary season with the work.

Why is it such a special piece? It is challenging technically, linguistically, emotionally and interpretively. It requires great stamina and each performance gives the performer and listener something new. We have never looked back and now we look forward, with great anticipation, to sharing our most recent thinking and research with new audiences.

Orthodox chant and bells

Written within two years of each other in 1913 and 1915 *The Bells* Op. 35 and *All-Night Vigil* Op. 37 were Rachmaninoff's two favourite pieces. They capture the Russian spirit found in the ubiquitous use of Orthodox chant (comparable to the use of chorales in Bach's Cantatas and Passions, or plainchant in Monteverdi's *1610 Vespers*) and the sound of bells, which from his childhood in Novgorod and throughout his life were an essential, ever-present part of his sound world and whose sonorities can be found in his piano works, choral pieces, symphonies and concertos. In fact bells permeate all Russian music and there are many well-known examples in the works of Glinka, Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky and Shostakovich.

Having performed 'Vespers' with many different interpolations – poems, translations read out loud, Rachmaninoff piano works and singing the ancient chant on which almost all the movements are based – it seemed like an interesting proposition to incorporate 'bell' preludes into the liturgical gaps. This idea was much inspired by my association with Michael Pushkin who enthusiastically introduced me to Andrei Tarkovsky's powerful film *Andrei Rublev* (1966) with its mesmerising final sequence showing the recasting of a huge medieval bell. Bells were banned in Russia from 1918 because they 'disturbed public order' and represented spiritual authority. The ban was lifted in 1991.

My 'bell preludes' make reference to the Orthodox chants and Rachmaninoff's piano and orchestral works and are scored in three parts for a sustained, fundamental note, here played by a tubular bell, a set of chromatic tubular bells and an octave of chromatic crotales, small antique cymbals.

The All-Night Vigil - the first performance

There have always been several important questions, until recently mostly unanswered, related to the first performance of *All-Night Vigil*. It was known that it took place in a secular venue in Moscow but were there any other pieces in the concert? And with its unusual sequence of keys and stamina-sapping segues the work did not seem to flow as a continuous piece. What was the size of the hall? What was the size of the choir and its make-up? It is very exciting that this performance introduces some new information which has come to my attention with the help of Michael Pushkin. Michael is a friend and colleague at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. He taught Russian Language and Literature at the University of Birmingham for 35 years and at the RBC he teaches beginners' and continuers' classes in Russian pronunciation for singing. The students love working with him and he continues to achieve remarkable results. On several occasions in the past he has helped Ex Cathedra with pronunciation, most notably in our involvement in the Stravinsky project with the CBSO and our recent performances of 'Vespers'. As he modestly commented, 'I came



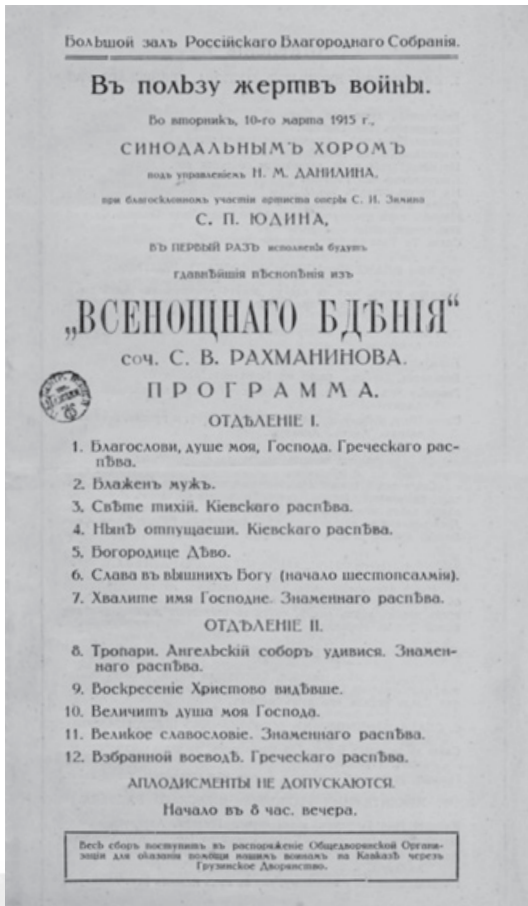
Pillar Hall of the House of Union, Moscow

across a copy of the original printed programme for the premiere!' Wow! It shows that the performance took place in the Great Hall of the Russian Noble Assembly. This spectacular late 18th-century hall with its 28 internal Corinthian columns had been the scene of many illustrious concerts since 1860. The concert started at 8 o'clock in the evening and it categorically states **APPLAUSE IS NOT PERMITTED**. The programme lists 12 movements (15 were published) in two clearly marked sections, interestingly not following the liturgical division of Vespers and Matins. The two short hymns (troparia), published as movements 13 and 14, were performed together with published movement 9 which begins the second section of the original programme. Published movement 1 – the stunning invitation and welcome to worship – was not listed, but begins our performance! We could not miss it out! This original order makes sense tonally and in terms of balance and stamina.

Another result of Michael's 'digging', as he calls it, was the size of the choir. In 1915 the Synodal Choir performed the 'All-Night' with a full complement – 90 people: 30 adults and 60 boys. Another wow! One day I should like to recreate this choir for a performance. I think Ex Cathedra's 50 singers will, however, fill Town Hall!

The liturgy

The Orthodox liturgy known as the *All-Night Vigil* combines elements of Vespers and Matins. It sets texts from the Russian Orthodox which in its purest monastic form could last 12 hours (from sunset to sunrise) and include bell-ringing, processions, prayers, readings,



Programme from the first performance of Rachmaninoff's *All Night Vigil* Op. 37

meditation, chanting and polyphony. It began on the eve of major feasts. Rachmaninoff's setting lasts just over an hour and was first performed in a concert hall! In the West, Rachmaninoff's setting of this service is usually, slightly misleadingly, abbreviated to *Vespers*. Written in under two months and published in 1915 the *All-Night Vigil* was given its first performance in Moscow at a charity concert for the war-wounded later in the same year.

The performance was given by the chorus of the Synodal Institute, a very distinguished and influential establishment which had been responsible for extensive research into traditional Russian chant. The setting is for mixed-voice, unaccompanied choir in accordance with the accepted practices of the Orthodox Church. Although Rachmaninoff

was only a nominal member of the Church, he was clearly influenced by its music and his setting was accepted by the Patriarchs and Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church as being within their rules and traditions.

The work is published in fifteen sections, the first eight of which are for Vespers and the remainder are for a Festival Matins and Prime. In the Orthodox monastic tradition, the first part would have been sung at nightfall and a long period of meditation would have followed before the second part began at first light on the following morning. Ten of the sections are based on traditional Orthodox chant, including several which make use of Znamenny, which was the first Russian music ever to be written down, Greek and Kievan chants. These chants were an essential part of Rachmaninoff's Russian soul and his first audiences would also have had a profound familiarity with the texts and melodies.

The music

Rachmaninoff demands a great deal from the singers. The vocal range of the choir is extremely wide with bottom basses being required to sing low B flat on a number of occasions. The texture varies from four parts to as many as eleven and, at different times, each voice divides into three parts. Rachmaninoff also indicates tempo and dynamics in meticulous detail and there are frequent changes from triple *forte* to triple *piano*! The choral orchestration is amongst the most imaginative in the repertoire and there are many moments of exquisite and almost unbearable beauty. The spiritual dimension is irresistible.

In many respects, 'Vespers' may be said to be the high point of Russian Orthodox church music. After the Revolution in 1917 sacred music was not encouraged by the new regime. Rachmaninoff himself left Russia that year and later, in 1931, his music was banned in the USSR. The *All-Night Vigil* was again published in Russia in 1989.

This evening's performance will be sung in the original Church Slavonic.

Jeffrey Skidmore, October 2023

Translations

BELL PRELUDE 1

1. Priidite poklonimsya

Come, let us worship

Come, let us worship God, our King.
Come, let us worship and fall down
before Christ, our King and our God.
Come, let us worship and fall down
before the very Christ, our King and our God.
Come, let us worship and fall down before Him.

BELL PRELUDE 2

2. Blagoslovi dushe moya

Bless the Lord O my soul

Bless the Lord O my soul,
blessed art thou, O Lord.
O Lord my God, thou art very great.
Blessed art thou, O Lord.
Thou art clothed with honour and majesty.
Blessed art thou, O Lord.
The waters stand upon the mountains.
Marvellous are thy works, O Lord.
The waters flow between the hills.
Marvellous are thy works, O Lord.
In wisdom hast thou made all things,
Glory to thee, O Lord, who hast created all!

3. Blazhen muzh

Blessed is the man

Blessed is the man, who walks not in the counsel
of the wicked. Alleluia...
For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the wicked will perish. Alleluia...
Serve the Lord with fear
and rejoice in Him with trembling. Alleluia...
Blessed are all who take refuge in Him. Alleluia...
Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God. Alleluia...
Salvation is of the Lord;
And thy blessing is upon thy people. Alleluia...
Glory to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
both now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.
Alleluia. Glory to thee, O God!

BELL PRELUDE 3

4. Svete tikhiy

Gladsome light

Gladsome light of the holy glory of the Immortal One –
the Heavenly Father, holy and blessed – O Jesus
Christ!
Now that we have come to the setting of the sun,
and behold the light of the evening light,
we praise the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – God.
Thou art worthy at every moment
to be praised in hymns by reverent voices.
O Son of God, thou art the Giver of Life;
Therefore all the world glorifies thee.

BELL PRELUDE 4

5. Nyne otpushchayeshi

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant
depart in peace, according to thy word.
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
which thou hast prepared before the face of all people
to be a light to lighten the Gentiles,
and to be the glory of thy people Israel.

6. Bogoroditse devo, raduisya

Rejoice O Virgin

Rejoice O Virgin Theotokos,
Mary full of Grace, the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb,
for thou hast borne the Saviour of our souls.

7. Shestopalmive

The Lesser Doxology

Glory to God in the Highest,
and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.
O Lord, open thou my lips,
and my mouth shall proclaim thy praise.

BELL PRELUDE 5

8. Khvalite imya Gospodne

Praise the name of the Lord

Praise the name of the Lord. Alleluia.
Praise the Lord, O you His servants. Alleluia.
Blessed be the Lord from Zion,
He who dwells in Jerusalem. Alleluia.
O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good.
Alleluia. Alleluia.
For His mercy endures forever. Alleluia.
O give thanks unto the God of Heaven,
For His mercy endures forever. Alleluia.

~ INTERVAL of 20 minutes ~

BELL PRELUDE 6

13. Dnes spaseniye miru

Troparion: Today salvation has come to the world

Today salvation has come to the world.
Let us sing to Him who rose from the dead,
The Author of our life.
Having destroyed death by death,
He has given us the victory and great mercy.

14. Voskres iz groba

Troparion: Thou didst rise from the tomb

Thou didst rise from the tomb and burst the bonds
of Hades!,
Thou didst destroy the condemnation of death, O Lord,
Releasing all mankind from the snares of the enemy!
Thou didst show thyself to thine Apostles,
And didst send them forth to proclaim thee;
And through them thou hast granted thy peace to
the world,
O thou who are plenteous in mercy!

9. Blagosloven yesi, Ghospodi

Blessed art thou O Lord

Blessed art thou O Lord, teach me thy statutes.
The angelic host was filled with awe,
When it saw thee among the dead.
By destroying the power of death, O Saviour,
Thou didst raise Adam, and save all men from Hell!

Blessed art thou, O Lord, teach me thy statutes.

"Why do you mingle myrrh with your tears of
compassion,
O ye women disciples?" cried the radiant angel in the
tomb to the myrrhbearers.

"Behold the tomb and understand:
the Saviour is risen from the dead!"

Blessed art thou, O Lord, teach me thy statutes.

Very early in the morning
The Myrrh-bearers ran with sorrow to Thy tomb,
But an angel came to them and said:
"The time for sorrow has come to an end!
Do not weep, but announce the resurrection to the
apostles!"

Blessed art thou, O Lord, teach me thy statutes.

The Myrrh-bearers were sorrowful
as they neared thy tomb,
but the angel said unto them:
"why do you number the living among the dead?
Since He is God, He is risen from the tomb!"

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy
Spirit.

We worship the Father, and His Son, and the Holy
Spirit:
the Holy Trinity, one in essence!
We cry with the Seraphim,
"Holy, Holy, Holy art thou, O Lord!"

Since thou didst give birth to the Giver of Life,
O Virgin,
Thou didst redeem Adam from sin!
Thou gavest joy to Eve instead of sadness!
The God-man who was born of thee
has restored to life those who had fallen from it!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! Glory to thee, O God!

please turn quietly

10. Voskreseniye Khristovo videyshe
Having beheld the resurrection of Christ

Having beheld the resurrection of Christ,
let us worship the holy Lord Jesus
the only Sinless One
We venerate thy cross, O Christ,
and hymn and glorify thy holy resurrection,
for thou art our God, and we know no other
than thee;
we call on thy name.
Come all you faithful,
let us venerate Christ's holy resurrection.
For, behold, through the cross
joy has come into the world. Ever blessing the Lord,
let us praise His resurrection,
for by enduring the cross for us
He has destroyed death by death.

11. Velichit dusha moya Gospoda
My soul magnifies the Lord

My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.

Refrain: More honourable than the Cherubim
and more glorious beyond compare than the
Seraphim,
without defilement thou gavest birth
to God the Word,
true Theotokos of God, we magnify thee.

For He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me
blessed.

For He that is mighty hath done great things for me,
and Holy is His name; and His mercy is on those who
fear Him from generation to generation.

He has put down the mighty from their thrones and
has exalted those of low degree;
He has filled the hungry with
good things and the rich He has sent empty away.

He has helped His servant Israel,
in remembrance of His mercy,
as He spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his posterity forever.

Refrain: More honourable than the Cherubim and
more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim,
without defilement thou gavest birth

to God the Word,
true Theotokos of God, we magnify thee.

BELL PRELUDE 7

12. Slabosloviye velikoye
The Great Doxology

Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace,
goodwill toward men.
We praise thee, we bless thee,
we worship thee, we glorify thee.
We give thanks to thee for thy great glory.
O Lord, Heavenly King, God the Father almighty.
O Lord, thou only begotten Son, Jesus Christ,
and the Holy Spirit.
O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
who takest away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.
Thou who takest away the sin of the world,
receive our prayer.
Thou who sittest at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.
For thou alone art holy,
Thou alone art the Lord, Jesus Christ,
to the glory of God the Father. Amen.
Every day will I bless thee
and praise thy name forever, and ever.
Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin.
Blessed art thou, O Lord, God of our fathers,
and praised and glorified is thy name forever. Amen.

Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us,
as we have set our hope on thee.
Blessed art thou, O Lord, teach me thy statutes.
Lord, thou has been our refuge
from generation to generation.
I said: Lord, have mercy on me;
heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee.
O Lord, I flee to thee,
teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God;
for with thee is the fountain of life;
and in thy light shall we see light. Continue thy mercy
unto those who know thee.
O Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal,
have mercy on us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy
Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.
Holy Immortal, have mercy on us.
Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal,
have mercy on us.

15. Vzbrannoy voyevode

To thee, the victorious leader

To thee, the victorious leader of triumphant hosts,
We thy servants, delivered from evil,
offer hymns of thanksgiving, O Theotokos!
Since thou dost possess invincible might,
set us free from all calamities,
so that we may cry to thee:
"Rejoice, O unwedded Bride!"



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Ex Cathedra

Hailed as “one of Britain’s very best choirs” (*New York Times*), Ex Cathedra is a world-class vocal ensemble which leads the choral sector in the fields of performance, learning and wellbeing. For more than 50 years we have been producing highly-acclaimed concerts and participatory projects, and nurturing young musicians from our youth training choirs to our student and graduate Scholar schemes.

We enjoy an international reputation for our performances of the best, the unfamiliar and the unexpected, and take pride in developing the repertoire through researching and reviving little-known gems, commissioning new work, and developing exciting ways of engaging audiences and participants.

Founded by Jeffrey Skidmore in Birmingham in 1969, we present a series of concerts in our home city, across the Midlands and in London. We are an Associate Artist at Symphony Hall and Town Hall, and have appeared at festivals and concert series across the UK and as far afield as New York and Tel Aviv.

Ex Cathedra has made a significant number of award-winning recordings for Hyperion, NMC, Orchid Classics, SOMM, Signum, and on our own label. Recent recordings with our composers in association include Alec Roth’s *The Traveller* released in July 2023 and a CD of choral music by Liz Dilnot Johnson forthcoming in 2024.

Alongside our concerts, we deliver an extensive programme of award-winning schools, wellbeing and community projects, led by a team of expert vocal tutors. We believe that singing is for everyone, and that singing together transforms individuals into a community, boosts wellbeing, builds confidence, teamwork and empathy. We want everyone to have opportunity to experience the remarkable benefits of singing and of inspirational choral music.

Our Academy of Vocal Music choirs offer a wide range of creative, learning and performing activities with a nurturing ethos. The choirs perform alongside Ex Cathedra and independently including, for example, the annual performances of *The Nutcracker* with Birmingham Royal Ballet. We are always pleased to welcome new singers – do get in touch.

We have worked in over 1,000 schools across the UK and have recently developed an innovative online programme. To put singing at the heart of your school and gain access to resources that inspire, enable and support pupils and teachers, visit our dedicated www.singingschools.co.uk website.

Our dedicated www.singingmedicine.co.uk site is the place to find out more about our work to support health and wellbeing, from bedside sessions at Birmingham Children’s Hospital to dementia groups, mental health, Long Covid and stroke recovery.

There are spaces and places for you to sing with us too! We run a wellbeing-focused community choir in Ladywood and offer drop-in sessions for adults, and for parents/carers with toddlers. Get in touch to find out more, we’d love to see you there.

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From the throne

We are often asked about our name. ‘Cathedra’ is the name for a bishop’s throne, and a cathedral is the building that houses that throne. When Jeffrey Skidmore and one of the founding members of the choir were choosing a name for the new group in 1969, they chose Ex Cathedra because it means ‘from the throne’ or in English usage ‘with authority’. At the time, Jeffrey and several members of the choir sang at Birmingham Cathedral so the pun was attractive. Researching the repertoire so that it can be performed with authority, style and passion has always been a guiding principle.

Jeffrey Skidmore

Photo by Neil Pugh



Jeffrey Skidmore's reputation as one of the UK's leading choral directors and an ardent advocate of the importance of singing in people's lives today is rooted in his work with Ex Cathedra, the ensemble he founded in 1969 in his home city of Birmingham.

Jeffrey's driving passion has been to refresh and reinvigorate the choral repertoire and to make it accessible to as many people as possible. He and Ex Cathedra have long been known for exciting and innovative but always attractive programming, underpinned by research. Under his direction, Ex Cathedra has also shown an enduring commitment to vocal education from its ground-breaking children's singing programme, *Singing Playgrounds*, to the nurturing of professional singers at the start of their careers.

As director of Ex Cathedra and its associated Consort and Baroque Orchestra, Jeffrey has appeared in concert halls and festivals across the UK and overseas. He has made a number of highly-acclaimed recordings ranging from Renaissance polyphony to Latin American and French Baroque. He has also worked with other ensembles including the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Aalborg Symfoniorkester, the Irish Baroque Orchestra and the BBC Singers.

In the field of opera he has worked with Birmingham Opera Company; Welsh National Opera; Marc Minkowski and David McVicker at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées; and has given the first performances in modern times of the French Baroque operas *Zaïde* by Royer and *Isis* by Lully. Jeffrey is a pioneer in the field of research and performance of choral works of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, both in the old and new worlds. He is also a champion of contemporary choral music and has commissioned more than a dozen new works in recent years.

Jeffrey is a Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham and Artistic Director of the Early Music programme at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. He is a regular contributor to the choral programme at Dartington International Summer School and to a wide range of choral workshops and summer schools at home and abroad. Jeffrey has been recognised with an OBE for services to choral music, and an honorary doctorate from the University of Birmingham. Most recently (2022) he was shortlisted for the prestigious RPS Conductor Award, the first choral conductor.

Simone Rebello bells



Simone combines her playing career with her position as Director of Percussion and Head of School of Wind, Brass and Percussion at the Royal Northern College of Music. Simone has recorded several solo CDs, is invited to perform as a soloist and guest artist internationally, and has won numerous awards including Cosmopolitan Magazine Woman of the Year (Performing Arts). She is a founder member of BackBeat Percussion Quartet who have toured extensively and won a number of international chamber music competitions.

Simone is regularly invited to work as an adjudicator for music competitions including BBC Young Musician and as a presenter for various musical festivals and competitions. Simone is a solo artist and endorsee for Yamaha Percussion, Sabian Cymbals and Mike Balter Mallets.

Martha McLorinan mezzo soprano

Photo by Kirsten McLorinan



Martha trained at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and has won prizes at the Thelma King Award and Royal Over-Seas League.

This season, she has appeared as The Sorceress in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* with Barokksolistene at Den Ny Opera, Esbjerg, sang the role of Mary Magdalene in Elgar's *The Apostles* (The Philharmonia/Adrian Partington) at Gloucester Cathedral as part of the Three Choirs Festival, sang Verdi's *Requiem* at Royal Festival Hall (London Mozart Players/Dan Ludford-Thomas), and she has given recitals of music by Byrd with The Rose Consort and Gibbons with Fretwork.

Previous oratorio highlights include Brahms' *Liebeslieder Waltzes* (Kings Place, The Sixteen/Harry Christophers), Handel's *Messiah* (Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Academy of Ancient Music/Nigel Short), Bach's *St. John Passion* (Zaryadye Hall Moscow, Taverner Players/Andrew Parrott) and Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* (Birmingham Symphony Hall, Ex Cathedra/Jeffrey Skidmore).

Roles include Lotinka (Dvořák's *The Jacobin*) and Notary's Wife (Strauss' *Intermezzo*) for Buxton Festival Opera, First Witch in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* (Royal Festival Hall, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra/Roger Norrington), Second Witch at the BBC Proms (La Nuova Musica/David Bates), Proserpina in Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* (i fagiolini/Robert Hollingworth), and Mrs Noye in Britten's *Noye's Fludde* for various community projects.

Her discography includes Garcia's *Missa Pastoril* (*Brazilian Adventures*, Ex Cathedra/Jeffrey Skidmore), Bingham's *The Drowned Lovers* (*Music of the Spheres*, Tenebrae/Nigel Short), the role of the Page in Chilcott's *Wenceslas* (West London Chorus/Hilary Campbell) and Byrd 1588 and 1589 (Fretwork/David Skinner). She recently recorded Alec Roth's song cycle "The Garden Path" with the Sacconi Quartet, and her recording of Second Witch with La Nuova Musica was released last month. www.marthamclorinan.com

James Robinson tenor



James Robinson graduated with distinction from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in 2018, having done his undergraduate degree in music at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge.

James was named one of Tenebrae's Associate Artists for 2016/17, and has subsequently worked with many of the country's top ensembles. Recent projects include work with the Dunedin Consort, Solomon's Knot, Ex Cathedra, Tenebrae, BBC Singers, The OAE, The Sixteen, English Voices, Siglo de Oro and Apollo of the Arts. He is a member of Ars Nova Copenhagen, and has also worked with other groups in Europe including Le Concert d'Astrée, Christian IV Vocal Ensemble, Theatre of Voices, and Mogens Dahl Kammerkor. His recent solo work has included Britten's *St Nicolas*, Evangelist in Bach's *St John* and *St Matthew Passions*, Handel's

Messiah, Monteverdi's *Vespers* in Llandaff and Winchester Cathedrals, and Mozart's *Requiem* at Symphony Hall, Birmingham.

His operatic roles include both Damon and Acis in Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, Schoolmaster in Janáček's *Cunning Little Vixen*, Shepherd and Sailor in Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, and The Madwoman in Britten's *Curlew River*. He fills his spare time by playing Dungeons and Dragons, attempting to beat his father at tennis, and following the misfortunes of Charlton Athletic.

Meet... Margaret Lingas (soprano)



Margaret Lingas was born in Cyprus, raised between the UK, Greece and the USA, and earned her BMus in vocal performance with linguistics at the University of Victoria, Canada, where she studied with Benjamin Butterfield. While in North America, she sang with the Pacific Opera Victoria chorus, and was a soloist with groups including the Victoria Baroque Players, the Sooke Philharmonic, and Fretwork.

Now based in Oxford, Margaret continues to perform as a soloist and small ensemble singer, regularly appearing in the UK and Europe with groups including Ex Cathedra, The Sixteen, the Tallis Scholars, Cappella Romana, the Carice Singers and Echo. Having grown up around a variety of musical traditions (Byzantine chant, jazz, baroque opera and Greek folk music were all family favourites) she particularly enjoys improvisation, singing in new languages, and exploring vocal styles less often heard in UK choral circles.

Margaret is a regular at the Oxford Oratory, teaches and conducts for Oxford Youth Choirs, and studies with Bronwen Mills.

1. How long have you been a member of Ex Cathedra and why did you join?

I joined Ex Cathedra in September 2019 as a graduate scholar, so my first concert was the Rachmaninoff *Vigil* - quite the sublime start. I applied for the scholarship because I was drawn in by Ex Cathedra's warm, unified, versatile sound

the moment I heard it, and also because of the imagination, scholarship and variety so apparent in EC's programming and recording back catalogue.

2. What does a typical day look like for you?

I mainly freelance, so there's no typical day, but it'll be a combination of: travel, concerts, recordings, conducting, cooking (a perk of travelling is getting to bring home ingredients that are hard to find in the UK...counting down to a US trip in the autumn to restock my salsa verde and jello stash!), kickboxing, and a part-time HR job which, thanks to the wonderful team I work with, is a nice bit of stability alongside the freelance chaos.

3. If you could choose to perform again any piece you have performed with Ex Cathedra, what would it be, and why?

This is a very mean question. If it's a single piece, then I have to go with the *Mass in B Minor*. Bach's extraordinarily intricate writing takes you through every style and emotion on the spectrum - and shows off both the EC choir and baroque orchestra in all their glory!

If I were allowed to pick a full programme (which hugely affects how individual pieces end up feeling in context), I'd revisit my very first CMBC in 2019. I'm sure some of the fondness comes from it being my first candlelight experience but it was the most incredible mix of vital, sing-your-guts-out crowd-pleasers (Tallis *Videte miraculum*, *Stars*, *Sir Christèmas*, the Marlow *Advent Responsory*), sparkly medieval toe-tappers (including some fantastic modern reinventions), and other EC gems (*Merry ding-dong*, the Gould *Sans Day Carol*), alongside exquisitely gentle, timeless moments (surrounding the audience with candles and voices for *Gentle Flame*, hearing *Baïlèro* drift down from the balcony, feeling oddly euphoric and weightless while singing the leapy lines in *Snowflakes...*). I don't think I ever managed to get through the transition from *Teče voda* to *Sometime I sing* at the end without getting a lump in my throat.

4. What's your musical 'guilty secret'?

I don't feel guilty for listening to/enjoying any music - whatever the style, if it gets to you it gets to you - but I will disclose that I spent an embarrassing amount of time as a 13-year-old memorising the rap verses from Weird Al's *White and Nerdy*.

Be an Angel!

A special message from Jeffrey Skidmore:

We believe everyone should have the opportunity to access extraordinary choral music and feel the wonderful benefits of singing, which is why we share our love of singing with as many people as possible through concerts, new commissions, recordings, training choirs for young singers, Scholarships, and community projects that reach 90,000 children and adults every year.

You may not realise that ticket sales only contribute around 20% of our income each year, with less than 10% coming from public funding. This means we need to raise over 70% of our income every year to sustain our programme of work. Your support is vital in helping us achieve our charitable mission to share great choral music with as many people as possible.

Our work is only possible thanks to the generous support of the many people listed opposite. I should be delighted and enormously grateful if you would consider joining them and becoming a valued member of supporter programme - be an Angel and give the gift of singing today. Thank you,



Jeffrey Skidmore OBE
Artistic Director & Conductor

How to join our Host of Angels

Be an Angel	from £75 per person per year.
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Be a Throne	from £1,500 per year.
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We would like to thank you by offering the following benefits:

- your name in concert programmes and on our website (you can opt to be anonymous)
- invitations to open rehearsals
- invitations to other special events

It's very easy to become an Angel. Scan the QR code above, then you just need to click the 'donate' button on the homepage of our website where you can make a single or regular donation via the Charities Aid Foundation. Or you can contact Julie Watson, Grants & Individual Giving Manager, at 0121 616 3410 or julie@excathedra.co.uk.

Ex Cathedra is a registered charity (no.1004086); if you are a UK taxpayer and Gift Aid your donation, every £1 you give will be worth £1.25 to us.

The rich diversity of Ex Cathedra's work would simply not be possible without the generous support of individuals such as our Angels.

Help our work – become an Angel today!

Give the gift of singing

Becoming an Ex Cathedra Angel makes a lovely birthday or Christmas gift for someone special. We would be delighted to arrange for a personalised welcome pack to be sent to you, to offer as a present. Alternatively, we can send a pack directly on your behalf.

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Ex Cathedra is a charity about singing. We believe that everyone should be able to experience the remarkable physical, mental and emotional health benefits of singing together, and have opportunities to be inspired by extraordinary choral music from the past and present.

By leaving a gift to Ex Cathedra in your Will, you can continue to support the music you have enjoyed in your lifetime, and help us to continue to develop the choral repertoire and share inspirational choral experiences. It will help us to:

- bring exceptional music to audiences in our home city of Birmingham and beyond
- develop ambitious projects, research and commission new music, and make this available to others to perform
- provide outstanding opportunities for children, young people, students, emerging professional singers, and singing leaders
- engage tens of thousands of children and adults in schools, hospitals and communities so they can experience the wonderful benefits of singing together

Practicalities

If you don't already have one, a Will is easy to make and can be done at relatively low cost. By creating a Will, you will be safe in the knowledge that the people and charities you care about will be looked after. We recommend that you discuss this with your solicitor who will be able to suggest a form of words.

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- a fixed sum
- a specific asset such as an item of property, a house, valuables or shares

If you decide to leave a gift to us in your Will, please include the following information: Ex Cathedra, CBSO Centre, Berkley Street, Birmingham, B1 2LF, registered charity number 1004086.

An unrestricted donation will enable us to use your gift where it is most needed at the time. If you are happy with this, state that the gift is "for the general charitable purposes of Ex Cathedra". However, if you wish your gift to be used to support a particular area of our work that is important to you, such as one of our hospital or community projects, supporting talent or commissioning new music, please contact us. This will ensure that we have a clear understanding of your wishes, so that they can be faithfully observed.

We'd like to thank you for considering supporting Ex Cathedra in this way.

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- invitations to our Host of Angels events such as open rehearsals
- invitations to special events, with the opportunity to meet Jeffrey Skidmore and members of Ex Cathedra
- advance concert information with priority booking for our Birmingham season

If you would like to discuss leaving a legacy in confidence, please contact Julie Watson, Grants & Individual Giving Manager, julie@excathedra.co.uk or Peter Trethewey, General Manager, peter@excathedra.co.uk.

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