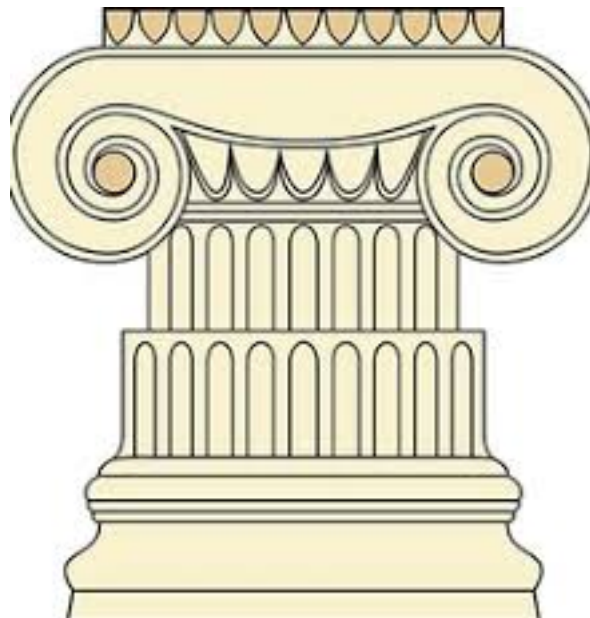


# vOx Chamber Choir

Directed by David Crown

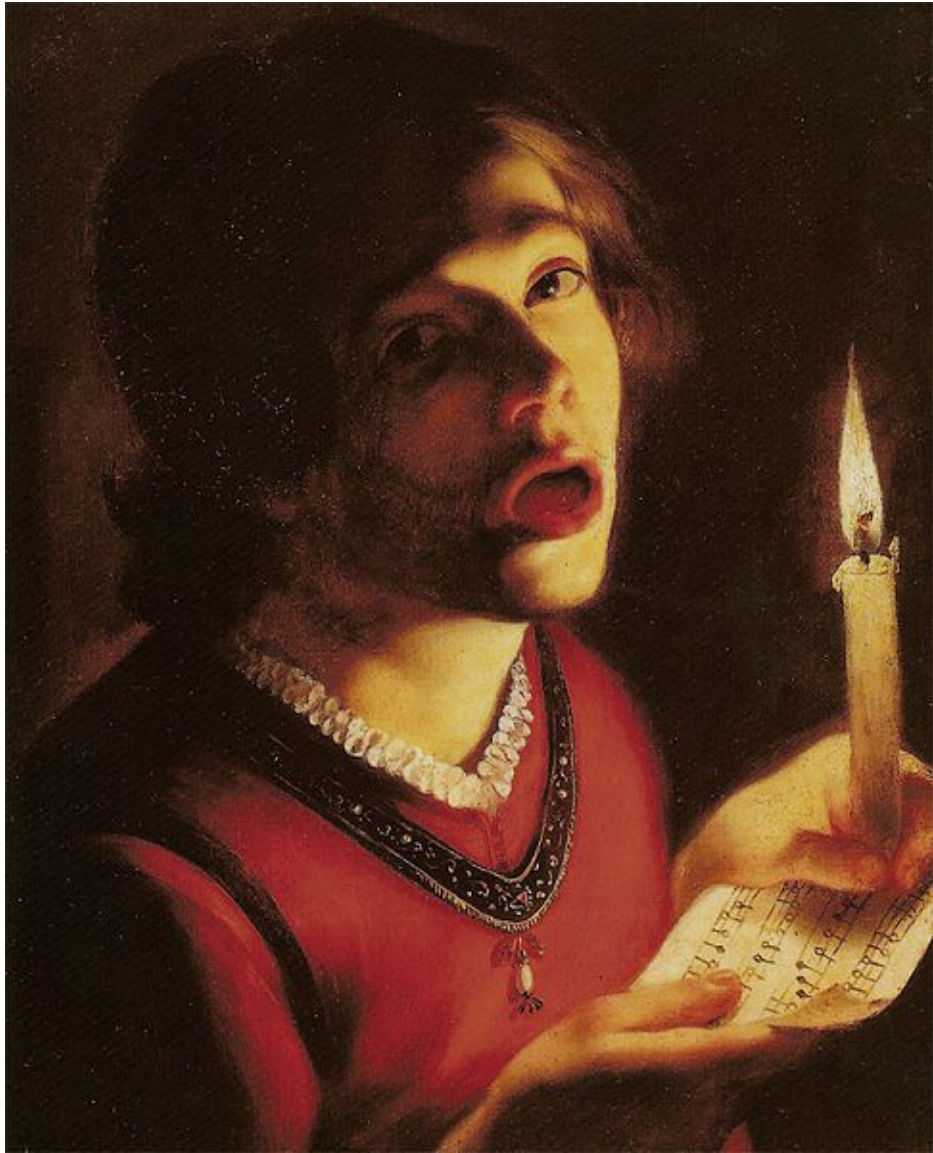
## Baroque Classics



Saturday 1 Dec  
St Mary's  
Charlbury  
7:30 pm

Sunday 2 Dec  
Exeter College  
Oxford  
2:30 pm





*Singer with a Candle*  
**Trophime Bigot**  
mid 1600s

— PROGRAMME —

- Johann Sebastian Bach Komm, Jesu, komm  
Samuel Scheidt Christ lag in Todes Banden  
Michael Praetorius Nun komm der Heiden Heiland  
Johann Pachelbel Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied  
Johann Adam Hiller Alles Fleisch ist wie Gras  
Johann Sebastian Bach Lobet den Herrn

INTERVAL

- Antonio Vivaldi Gloria  
George Frideric Handel Zadok the Priest



**Bach, Johann Sebastian (1685 – 1750)**

Komm, Jesu, komm, BWV 229

This is one of Bach's six motets written in Leipzig, probably for a funeral. One of the more challenging phrases in the music is a chromatic and "sour" passage of very dense counterpoint on the text "der Sauer Weg wird mir zu schwer" / "the sour path becomes too difficult for me." By the end of the stanza, though, and the end of the piece as a whole, Bach emphasises the "right path" and the "true path" in much more euphonious ways, suggesting that the anticipation of Jesus is itself the path to salvation. The antiphonal play of two choirs is deceptively simple: a reassuring dialogue. The concluding Chorale is much richer and more complex than the familiar congregational hymn settings in which Bach harmonised traditional melodies; this is more elaborate, with exciting harmonies and a new-composed melody rising to a confident climax on the words "the true path to life".

**Scheidt, Samuel (1587 – 1654)**

Christ Lag in Todes Banden

The somewhat awkwardly named Scheidt was a prominent North German composer of the early Baroque, and a strong influence on later generations. Unlike other prominent contemporaries who travelled widely, particularly to Italy, Scheidt never left northern Europe, even throughout the deprivations of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). A Protestant, Scheidt's disconnection from Roman influences led to a very distinctive compositional style: heavily modal, often syncopated, generally quite severe. His choral music, as in this example, is usually structured in a series of "patterned" variations, in which each increasingly elaborate phrase of the chorale uses a different rhythmic motive. Here, Martin Luther's very familiar Easter tune and text about Christ breaking the bonds of death, are varied between two choirs in multiple combinations of voices.

**Praetorius, Michael (1571 – 1621)**

Nun komm der Heiden Heiland

A contemporary of Scheidt, and even more influential in the development of Protestant German musical traditions, Praetorius was quite open to Italian compositional influences. His huge compendium of over 1,200 songs and arrangements, *Musae Sioniae* (1605–1610) in which this piece is included, shows a wide-ranging stylistic curiosity, an exploratory musical mind, and much refinement. Praetorius was expressly interested in using music to help reconcile Protestants and Roman Catholics; this piece is based on a familiar Lutheran chorale tune for Advent, yet also employs Venetian polychoral techniques that are smoother and lighter than those used in the Scheidt motet.

**Pachelbel, Johann (1653 – 1706)**

Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied

Had he never written that Canon (which isn't a canon), more of Pachelbel's extensive output would doubtless be better known. Even more absorptive of Italian and Roman Catholic influences than Praetorius, and less Lutheran in his personal professions than his near contemporary Bach, Pachelbel's music is also less adventurous and challenging. He's not a simple composer, by any means, but there is a stable and efficient quality to much of his work. This piece is jolly, even bouncy. It conveys a mood, and many words, with admirable and pleasing ease. Sing to the lord a new song!

Fun Fact: Pachelbel's son Karl Theodor emigrated to America and became a prominent musical figure in Charleston, South Carolina, up to his death in 1750.

**Hiller, Johann Adam (1728 – 1804)**

Alles Fleisch is wie Gras

Many fun facts about Hiller: his real name was Huller, he was Bach's distant successor as Kantor to the Thomasschule Leipzig, and he can be considered the father of German Singspiel, that hybrid genre combining spoken dialogue with popular song and original composition. He was also a hypochondriac. As the director of a Leipzig civic music society, he oversaw its move into the newly built guildhall of garment merchants, and thus can be considered the father of the globally famous Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra too. Hiller was deeply inspired by Handel; he popularised the oratorios in Germany, including regular performances of *Messiah* in Leipzig, Berlin, Breslau, and other places—in the same raucous manner of the English choral societies. Hiller's many sacred works are less influenced by Bach (whose he was not fond, apparently) than by Graun and Hasse. In this fine miniature, the chromaticism of the opening section is more redolent of Haydn; the racing counterpoint of the middle section is more Handelian; and even the concluding chorale makes only a begrudging nod to Bach's looming presence in Leipzig. All flesh is grass: even, apparently, Old Bach.

**Bach, Johann Sebastian (1685 – 1750)**

Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden, BWV 230

Hiller might not have approved, but Bach gets the last word in the first half of our concert. *Lobet den Herrn* is one of the most familiar and widely performed of his set of Six Motets. It is joyous, virtuosic, a thrill to sing, and we hope even more thrilling to hear.

Slight complication: it might not be composed by Bach. It was published in 1821, considerably earlier than the publication of the rest of Bach's oeuvre and at a time when his music was truly obscure. The manuscript was purportedly in Bach's hand, but Bach transcribed enormous amounts of music, to study it, so it is not impossible that this superb composition attracted his attention as a suitable and suitably challenging model for his own subsequent work in the genre. Musically, some aspects are atypical. For example, the arpeggiated vocal writing is unusual for Bach; the opening counterpoint, based on rising major arpeggios and other leaping figures, is common in his instrumental writing but not in his vocal writing. So, perhaps this is Bach's transcription for voices of an earlier instrumental piece. At any rate, with no definitive evidence that it is or is not by Bach, it has become firmly entrenched in the canon, and we are delighted to perform it for you this evening in all its excellence.

Listen out for the changes in mood and character across 5 distinct parts. Part 1 "Praise the Lord, all the heathen" begins with an exuberant fugue (and those questionable arpeggios). Part 2 "And praise him, all ye peoples!" is also a fugue, but more undulating—as if the vigour of the heathens is tempered by the grace of the faithful. In both fugues, the voices enter in descending order: Soprano first, then Alto, Tenor and finally Bass—and both fugue subjects combine and overlap at the end of Part 2, as if sectarian divisions are resolved. A clear cadence precedes the start of Part 3, "For His grace and truth": chordal and hymn-like, it provides a moment of relief from the earlier counterpoint. In Part 4 "Reign over us for ever", each voice at different times sustains a very long suspended note on "ewigkeit / for ever" – (such word painting argues against the idea that the piece originated without words). Counterpoint returns for an exhilarating "Alleluia" fugue that races to the end—winding up the pace and mood, and then pulling back through several descending sequences, all in about 90 seconds. Performed with rhythmic precision and rigor, the sound of praise is unmistakable.

— INTERVAL —



**I Musici**  
**Caravaggio, ca 1595**

## Vivaldi, Antonio (1678 – 1741)

Gloria, RV 589

1.) Gloria in excelsis	Chorus	7.) Domini Fili	Chorus
2.) Et in terra pax	Chorus	8.) Domine Deus	Alto and Chorus
3.) Laudamus te	Soprano duet	9.) Qui tollis	Chorus
4.) Gratias agimus tibi	Chorus	10.) Qui sedes	Chorus
5.) Propter magnum	Chorus	11.) Quoniam tu solus	Chorus
6.) Domine Deus	Soprano	12.) Cum sancto spiritu	Chorus

Vivaldi was at the height of his career when he composed this setting of the Gloria from the Roman Catholic mass, in 1715. It somehow combines splendour with concision, introspection with exuberance, and a fervid faith with rambunctious humanism. Full of sunlight and sparkle and swagger, it is a consummately Venetian piece. Amazingly, it vanished after Vivaldi's death and wasn't re-discovered until the 1920s. Its first performance came only in a butchered Italian version in 1939, and finally in its proper form in New York in 1957—contributing significantly to a revival in which Vivaldi has become one of the most popular of all composers. That he dissipated his good fortune and died in poverty (in Vienna, where he was buried in an unmarked grave like Mozart) does nothing to diminish the achievements of his illustrious career. And this piece is a jewel in the crown.

The opening chorus sets a standard that a less capable composer might not have been able to sustain, but in Vivaldi's hands the inventiveness and cohesion of the twelve movements never flags. The opening octave leaps and racing semi-quavers provide motivic elements and a general character that pervade the work as a whole. The second movement, *in stile antico*, contrasts deliberately and excitingly with the opening; it's slower, grander, in the minor, and in triple time. Light breaks back in with a soprano duet on "Laudamus te", clearly composed to showcase some of Vivaldi's prize-pupils at the girls' orphanage for which he wrote the piece. A grandly declamatory short chorus gives thanks—"Gratias agimus tibi"—immediately followed by the bustling fugue proclaiming the reason: "Propter magnam gloriam tuam" / "All for thy great glory". The first solo movement follows, for another soprano, "Domine Deus", recalling the leaping octave figure from the opening movement in a more meditative measure. The full chorus presses back in exuberantly, singing of the only begotten son of the father, "Domine Fili Unigenite"—in which a dotted galloping figure is tossed from voice to voice, and reigned up periodically by hemiolas that keep the pace from running out of control. An alto soloist takes an adagio turn extolling the Lamb of God, "Domine Dei, Agnus Dei", and is accompanied by syllabic and harmonically adventurous interjections from the irrepressible chorus. The message of salvation is re-emphasised as the chorus repeat "Qui tollis" / "Who taketh away the sins of the world", and entreat that their prayers be heard, "suscipe deprecationem nostram". He who sits at the Right Hand of the Father, "Qui sedes ad dexteram", must be well pleased with the beautifully wrought alto aria, echoing motives from other movements: octave leaps, triads, quaver/semi-quaver figures, parallel thirds, and hemiolas. A direct (if abridged) repeat of the opening movement follows, to give the whole piece further consistency and coherence, on the words "Quoniam tu solus sanctus" / "for only Thou art holy". The final movement is a fugue celebrating the Holy Spirit, "Cum Sancto Spiritu", at once stately and glittering—in every respect glorious.

## Handel, George Frideric (1685 – 1759)

Zadok the Priest, HWV 258

*Zadok* was composed for the coronation of King George II in 1727, with three other Coronation Anthems: *The King Shall Rejoice*, *My Heart is Inditing* and *Let Thy Hand Be Strengthened*. One of Handel's best-known works, *Zadok* has been sung prior to the anointing of the sovereign at the coronation of every British monarch since its composition, and no doubt will continue to be sung well into the future. The words have been used in every Coronation since King Edgar at Bath Abbey in 973, and from 1 Kings 1: 38-40.

Zadok the Priest, and Nathan the Prophet anointed Solomon King.  
And all the people rejoiced, and said:  
God save the King! Long live the King!  
May the King live for ever,  
Amen, Alleluia.

After an elaborate slow procession in the strings (tonight, on the organ), in which static arpeggios accumulate to a sudden choral outburst on the very singable word "Zadok", all the people rejoice with very happy D-major chords and trumpet-like flourishes in the inner voices. Three shouts of "God Save the King!" are followed by coruscating alternations of Amen and Alleluia, arguably more resplendent than the celebrated Hallelujah Chorus.

The first 1727 performance, incidentally, was a disaster. The choir somehow forgot to sing *Zadok* at the right time, but did so later in the service, at a liturgically inappropriate moment and bumping another anthem into the wrong place in turn.

*Zadok* was used 1992 as the basis for the UEFA Champions League Anthem, one of the best-known sports songs in the world. Handel might have been pleased about that, and the royalties, as much he doubtless would have enjoyed the fact that his house in Mayfair is next door to Jimi Hendrix's. He might even have appreciated an evocation of *Zadok* in one of the weirder passages from 19<sup>th</sup> Century literature, Thomas de Quincey's description of a heroin-fuelled nightmare in *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*:

My dream commenced with a music which now I often heard in dreams—a music of preparation and of awakening suspense, a music like the opening of the Coronation Anthem, and which, like *that*, gave the feeling of a vast march, of infinite cavalcades filing off, and the tread of innumerable armies.... Somewhere, I knew not where—somehow, I knew not how—by some beings, I knew not whom—a battle, a strife, an agony, was conducting, was evolving like a great drama or piece of music....

Handel influenced more than just the musical culture of Britain; his presence is enormously pervasive, and deservedly so. *Zadok* is a true Baroque classic, and a suitably valedictory end our concert.





**Das Konzert**  
**Gerrit van Honthorst, 1623**

**David Crown** founded vOx in 2013, an *a cappella* chamber choir of about 24-30 singers (depending on repertoire) based in the city of Oxford. David is also Music Director of the Cheltenham Bach Choir, one of the foremost large choral societies in the UK, and of Opus 48, the first new choral society to be established in Oxford in over 50 years.

We are always happy to hear from keen singers and anyone interested in supporting us. Please contact us via the website: [www.vox-choir-oxford.co.uk](http://www.vox-choir-oxford.co.uk)

### **Soprano**

Karen Benny <sup>y</sup>  
Clare Bowler-Reed <sup>x</sup>  
Meryl Davies <sup>y, x</sup>  
Emma Grylls  
Rose Hadshar  
Alex Merckx <sup>y, x</sup>  
Sarah Salo  
Madelon Shaw  
Alexandra Wilson

### **Tenor**

Paul Cann  
Richard Green  
Laurence Hunt  
Paul Parker  
Paul Price  
Brian Todd

### **Alto**

Eleri Adams <sup>x</sup>  
Denise Ault  
Ellen Border <sup>y</sup>  
Susan Glaisher <sup>y</sup>  
Liz Greenlaw <sup>x</sup>  
Miranda Ommanney

### **Bass**

Andrew Chim  
Christopher Dickson  
Pegram Harrison  
Alan Jiang  
David Johnston  
Daniel Talbot-Ponsonby

y = Charlbury soloists in the Vivaldi

x = Exeter soloists in the Vivaldi

### **Further information:**

[www.vox-choir-oxford.co.uk](http://www.vox-choir-oxford.co.uk)

### **Upcoming Concert:**

**Handel Messiah** (arr. for choir and wind)

with Oxford Sinfonia

Thursday 20 Dec, 7:30pm

SJE Arts, Iffley Road, Oxford

