



*Excelsis*

**Saturday 29 March, 6:45pm**  
Live jazz drinks reception from 6pm

# Celestial Sax

A concert celebrating the  
synthesis of choir and solo  
saxophone featuring pieces by  
Gjeilo, Whitacre and Morales

**Conductor - Robert Lewis**  
**Saxophone - Sam Corkin**

**St Christopher's Church**  
**Haslemere**

Welcome to Excelsis' Celestial Sax concert! We are excited to present our wide ranging selection of music in a new format which we very much hope you will enjoy.

The aim is to provide a rather more relaxed concert atmosphere than usually encountered to reflect the nature of the repertoire we have chosen much of which will showcase the extraordinary improvisatory skill of our guest saxophonist Sam Corkin. Many of the pieces invite a mood of calm and in some cases philosophical contemplation which we hope will inspire an episode of 'time out' from daily life whilst listening to a truly unique performance.

### **Drop Drop Slow Tears - Orlando Gibbons (1583 – 1625)**

arr. Christian Forshaw (b. 1972)

Christian Forshaw's distinctive sound as a saxophonist & composer/arranger has attracted a global audience. Forshaw's music has been heard in a number of film and television scores, including the 20th Century Studios blockbuster *The Last Duel* directed by Ridley Scott, and *A Song For Jenny* for the BBC.

Christian has performed and recorded with artists as diverse as Brian Eno, Damon Albarn, Moondog, Hugh Jackman, The Divine Comedy, Michael Nyman Band, BBC Singers & the Chamber Orchestra of Europe. You can read an interview with him [here](#) in which he discusses in depth how he has incorporated the Saxophone sound into his work.

He says:

'The juxtaposition of saxophone and voices has been central to my work as a composer, arranger and performer for almost 30 years. The way sound can morph from one to the other in an almost imperceptible way has fascinated musicians from all genres for over a century. Johnny Hodges & Ella Fitzgerald, Stan Getz & Astrud Gilberto and John Dankworth & Cleo Laine have all brought their own unique approaches to this combination of forces.

My own concept of sound derived from my days as a chorister. That aesthetic has always been central to the way I approach the saxophone, aiming to phrase and resonate like a singer. I enjoy the way there is so much

common ground between the two, but also how they are also able to depart from each other and explore their own uniqueness.'

### *Drop Drop Slow Tears:*

'This piece is an exploration of how the saxophone can be blended with music from the Renaissance', in this case Orlando Gibbons, whose serene setting of these words forms a structure around which the saxophonist can weave 'modern harmonies and complex rhythms.' Christian can be heard playing this piece on his recording with Tenebrae [When Sleep Comes](#)

Drop, drop, slow tears,  
And bathe those beauteous feet  
Which brought from Heaven  
The news and Prince of Peace.  
Cease not, wet eyes,  
His mercy to entreat  
To cry for vengeance  
Sin doth never cease.  
In your deep floods  
Drown all my faults and fears  
Nor let His eye  
See sin, but through my tears.

### ***Cantate Domino* - Claudio Monteverdi (1567 – 1643)**

Monteverdi's motet is a setting of lines from Psalms 96 and 98, exhorting the Christian believer to sing, rejoice and play instruments to celebrate the gifts of God. Monteverdi matches the excitement of the opening text with a triple-time introductory passage in four voices. This is then repeated with all six voices, leading to an exhilarating setting of 'For he hath done marvellous things'.

*Cantate Domino canticum novum  
cantate et benedicite nomine eius  
quia mirabilia fecit.  
Cantate et exultate et psallite  
in cythara et voce psalmi  
quia mirabilia fecit.*

Sing to the Lord a new song;  
Sing and bless His name,  
Because He has performed miracles.  
Sing, and exalt, and play  
On the harp and with the voice of a psalm,  
Because He has performed miracles.

## ***Parce Mihi Domine* - Cristobal de Morales** (1500 – 1553)

Cristóbal de Morales (c. 1500 – between 4 September and 7 October 1553) was a Spanish composer of the Renaissance. He is generally considered to be the most influential Spanish composer before Tomás Luis de Victoria.

*Parce mihi Domine* was made famous as the signature track (in three versions) on the best-selling Jazz and Classical Album of 1994, *Officium*, by Jan Garbarek and the Hilliard Ensemble.

In notes on a recent recording of this piece (without saxophone!) by the Gesualdo 6, their Director Owain Park wrote this perceptive description of this apparently simple but haunting piece:

‘.....the music is bound together by a continuous thread: almost without exception each chord contains one note from the previous, knitting together the chordal texture. The questioning nature of the text is portrayed in music that gives a sense of slowly blinking, with repeated chords coming in and out of focus between silences. The repetition of harmonic patterns at the start of each section relaxes the ear, readying us for the next moment of change and allowing the later cadential passages the space to feel radiant in their difference.’ Owain Park © 2022

The saxophone will weave its own path creating elegant ethereal movement around the almost static nature of the choral texture reflective of the melancholy nature of the text.

## ***Feelings come and feelings go* - Clive Osgood** (b. 1977)

Text - Martin Luther

[Clive Osgood's](#) distinctive sound world is well known to many of our audience. Clive is the Organist in this parish and is a composer with a number of acclaimed recordings to his name. Excelsis' recording of his [Magnificat](#) setting - with the London Mozart Players and Amy Carson under Robert Lewis' baton - was released last year. His [Stabat Mater](#) setting with the Choir of Royal Holloway College and the London Mozart Players under the direction of Rupert Gough was released this month.

*Feelings come and feelings go* was first written as a short introit for choir

and semi-chorus for the 2017 Haslemere Festival. The year marked 500 years since Martin Luther wrote his ninety-five theses that launched the Protestant reformation. The work sets a text by Martin Luther combined with one of Luther's own hymn tunes, '*Ein Feste Burg ist unser Gott*', sung by a semi-chorus to J.S Bach's harmonisation. More recently, the piece was rearranged with a saxophone added to the mix. This is the first performance of that version.

Feelings come and feelings go,  
And feelings are deceiving;  
My warrant is the Word of God  
Naught else is worth believing.

Though all my heart should feel condemned  
For want of some sweet token,  
There is One greater than my heart  
Whose Word cannot be broken.

I'll trust in God's unchanging Word  
Till soul and body sever,  
For, though all things shall pass away,  
His word shall stand forever!"

### **Alleluia - Elaine Hagenburg** (b. 1979)

Elaine Hagenberg is celebrated as one of today's leading choral composers, with music that "soars with eloquence and ingenuity" (ACDA Choral Journal). Renowned for her ability to seamlessly weave lush harmonic landscapes, captivating melodies, and evocative piano and orchestral accompaniments, she offers a unique blend of artistic sophistication and universal appeal, creating music that resonates with conductors, performers and audiences alike.

Elaine's award-winning compositional style is profoundly influenced by her connection to nature, beauty, and spiritual reflection. Drawing inspiration from the vivid imagery and themes found in poetry, she crafts intricate musical textures that enrich her narratives and "pull at one's heartstrings" (NY Concert Review).

This joyous and rhythmic a cappella setting of St. Augustine's text in a

buoyant 7/8 meter is brimming with vitality and energy. The contrasting middle section offers expansive lines and lush harmonies which propel the music into exciting key changes and a climactic ending.

All shall be Amen and Alleluia.  
We shall rest and we shall see.  
We shall see and we shall know.  
We shall know and we shall love.  
Behold our end which is no end

by St. Augustine (354-430)

### ***Lux Aurumque* - Eric Whitacre** (b. 1970)

Eric Whitacre is a unique figure in the contemporary work of choral composition and performance. He is famed for his ground-breaking Virtual Choir which began with Virtual Choir 1 ‘Lux Aurumque’ was launched in March 2010 and featured online performances by 185 singers from 12 different countries. It received over 1 million hits in the first two months of its release, and has since been watched by nearly 5 million people.

Writing about the composition process Whitacre stated that he was trying to render “the original poem into Latin and set it as singably and as sonically beautifully as I could”. It is set for SATB; all parts are divided in two for most of the time, a solo soprano is employed in measures 5 to 7, and the soprano section is divided in three parts beginning in bar 34. In our performance tonight the saxophone will take the solo line.

The composer writes in the printed score: “... if the tight harmonies are carefully tuned and balanced, they will shimmer and glow”.

*Lux,  
Calida gravisque pura velut aurum  
Et canunt angeli molliter  
modo natum.*

Light,  
warm and heavy as pure gold  
and angels sing softly  
to the new-born babe.

Edward Esch (b.1970) (Translated to Latin by Charles Anthony Silvestri)

## **Locus Iste - Paul Mealor** (b. 1975)

Paul Mealor is one of the world's most 'performed' living composers and has composed music for some of the most important UK state, national and Royal occasions of the last ten years, including the wedding of The Prince and Princess of Wales (2011), King Charles' 65<sup>th</sup>, 70<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> birthdays, two works for the late Queen Elizabeth II's national Services of Thanksgiving (2022), two works for the Coronation (2023), including the first ever setting of the Welsh Language at a Coronation, and three works for The Honours of Scotland Service (2023).

*Locus iste* was commissioned by the University of Aberdeen to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the consecration of King's College Chapel. The work was premiered by Polyphony, conducted by Stephen Layton. Whilst the piece conjures a similar mood to the famous setting by Anton Bruckner (1824 – 1896) it is in a wholly contemporary harmonic style. The choir splits into 8 parts in each verse to sing dense glowing harmonies which in glorious crescendos here with the addition of an improvisatory saxophone line weaving in and out of the choral texture. At the conclusion of the piece the choral sound dies away to almost silence leaving the solo line with a final cadenza to create a timeless sense of peace.

*Locus iste* is particularly close to Excelsis' heart as they performed it when they sang at the daily remembrance ceremony at the Menin Gate in Ypres during their 10th anniversary tour to Belgium in 2017.

*Locus iste a Deo factus est,  
inaestimabile sacramentum,  
irreprehensibilis est*

This place was made by God,  
a priceless sacrament;  
it is without reproach

## **Sing my Child - Sarah Quartel** (b. 1982)

Canadian composer and educator Sarah Quartel is known for her fresh and exciting approach to choral music. Deeply inspired by the life-changing relationships that can occur while making choral music, Sarah writes in a way that connects singer to singer, ensemble to conductor, and performer to audience. Her works are performed by choirs across the world.



This joyful text celebrates the beauty found all around us in everyday life. Characterized by tight harmonies and a dynamic percussion line, the buoyant 7/8 meter of the opening drives the piece forward. Lush harmonies colour the hymn-like B section as the text evolves into a call for strength despite the troubles that may come.

Sing for the promise in each new morning  
Sing for the hope in a new day dawning  
All around is beauty bright  
Wake in the morning and sing my child  
Dance in the joy of the day unfolding  
Dance as you work and dance as you're learning  
All around is beauty bright  
Take in the day and dance my child  
But when troubles come and worry is all that can be found gather your strength and hear your voice Sing my child  
Laugh in the cool and the fresh of the evening  
Laugh in your triumph and laugh in succeeding  
All around is beauty bright  
Rest in the ev'ning and laugh my child  
Peace  
But when troubles come and worry is all that can be found gather your strength and hear your voice Sing my child  
Sing my child  
Dance my child  
Laugh my child  
Peace my child

***A Whiter Shade of Pale* - Keith Reid** (b. 1946) **Gary Booker** (b. 1945) & **Matthew Fisher** (b. 1946)

Keith Reid was inspired to write this iconic Procul Harum song when he overheard someone at the party saying to a woman, “You’ve turned a whiter shade of pale”. The phrase stuck in his mind: ‘I was at a party in a crowded room and that line came through the air. I saw it in the air and dragged it down...I was trying to conjure a mood as much as tell a straightforward, girl-leaves-boy story. With the ceiling flying away and the room humming harder, I wanted to paint an image of a scene. I wasn’t trying to be mysterious with those images, I was trying to be evocative. I suppose it seems like a decadent scene I’m describing. But I was too young to have experienced any decadence, then. I might have been smoking when I conceived it, but not when I wrote. It was influenced by books, not drugs.’ The original lyrics had four verses, of which only two are heard on the original



recording and in the arrangement that we will sing this evening.

Similarity has been noted between the Hammond Organ line of “A Whiter Shade of Pale” and J. S. Bach’s Air from his Orchestral Suite No. 3 2. Air, BWV 1068, (the “Air on the G string”), where the sustained opening note of the main melodic line flowers into a free-flowing melody against a descending bass line. Allan Moore (Emeritus Professor at University of Surrey in the Department of Music and Sound Recording) notes in the 2018 BBC radio series “Soul Music” that the resemblance “creates the sense of [Bach’s] music without actually quoting it”.

We skipped the light fandango  
Turned some cartwheels across the floor  
I was feeling kind of seasick  
When the crowd called out for more  
The room was humming harder  
And the ceiling flew away  
When I called out for another drink  
The waiter brought a tray  
And so it was later  
When the miller told this tale  
That her face at first just ghostly  
Turned a whiter shade of pale

She said, “There is no reason  
And the truth is plain to see”  
That I wandered through my playing cards  
And could not let her be, no  
One of sixteen vestal virgins  
Who was leaving for the coast  
And although my eyes were open  
They might just as well have been closed  
And so it was later  
When the miller told this tale  
He said that her face at first just ghostly  
And then turned a whiter shade of pale  
And so it was later  
When the miller told this tale  
He said that her face at first just ghostly  
Then turned a whiter shade of pale  
Oh, just a whiter shade of pale  
Then turned a whiter shade of pale

**Sources:**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Whiter_Shade_of_Pale)

[A\\_Whiter\\_Shade\\_of\\_Pale](#)

***O be joyful - Toby Young*** (b. 1963)

Toby Young's compositions explore the boundaries between pop and classical music. Since winning the Guardian/BBC Proms Young Composers' Competition (2006 and 2008) and the ABRSM International Young Composers' Competition (2009), Toby's music has been performed by renowned ensembles including the London Symphony Orchestra, Academy of Ancient Music, London Mozart Players, and the choirs of King's College, Cambridge and Westminster Abbey. He has also written and co-written for numerous pop artists including the Rolling Stones, Chase & Status, and Duran Duran. Toby is the Gianturco Junior Research Fellow in Music and Philosophy at Linacre College, Oxford.

The initial tempo indication of 'Light and lively' aptly describes this carol for choir and piano. The jaunty 6/8 tempo and effervescent piano part propel the music along and underpin highly singable melodic writing for the choir.

O be joyful, earth and sky Hallelujah  
Unto us God's Son came nigh Hallelujah  
He for our salvation, Hallelujah  
Left God's habitation Hallelujah  
Here the fairest Rose we see Hallelujah  
Blooming forth from Jesse's tree Hallelujah  
He the great incarnate Word Hallelujah  
Jesus Christ doth help afford Hallelujah.

***Evening Prayer - Ola Gjeilo*** (b. 1978)

Evening Prayer from 2010 was Gjeilo's first choral work incorporating instrumental improvisation, with solo improvisation passages for the tenor sax. Of the piece Gjeilo says:

'Having grown up with my father being a good amateur saxophonist, and more recently collaborating with Phoenix-based Ted Belled in doing entire sax/piano duo concerts together that are unplanned and improvised, I

wanted to find a way to combine our playing with the Chorale. It was the final piece written for the group during my 2009-2010 residency with them, and the Chorale's recording of the work is the final track of their 2012 Northern Lights album."

Watch, O Lord, with those who wake, or watch or weep tonight, and give your angels charge over those who sleep.

Tend your sick ones, O Lord Jesus Christ; rest your weary ones; bless your dying ones; soothe your suffering ones; pity your afflicted ones; shield your joyous ones; and all for your love's sake.

Amen.

### ***Before a Word is on my Tongue - Chris Lawry*** (b. 1978)

We are delighted to say that Chris Lawry is at our concert this evening for what we believe to be the first performance of his piece. The dedication of the piece is 'New from Old, from old, again. Musings on Psalm 139.4 using a tune 'without words and then Thomas Ken's later text'.

In a further explanation, Chris Lawry states that the piece takes inspiration from Tallis' Psalter Tune 8 (the Canon) and 'muses' on Psalm 139:4 'Before a Word is on my Tongue, you Lord know it completely'. The first half of the piece uses a wordless choir which ebbs and flows in dynamics and harmony with the organ (in essence reflecting the Psalter tunes that could have many texts, and therefore meanings) and the second half uses Thomas Ken's later text to fit Tallis' tune, 'O praise to thee, my God, this night', the aim was to create an ethereal sound with shifting harmonies which the soprano saxophone can sit above, stating each line of Tallis' tune but with a following passage in improvisatory style. I hope the piece is a rather joyous celebration of the original tune, text and meaning.'

O Praise to you my God this night  
For all the blessings of the light  
Keep me, O keep me, King of Kings  
Beneath the shelter of Your wings  
Praise God, from whom all blessings flow  
Praise him all creatures here below  
Praise him above ye heavenly host  
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost  
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost

## **Summertime - George Gershwin** (1898 – 1937) arr. Roderick Williams (b. 1965)

Summertime is the ever popular aria composed in 1934 by George Gershwin for the 1935 opera “Porgy and Bess”. The lyrics are by DuBose Heyward, the author of the novel “Porgy” on which the opera was based, and Ira Gershwin.

The song soon became a much-recorded jazz standard, described as “without doubt ... one of the finest songs the composer ever wrote ... Gershwin’s highly evocative writing brilliantly mixes elements of jazz and the song styles of African-Americans in the South-East United States from the early twentieth century”.

This famous song lends itself to the addition of saxophone in bluesy mood.

Summertime, and the living is easy.  
Fish are jumping, and the cotton is high.  
Oh, your daddy’s rich, and your ma is good-looking.  
So, hush, little baby, don’t you cry.

One of these mornings you’re gonna rise up singing.  
Yes, you’ll spread your wings and you’ll take to the sky.  
But ‘til that morning, there’s nothing can harm you.  
Yes, with daddy and mammy standing by.

Summertime, and the living is easy.  
Fish are jumping, and the cotton is high.  
Oh, your daddy’s rich, and your ma is good-looking.  
So, hush, little baby. Baby, don’t you cry.  
Oh, don’t you cry.  
Don’t you cry.  
Oh, don’t you cry.  
Don’t you cry.

## **The Saxophone – A Little-Known Tale**

Belgian inventor Antoine-Joseph (Adolphe) Sax (1814 – 1894 – became a French Citizen in 1869) was in his youth a student of flute and clarinet at Brussels’ Conservatory of Music. His observation of the balance of brass and woodwind instruments in musical composition and performance at the time led him to believe that there was a missing range that a hybrid woodwind and brass instrument might be able to fill. Sax’s experimentation with the bass clarinet led him to a design that married the single-reed concept of the woodwinds with metal materials, a conical bore and the ability to over-blow

at the octave.

Sax's concept of the saxophone family was extensive. His 1846 patent described 14 different versions of the saxophone ranging from F contrabass all the way up to E flat sopranino. In between were E flat contrabass, C bass, B flat bass, E flat baritone, C tenor, B flat tenor, F alto, E flat alto, C soprano and B flat soprano.

When he showed this new instrument to the composer Hector Berlioz in 1841, the composer showered him with praise. Berlioz was later to write a glowing article in Paris' prestigious "Journal des Debats" magazine outlining Sax's innovative design and what this could mean for the future of composed music. 1847 saw the founding of a dedicated saxophone school in Paris, three years to the month after the debut of Berlioz's *Chant Sacre*. Berlioz said of the saxophone in 1844:

"Its principal merit in my view is the varied beauty of its accent, sometimes serious, sometimes calm, sometimes impassioned, dreamy or melancholic, or vague, like the weakened echo of an echo, like the indistinct plaintive moans of the breeze in the woods and, even better, like the mysterious vibrations of a bell, long after it has been struck; there does not exist another musical instrument that I know of that possesses this strange resonance, which is situated at the edge of silence."

An exploration of the intriguing legal battle which raged about Sax's legal rights to his patents is contained in a recent study entitled 'The Battle for Control of the Brass and Instruments Business in the French Industrial Revolution' by José-Modesto Diago Ortega (OUP 2024).

The book explores the turgid and rather sad tale of prolonged legal confrontations between a group of French businessmen and Adolphe Sax. The former who built wind instruments saw their economic interests being threatened by the French Military's insistence on their bands using Sax's patent protected instruments. The businessmen sought to challenge Sax's patents of his various types of saxophones in the Courts.

The legal battle was fought at a time of huge political turmoil. Political power wavered between the July Monarchy and the accession of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte. After receiving a high-level prize for his invention of the

saxophone family of instruments at the Great Universal Exhibition of London, Sax returned to France now under Napoleon III.

Sax became the 'Manufacturer of the Military Household of his Majesty the Emperor'. Shortly after this in 1854 Sax's legal right of his patents was established and he received 10.000 francs compensation for the legal wrangle. The Emperor also decreed that the bands of the Imperial Guard was to be equipped with Saxhorns, Saxotrombas and Saxophones.

Sax however was under continual pressure from other instrument manufacturers to protect his monopoly on the production of his instruments against imitators throughout the succeeding decades of his life. Adolphe took these imitators to court, but the court cases ruined him financially. He was declared bankrupt three times: in 1852, 1873 and 1877; only escaping a fourth bankruptcy due to the support of Emperor Napoleon III.

These misfortunes affected Adolphe's health. Berlioz wrote: "Again and again, Sax is the victim of persecutions worthy of the Middle Ages and that recall precisely the acts and deeds of Benvenuto Cellini, the Florentine engraver. They took away his workmen, stole his plans, accused him of madness and took him to court. With a little more audacity, they would have murdered him. Such is the hatred that inventors always waken amongst those of their rivals that do not invent anything."

Adolphe Sax died in poverty in 1894 but he will be forever remembered for his saxophone. The versatility of the instrument is such that it is used in military and wind bands, orchestras and jazz ensembles, particularly big bands.

Works written for the saxophone range from chamber music for saxophone quartet to saxophone choir pieces, classical concertos and jazz standards, and its popularity just keeps growing. In 2016, Jess Gillam made history as the first ever saxophonist to reach the final of the BBC Young Musician of the Year.

LES BONNES TÊTES MUSICALES.

376.



Etudes concertistiques sur les nouveaux instruments de M<sup>r</sup> Sax.

Theodor Sauer & Co. Leipzig

1854

**Sources:**

*History Today* 2025 Vol 75 Issue 3 P20

[Henri Selmer Paris](#)

[The Music Workshop Company – The Extraordinary Life of Adolphe Sax](#)