



Psalms for
Feasts
&
Seasons

Christopher Willcock

New introduction
by Christopher
Willcock

The psalms are at once both poetry and prayer, or better, they are sung poetry and sung prayer. They have only half-lives if they are simply recited or read. They are common to the Jewish and the Christian faiths where they are one of the chief methods of prayer, both public and private. The wide range of human expression is echoed within their direct and memorable poetry: praise and lament, exultation and contrition, warlike chant and tender song. The ways in which the psalms have been sung are just as varied. The pattern heard in this collection is described as responsorial. This popular way of singing the psalms is similar to the refrain and verse format of many other songs. Here the refrain section is usually a short text taken from the psalm. It is first sung by a soloist (cantor), repeated by the congregation, and then repeated by them after each stanza of psalm verses sung by the cantor.

This collection falls into two parts: the first contains psalms traditionally associated with the major celebrations of the Christian liturgical year such as Christmas and Easter (Feasts), while the second contains of a general nature for the rest of the year (Seasons). Their selection was made principally for their suitability as responses after a reading from the Scriptures. Hence, a psalm of penitence would follow a reading on the theme of penitence. Their uses, of course, would extend far beyond this to many other occasions: formally liturgical ones and others less formally structured.

They may be performed simply or with more elaboration. Obviously too much decoration will blunt the direct appeal of the words. In addition to the organ, the present recording uses sometimes a flute and at others a guitar to provide instrumental variety in the accompaniment. Many worshipping communities have an instrumentalist or two as well as their keyboard player. Judicious experimentation with such instruments will produce many other results that are not attempted here.

Whether these psalm settings are used to stimulate a Church community to approach the singing of psalms afresh, or more simply as a means for an individual to enter their world of relating to God, the psalm texts themselves will continue to speak to the heart, whether in pain or in gladness.

Christopher Willcock, 2017

The Julian Singers conducted by Christopher Willcock

Organ: Graham Cox

Flute: Robin Hezky

Guitar: Phil Gardner

Cantors: Therese Quinn (soprano)

Joan Marshall (alto)

Geoff Lock (tenor)

Michael Wood (baritone 1)

David Rankin (baritone 2)

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|-----|--------|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. | Ps 25 | To you, O Lord (B2) | <i>Advent I</i> |
| 2. | Ps 85 | Lord, let us see your kindness (A) | <i>Advent II</i> |
| 3. | Ps 98 | All the ends of the earth (B1) | <i>Christmas</i> |
| 4. | Ps 75 | Lord, every nation (T) | <i>Epiphany</i> |
| 5. | Ps 51 | Be merciful, O Lord (B2) | <i>Lent I</i> |
| 6. | Ps 91 | Be with me, Lord (T) | <i>Lent II</i> |
| 7. | Ps 130 | With the Lord there is mercy | <i>Lent III</i> |
| 8. | Ps 22 | My God, my God (B2) | <i>Holy Week</i> |
| 9. | Ps 136 | His love is everlasting | <i>Easter Vigil</i> |
| 10. | Ps 118 | This is the day (S) | <i>Easter I</i> |
| 11. | Ps 66 | Let all the earth (T) | <i>Easter II</i> |
| 12. | Ps 47 | God mounts his throne (A) | <i>Ascension</i> |
| 13. | Ps 104 | Lord, send out your Spirit | <i>Pentecost</i> |
| 14. | Ps 19 | Lord, you have the words (T&B2) | <i>General I</i> |
| 15. | Ps 27 | The Lord is my light (S) | <i>General II</i> |
| 16. | Ps 34 | Taste and see (T) | <i>General III</i> |
| 17. | Ps 63 | My soul is thirsting (B1) | <i>General IV</i> |
| 18. | Ps 95 | If today you hear his voice | <i>General V</i> |
| 19. | Ps 100 | We are his people (T) | <i>General VI</i> |
| 20. | Ps 103 | The Lord is kind and merciful (B1) | <i>General VII</i> |
| 21. | Ps 145 | I will praise your name (A) | <i>General VIII</i> |
| 22. | Ps 122 | Let us go rejoicing (B1&B2) | <i>General IX</i> |

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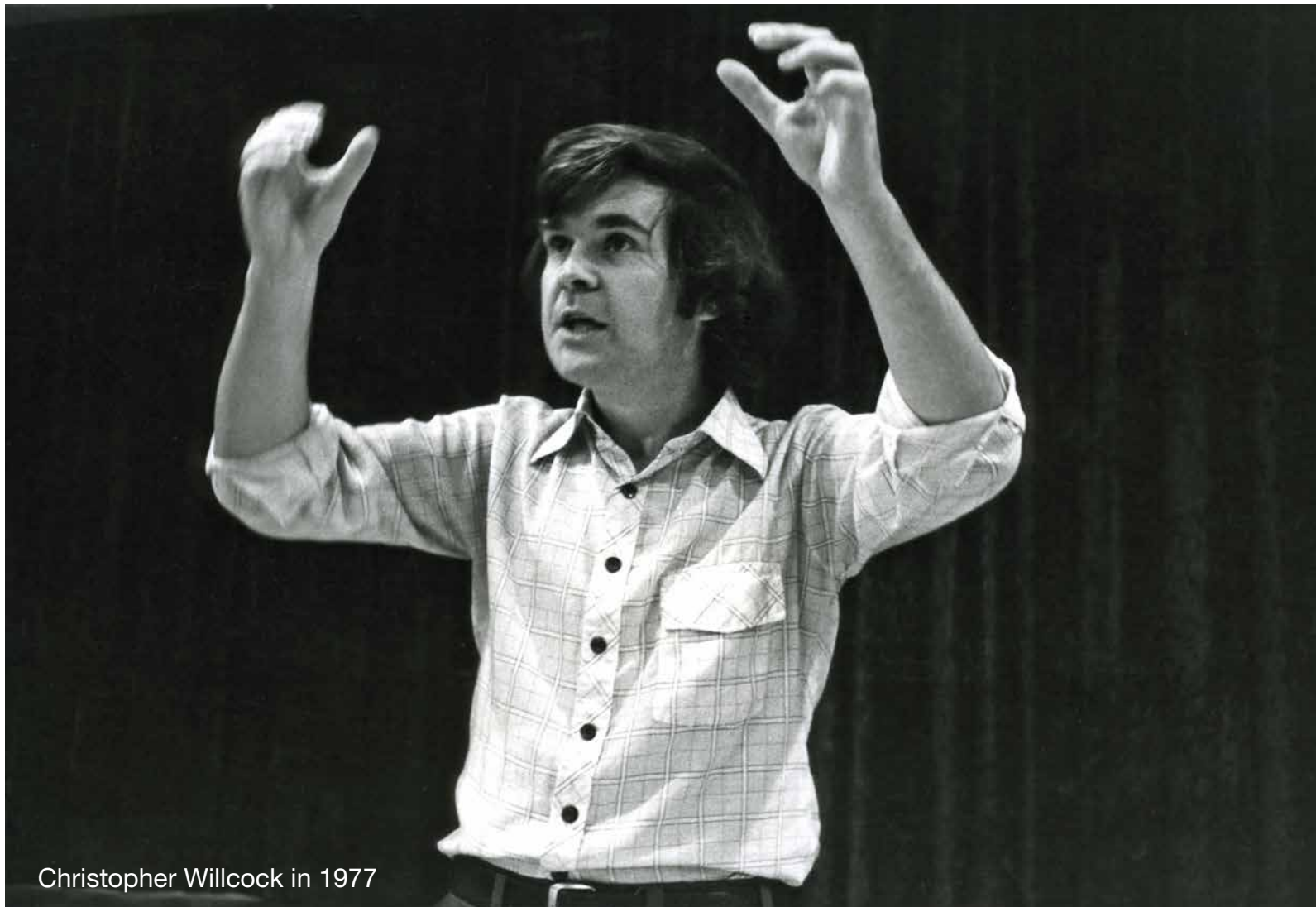
Notes from original release

The psalms are common to the Jewish and the Christian faiths. In Christian worship they are one of the chief methods of prayer. The wide range of human expression is echoed within their direct and memorable poetry. This recording is devoted to a collection of psalms performed in the responsorial style. This popular way of singing the psalms is similar to the chorus and verse pattern of many other songs. In this present performance the chorus section is called an Antiphon and is usually a short text taken from the psalm it accompanies and repeated after the stanzas. The Antiphons are intended for the larger group of people present, while the Verses are frequently sung by a Cantor and at times by a small choral group.

This collection falls into two parts: the first contains psalms that are traditionally associated with the major Christian feasts while the second contains psalms of a general nature. Their selection was made principally for their suitability as responses after a reading from scripture. Hence, psalms of penitence would follow a reading on the theme of penitence. But they may also be used in many other situations: for meditation, in Morning and Evening Prayer, and at various points in liturgical celebrations where hymns are commonly found.

They may be performed simply or with more elaboration. Obviously too much decoration will blunt the direct appeal of the words. In addition to the organ, the present recording uses a flute and a guitar to provide instrumental variety within the accompaniment. Most groups have an instrumentalist or two as well as their keyboard player. Experimentation with instruments will produce many other results that are not attempted here. The judgement about what kind of treatment will benefit the psalm should bring a particular group to a performance that best meets its needs.

In only a few cases has the entire text of a psalm been set. Usually the limit is kept to three or four stanzas. The verses were chosen to form texts of a manageable size and with a central theme that could be used to express a particular point in worship.



Christopher Willcock in 1977

This recording is produced with the co-operation of Dove Communications Pty. Ltd., 203 Darling Road, East Malvern, 3145, who have published a printed music edition of this collection.

Front cover art — Lynne Muir

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