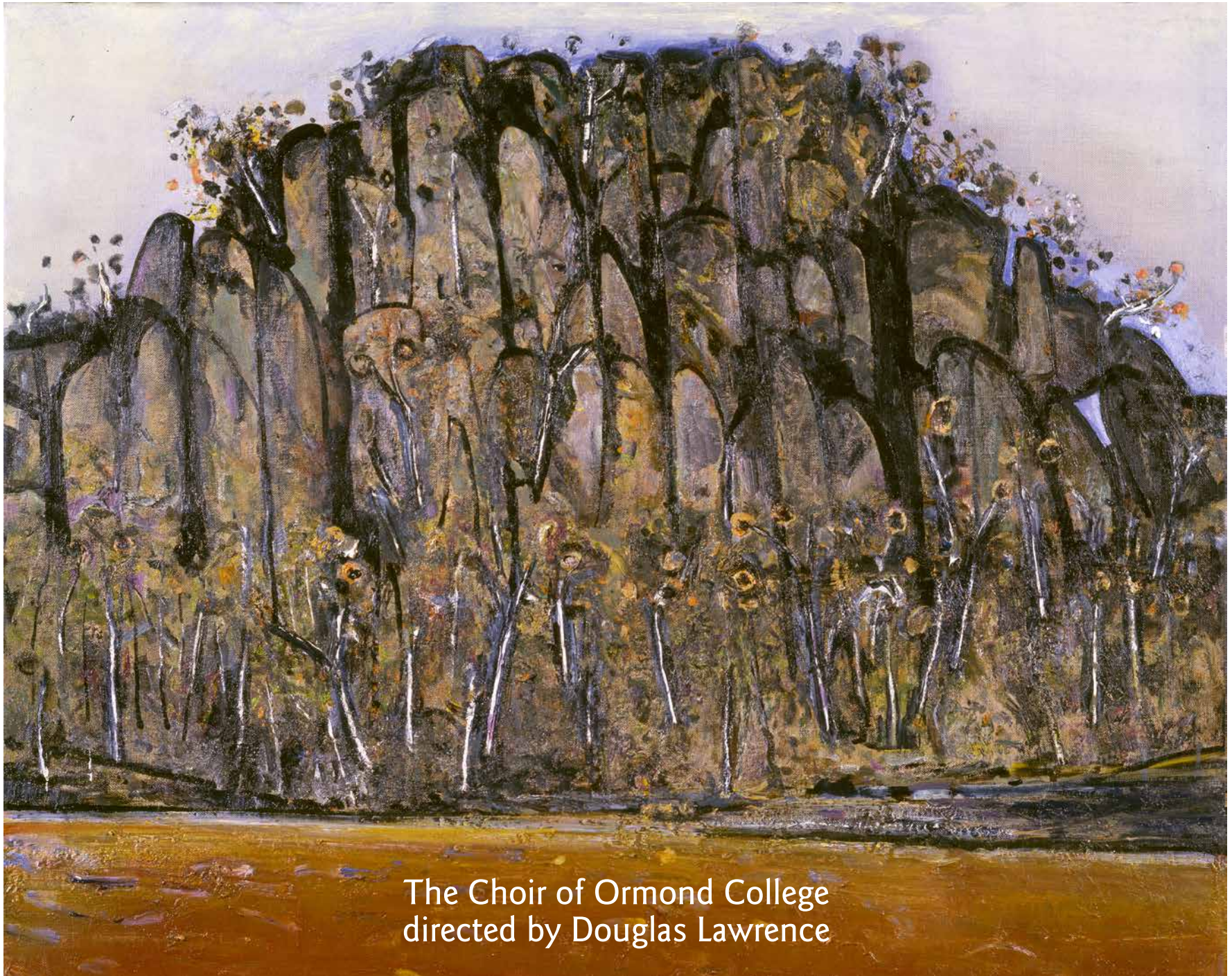


I HEARD THE OWL CALL MY NAME

Nunn • Bach • Poulenc • Josquin



The Choir of Ormond College
directed by Douglas Lawrence

I heard the owl call my name is a highly innovative piece of music based on Margaret Craven's famous novel of the same name. It employs a wordless chorus and depicts events from the story in a style suggestive of medieval music. Traditional harmonies have been arranged in exciting new forms which are interspersed with dense and evocative sound textures. Philip Nunn has achieved a kind of timelessness in the music; from reflective tranquility to great activity when the river starts running and the birds begin their calling. The harmonies, colours and textures of this a cappella work create some richly opulent patterns, and aleatoric passages. **The owl** is an excitingly ingenious work, unique in its concept and gives to the listener a delightful and satisfying musical journey. This new piece sits surprisingly well in company with the other works on this disc which together cover 500 years of composition.

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I HEARD THE OWL CALL MY NAME

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
Jesu meine Freude BWV 227 19'45"

- 1** Choral 1'04"
- 2** Es ist nun nichts Verdammliches 2'48"
- 3** Unter deinem Schirmen 1'01"
- 4** Denn das Gesetz des Geistes 1'08"
- 5** Trotz dem alten Drachen 2'15"
- 6** Ihr aber seid nicht fleischlich 2'27"
- 7** Weg mit allen Schätzen 1'04"
- 8** So aber Christus in euch ist 1'58"
- 9** Gute Nacht, o Wesen 3'24"
- 10** So nun der Geist des 1'30"
- 11** Choral: Weicht, ihr Trauergeister 1'05"

Josquin des Prez (ca. 1440-1521)
Missa Pange Lingua 25'35"

- 12** Kyrie 2'44"
- 13** Gloria 3'40"
- 14** Credo 6'06"
- 15** Sanctus 4'46"
- 16** Benedictus 2'54"
- 17** Agnus Dei 5'25"

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)
Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence 12'20"
(four motets for a time of penitence)

- 18** Timor et tremor venerunt super me 2'49"
- 19** Vineam electam 3'11"
- 20** Tenebrae factae sunt 3'29"
- 21** Tristis est anima mea 2'43"

Philip Nunn (b. 1961)
I heard the owl call my name 15'43"

- 22** Yes my Lord, no my Lord 3'06"
- 23** The depth of sadness 4'33"
- 24** Che-kwa-la 2'32"
- 25** Come wolf – come swimmer 5'29"

Recorded in Denmark whilst on tour in July 1993, by Move Records.

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move.com.au

"These performances reveal a world-class choir at the height of its powers ... add this CD to your collection." (The Melburnian)

"(The Owl) ... is the highlight of the disc."
(24 Hours magazine)



Of the Bach motets, two stand out as large, mightily impressive major works; *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied* and the motet on this recording; ***Jesu meine Freude***. The other motets are exquisite but

these two are big pieces; big in conception, in length and very difficult. *Jesu, meine Freude* is written in five voice parts; Soprano I, Soprano II, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. It is in eleven sections, which consist of settings of the six

verses of Johann Franck's chorale alternating with settings of passages from Romans chapter 8. In the style of the time, the text of the chorale is very emotional, and may be thought of as sentimental today, but Bach's setting of these words demonstrate the religious emotion that he felt. The chorale begins with the author's passion for Christ, and then describes various tribulations that Christ protects him from, such as fiends, Satan and dragons. In similarly emotive language the author renounces things of the world, particularly his old life of sin, and in the last verse resolves not to concern himself with the worries of the world, because Jesus is his Joy.

In the passages from Romans 8 that alternate with the verses of the chorale, St. Paul is talking of the importance of living by the Spirit of Life instead of by the flesh. Bach uses these statements to comment on the verses of the chorale, and to contrast with the adjoining movements. For example, between verses 2 and 3 of the chorale (the third and fifth movements), which are about the powers of darkness and have suitably fiery music, Bach inserts the words "For the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death", which apart from showing the listener how to be free from sin and death, provides a contrast and respite from the adjoining verses. The words from the Bible lack the charged emotion of the chorale, and Bach uses this opportunity to write a superbly beautiful setting for female voices alone (the fourth movement *Denn das Gesetz*).

The whole work is grouped

symmetrically around the central movement *Ihr aber seid nicht fleischlich*; one of the most brilliantly written and compelling of all Bach's vocal movements. This verse builds in contrapuntal intensity and then fades into the tranquility of the final homophonic section, reminiscent of the longer quiet organ chorale preludes. The contrast of these two sections emphasises the words *Wer aber Christi Geist nicht hat, der ist nicht sein* (But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him), which Bach would have considered to be a fundamental aspect of his faith. Further symmetry can be seen in that the first and last pieces (the first and last verses of the chorale) use the same harmonisation, and the second and second last pieces are based on the same musical material. The whole motet achieves an altogether other worldliness, uniquely Bach's and uniquely expressive.

Josquin's last composition, *Missa Pange Lingua* is considered by many to be the finest of all Renaissance masses. Josquin composed the work between 1515 and 1520 at the height of his consummate powers. The *Pange Lingua* plainsong hymn is often lost in Josquin's complex polyphony as with J.S. Bach two centuries later Josquin transcends his contemporaries and brings existing forms to a final flowering. It has been said that this mass has the feeling of a Gothic cathedral: massive yet detailed; forthright and yet subtle. It has been a joy to learn and perform this sublime work.

The mass is closely based on the plainsong hymn *Pange Lingua*. This is most audible at the beginning of each movement, where the four-note motif which begins the hymn can be heard in all four voice parts at the beginning of the movement. The first example of this occurs at the very beginning of the mass where the first four notes sung by the tenors to the word *Kyrie* form this motif, which can be recognised throughout the mass. These notes can also be recognised in the third part of the *Agnus Dei*, where it was traditional for the composer of a mass to use special compositional techniques.

After the motif is imitated in all four voices, it is sung by the sopranos in much longer note values. The next phrase in the soprano is also mostly in long notes, and is a slightly decorated variation of the next phrase of the hymn. As new words are introduced, Josquin uses various melodies from the hymn. The music for the words *qui tollis* in the tenor and bass voices is based on the tune to the words *Corporis mysterium* of the hymn, and the first time the words *dona nobis pacem* are heard, the music is based on the section of the hymn *Quem in mundi pretium*. Although this all occurs at the very end of the mass, the whole mass is based on lines from the hymn, and Josquin's artistry was such that he was able to adapt the hymn to be the melodic material for the very different words of the mass without his use of this great unifying thread compromising his melodic or contrapuntal inventiveness.

The *Four motets for a time of penitence* see Poulenc at his most dissonant. The anguish of Christ's last days is expressed in jagged, almost objectionable harmonies, in long trance-like chords and in violent mood changes.

It is fascinating to contrast these anguished musical outpourings with the joyous calm of the few Christmas motets. The two sets of motets are a compositional object lesson; word painting at its very best.

The cycle opens with *Timor et tremor venerunt super me* (Fear and dread have come upon me), a prayer to God for mercy, in which the author puts his trust in God as his refuge. The words are reflected by dramatic contrasts in the music, for example the words mentioned above are sung *fortissimo*, while the next line *et caligo cecidit super me* (and darkness has invaded me) is sung suddenly *pianissimo* in low, sombre chords. Later the words *Exaudi Deus* (Listen, Lord) are sung *mezzo-forte* in dissonant chords followed by the words *deprecationem meam* (to my prayer) sung *piano* in consonant three-part chords marked to be sung very sweetly. Thus for Poulenc the cry of 'Listen, Lord' is heartfelt, but he refers to his own prayers more humbly. The climax of the piece follows with the words *quia refugium meum es tu* (for thou art my refuge), and ends calmly with the author feeling assured that he will not be confounded.

The texts of the other three motets are taken from the Catholic liturgy. The text of *Vinea mea electa* is from the point of view of Christ, who is lamenting being crucified by

the people he had ‘planted’ and cared for like a vine. The beautiful rich chords that open the motet depict the tenderness Christ feels for his people, and indeed the score is marked *Tendrement et mélancoliquement lent* (Tenderly and melancholically slow). In contrast the music for the words *et Barrabam dimiteres* ([Why did you crucify me and] let Barabbas go free?) is an anguished cry lamenting a broken relationship. The conflicting feelings that Christ has for his chosen people is depicted in the return of the tender feelings, but the motet ends with another anguished cry, the last time with the words *et Barrabam* repeated for greater emphasis.

The third motet was the first to be composed, and is the most dramatic of the four, being a musical setting of the last moments of Jesus on the cross, in an account derived from the Gospels. The words ***Tenebræ factæ sunt*** (Darkness fell) are sung in an ominous, dark setting by the altos and basses. The texture alternates dramatically between very loud and very quiet as the narrative reaches the anguished cry of *Deus meus, Deus meus, ut quid me dereliquisti?* (My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?), the most thrilling moment of the four motets, expressing Christ’s overwhelming loneliness.

The text of the last motet, ***Tristis est anima mea***, is said by Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, addressed to his disciples, whom he says are about to abandon him. The opening soprano solo is marked *Très calme* (very calm), which depicts the calmness of Christ despite knowing he is about to be

arrested and crucified, and abandoned by his disciples. The first time the words *et ego vadam immolari pro vobis* (and I will sacrifice myself for you) appear, the setting is fiery and vehement, but by the end of the motet, Christ is resigned to his fate, and the same words appear set beautifully in nine parts, marked *doucement en dehors* (outwardly calm), and the solo soprano part can be heard weaving in and out of the texture.

I heard the owl call my name was composed in 1989 by Philip Nunn (b. 1961). It derives its inspiration from Margaret Craven’s novel. Craven relates the story of a young Episcopalian priest who is terminally ill but unaware of it. His bishop, in full knowledge of the priest’s health, sends him to the most difficult parish in North West Canada. The book follows the day to day events in this Indian fishing village. The theme of integration of cultures is never far from the surface.

The local people have many traditional beliefs surrounding the time of death. One of these is the hearing of one’s name called by an owl as death approaches. The young priest has become so integrated with his people that when the appointed time comes, he hears the owl call his name. He dies, not of the disease, but like one of his people, in a logging accident, a frequent occurrence in the Cariboo at the time.

Philip Nunn’s music is not a direct telling of Margaret Craven’s story. It is more an evocation of the themes that she proposes;

particularly that of the integration of opposing forces. To this end, no words are used in the cycle. The vocal writing is regulated by the use of vowel sounds which change the harmonics produced by the human voice.

The opening section, ***Yes my Lord - No my Lord***, recalls the young priest being sent into the area by the bishop - his anger and confusion and final resignation. Throughout an ostinato A flat, sung by the sopranos, evokes the call of the owl in the wilderness.

The second section, ***The depth of sadness***, suggests the daily trudge of village life for the priest; the baptisms, weddings and funerals.

The third section ***Che-Kwa-La*** is a simple minuet. The depiction of this local village festival is combined with a veiled reference to a popular revival hymn, the combination of two religions in one celebration.

The fourth section, ***Come wolf - Come swimmer*** depicts the rushing waters and the storm before a logging accident. Guttural sounds are introduced with the use of bird calls. Themes from the beginning are heard, and then the call of the owl is heard for the last time. Three simple chords conclude the cycle. As the final F major chord fades into the distance, the forces of nature are symbolically restored by open fifths, sung by the bass voices.

The Choir of Ormond College, the University of Melbourne, was founded in 1982 by Douglas Lawrence. It made its first international tour in 1985. Since then the choir has toured every second year and this compact disc is the result of the most recent tour. These recordings were made towards the end of July 1993 in two churches in Denmark, St. Catherine's Church in Hjørring and St. Peter's Church in Næstved.

The music covers an enormous time span. Josquin wrote the *Missa Pange Lingua* in the closing years of his life in the 16th century. Philip Nunn wrote *I heard the owl call my name* in the late 20th century. The centuries are further spanned by J.S. Bach (18th) and Francis Poulenc (early 20th). For the 1993 tour the Josquin, Bach and Nunn were performed together on many occasions. This juxtaposition of very old and

very new music is a feature of this choir's programming; many times it has performed a new work and followed that with a Bach motet. It is a beautiful and fulfilling way to make music.

The Choir of Ormond College, photo below (from left to right):

Nicholas Howden (bass)
 Fincina Hopgood (alto)
 Anna Kelly (alto)
 Angus Campbell (bass)
 Fiona Furphy (alto)
 Kelvin Adams (tenor)
 Vaughan McAlley (tenor)
 Deirdre Dowling (soprano)
 Philip Bohun (bass)
 Alison Dunn (soprano)
 Zoë McCallum (soprano)
 Pennie Loane (alto)

Mike Reid (tenor)
 Gillian Weetch (soprano)
 Katherine Abrat (soprano)
 Lisa Leong (soprano)
 Carolyn Francis (soprano)
 David Iser (bass)
 Rachel Schlagecke (soprano)
 Adrian Phillips (bass)
 David Bennett (bass)
 Rosie Iser (soprano)
 Ross Collier (tenor)
 Nina Wellington (soprano)

15 *The pleni sunt caeli* (Sanctus) is sung by alto Fiona Furphy and soprano Deirdre Dowling.

16 The *Benedictus* is sung by baritone Adrian Phillips and tenor Ross Collier.

21 The soprano soloist in *Tristis est anima mea* is Alison Dunn.





The Choir of Ormond College, directed by Douglas Lawrence can also be heard on the following Move recordings:

BACH BYRD BRITTEN – Benjamin Britten's *A ceremony of carols* and *Five flower songs*, as well as William Byrd's *Mass for 4 voices* and JS Bach's *Lobet den herrn*.



On location digital recordings: Martin Wright (in sessions held during the final week of the tour, in Denmark, July 1993)

Musical director: Douglas Lawrence

Digital editing: Martin Wright assisted by Adrian Phillips

Program notes: Douglas Lawrence, Philip Nunn and Vaughan McAlley.

Front cover painting: Fred Williams "Hanging Rock" 1976. Copyright. Reproduced by permission.

Photographs: Philip Wischer
Photo on page 6: St Andrew's Scotland
Photo on page 7: Douglas Lawrence rehearsing in Japan



I CAN TELL THE WORLD – Madrigals and drinking songs, saucy rounds by Henry Purcell, English folk songs such as Vaughan Williams' *Greensleeves*, Percy Grainger arrangements *Brigg Fair*, and *Irish tune from County Derry*, beautiful interpretations of seven spirituals: *I can tell the world*, *Wade in the water*. Also *Ac-cent-tchu-ate the positive*, *Voices*, *Now is the month of Maying*, *Matona mia cara*.

WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS – A varied selection of 22 carols, plus organ interludes by Bach and Pachelbel. Recorded in St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne.

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