

TWO HATS OR ONE: THE CO-DEPENDENT WORLDS OF JONATHAN HARVEY'S CHURCH AND CONCERT MUSIC

Ed Hughes

Abstract: This article scrutinises the composer Jonathan Harvey's remark that 'most of my colleagues see me as wearing two hats: one a church music composer's, the other an avant-garde instrumental/electronic composer's. I wish I could say it was one hat. I think of all my music as sacred in a sense.' The article considers Harvey's church and concert works as linked worlds in order to propose a more holistic appreciation of his stylistic and technical innovations and that, far from being occasional pieces, his music for the church played an active role in the development of the composer's language, in part because singing was a formative experience for Harvey, and in part because collaborative work with choirs, church musicians and associated artists and thinkers was so frequently fertile. Based on the composer's own notes to the author, the article concludes with an account of the composition process involved in the creation of *Plainsongs for Peace and Light* (2012), a work for unaccompanied mixed choir or 16 solo voices, which the composer described as 'elaborations' of chant.

In November 1990, British composer Jonathan Harvey (1939–2012) wrote a reflective piece for *The Musical Times* in which he suggested that 'most of my colleagues see me as wearing two hats: one a church music composer's, the other an avant-garde instrumental/electronic composer's. I wish I could say it was one hat. I think of all my music as sacred in a sense.'¹

Harvey advocated a music for the church that would be as radical and intense in its impact as the most ambitious concert music, arguing that 'art and religion. . . both spiral out from the familiar' and offer 'a way to Enlightenment', but church music is often let down by 'purely practical' approaches that avoid art's necessary 'leap into the dark'.²

Harvey's remark about two hats has not been widely scrutinised, although Michael Downes commented perceptively that Harvey's

¹ Jonathan Harvey, 'An Approach to Church Music', *The Musical Times*, 131, no. 1763 (1990), p. 55.

² *Ibid.* pp. 52–3.

‘works for the Anglican Church are acts of musical and spiritual exploration, just as much as any of his other music’.³ It is interesting to ask in that case how the one world connects to and even serves the other. Might study of the church and concert works as linked worlds lead to an appreciation of how their interconnectedness fed developments in Harvey’s compositional processes? On the one hand, a sense that Harvey composed into separate traditions or ‘hats’ persists.⁴ Yet many of his non-choral compositions evidently connect to the ‘sacred’. Casual browsers of Harvey’s catalogue will easily detect a commitment to sacred themes in avant-garde concert and electronic-music settings, such as the electroacoustic piece *Mortuos Plango, Vivos Voco* (1980), *Bhakti* (1982), for mixed ensemble and electronics, and *Madonna of Winter and Spring* (1986), for orchestra and electronics, although *Bhakti*, like a large number of Harvey’s later works, invokes a non-Christian, Hindu religious tradition. Perhaps concert music gave freedom to explore wider ideas of spirituality and helped to expand Harvey’s inclusive concept of the sacred.

Such works synthesised the ‘structural depth’ of ‘high modernism’ (referring to the influence of Stockhausen’s ideas), with intuitive ‘worlds of light, colour and sound’.⁵ This synthesis of modernism with religious and mystical images may have facilitated new elements across many categories of Harvey’s musical language, including chant elaborations, a kind of non-tonal free use of triads and other musical methods. This article will suggest that, far from being satellite pieces, choral and ‘church’ works played an active role in the formation and development of the composer’s language, perhaps in part because their processes of composition, including collaborative ways of thinking, stimulated change and discoveries in musical methods.

Harvey’s interest in church settings was shaped by early experiences of collective music-making, in which he first felt the impulse to compose. He recalled his life as a chorister in several interviews, and tended to stress the significance of ‘rite’ (customary observance) in collective music-making, including in conversation with documentary filmmaker Barrie Gavin:

When I was eight my parents sent me to a choir school which I was too young to understand the importance of, the huge significance for me, but that was an enormous decision. At this choir school, St Michael’s College Tenbury, it was an institution devoted to church music. We sang to nobody, twice a day, in the morning and the evening and we rehearsed after lunch and in the evening, and we all learnt two instruments at least. . . There I started to compose. . . that was unforgettable; that was of course connected with worship. Everything revolved around the chapel, in this lovely Victorian chapel with its stained glass and the light streaming through those windows. And then we would sing this beautiful music, Byrd, Tallis and then the Italians, Lassus, Palestrina and so on.⁶

Here Harvey points towards an experience of music as integrated with and part of lived experience. Given that singing was at the core of his

³ Michael Downes, *Jonathan Harvey: Song Offerings and White as Jasmine* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 40.

⁴ Harvey ‘invariably managed to say something fresh and deeply personal, whether writing pieces still unmistakably rooted in the Anglican choral tradition, or exploring other faiths in works that made use of the latest technology’. Andrew Clements, ‘BBC Singers/Brabbins review’, *Guardian*, 26 September 2016, www.theguardian.com/music/2016/sep/26/bbc-singers-brabbins-review-jonathan-harvey (accessed 3 August 2022).

⁵ Arnold Whittall, *Jonathan Harvey* (London: Faber, 1999), pp. 8, 15.

⁶ Barrie Gavin, interview [video recording] with Jonathan Harvey, *Jonathan Harvey 70th Anniversary Box Set* (2009, Sargasso, ‘SDVD001’ [see <https://www.sargasso.com/product/jonathan-harvey-70th-anniversary-box-set/>]).

first steps in composition, it is reasonable to propose that choral works were crucibles for experimentation. The *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* (1978) demonstrate qualities of research in balance with sensitivity to tradition: the musical language is complex, yet the texts are carefully respected and articulated so that they will meet the needs of the rite. In turn the texts shape the musical structure of this diptych as two linked panels. Harmonic overlays separated by minor seconds and linear materials constructed from ascending minor thirds, leading to an emphasis on augmented fourth intervals, form a characteristic language challenging for any choir to sing. However, this is not musical modernism for its own sake: these settings of the canticles exhibit sonorities that are intimately tied to direct textual expression (for example, the haunting chord on 'blessed', the urgent rhythms of 'he hath scattered the proud' and the dramatic strict counterpoint between two high treble voices).

The *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* are brittle and angular, in a style rarely exploited by composers of traditional liturgical music.⁷ They are challenging but respond acutely to the text, securing a place for Harvey's works in Winchester Cathedral's services under Martin Neary well into the 1980s and, later, at St John's College, Cambridge. Here Harvey's church compositions, often originally commissioned by Neary, were revived in the 2010s by the college's then music director Andrew Nethsingha, who has written that 'in Harvey's *Magnificat* our ears are again opened to a new range of sonorities not usually heard in church'.⁸

Harvey produced choral works fairly regularly – about one a year throughout the 1980s – primarily through Winchester Cathedral's commissioning of anthems, including *O Jesu, Nomen Dulce* (1979) and *Come, Holy Ghost* (1984), which have since been recorded. Dominic Harvey, Jonathan's son, and a chorister at Winchester during this period, recently commented:

I think the first piece Dad wrote for Winchester was *The Dove Descending* [1976] (which sounded very different from the usual harmonies that we sang) for the new Bishop, John Taylor's, enthronement. Then came *I Love the Lord* I think, and then the *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis*. . . But Dad struck up a close friendship both with Bishop Taylor and Martin Neary after his first commission, which continued over the years. Dad and John collaborated on a TV piece with words from John and music from Dad later on in his life. I started at Winchester just after John Taylor's enthronement so I sang most of these pieces as premieres, including *Mortuos [Plango, Vivos Voco]* (1980) which was the last recording of my treble voice before it broke.⁹

Thus a sustained and collaborative relationship formed between the composer, Winchester Cathedral's then music director, Martin Neary, and clergy, including Bishop John V. Taylor. This dialogue, which *The Musical Times* article documents, led to productive explorations that connected related artefacts to Harvey's compositions, including Winchester Cathedral's tenor bell, psalm texts, the liturgical music of chants and, in the case of *Passion and Resurrection* (1981), the drama of a medieval passion play.

⁷ A possible comparison might be with Michael Tippett's *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis* (1962), recorded by St John's College Choir, Cambridge (2014, SignumClassics, SIGCD588) and before that by Queens College Choir, Cambridge, (2001, Guild, GMCD7213).

⁸ Andrew Nethsingha (2016) 'Time to Discover Jonathan Harvey's Choral Music', *Gramophone* online, 23 May 2016, www.gramophone.co.uk/blogs/article/time-to-discover-jonathan-harvey-s-choral-music (accessed 3 August 2022).

⁹ Email from Dominic Harvey to Ed Hughes 10 June 2022.

Harvey was Professor of Music at Sussex University from 1977 to 1993. In April 2010, he returned to Sussex to contribute to a research seminar series on Music and Collaboration.¹⁰ At this event, Harvey spoke at some length about *Passion and Resurrection*. Harvey began by remarking that collaborations ‘are often unsatisfactory; one personality swamps the other. Or they go in different directions and don’t add up to anything.’ But he then went on to speak with approval about ‘antithetical’ collaboration, in the context of a production (July to August 2009) of *Passion and Resurrection* by Paul Flieder, in Austria. Flieder’s insertion of a poem by Paul Celan, *Todesfuge*, at the end of the production, changed the meaning of the whole church opera to become ‘a statement about the victimisation of the repentant Judas. In a sense Judas became the principal character.’ Harvey highlighted his idea of antithetical collaboration in order to speak of circumstances in which collaboration can be productive, warning against the idea that good collaboration is easy. Here, the sense is of two visions clashing to produce a third and new meaning: not so much collaboration in the modern sense of distributed creativity, but rather in the recognition of what a new creative vision can bring to an earlier work so that it speaks more powerfully to changing values.

But although sceptical about certain kinds of collaboration,¹¹ it seems that the conversations and creative work at Winchester Cathedral enabled Harvey to balance his own vision with the necessity of co-developing the texts and concepts underpinning many of the works made there, including *Passion and Resurrection*. These conversations influenced the composer’s thinking about the social significance of music and its function in terms of the rite of the church. In Harvey’s *Musical Times* article, and in his church music of this period, one detects an aspiration for contemporary music to attain a kind of critical social belonging. One hears this in the sharply codified materials of *Passion and Resurrection*, in which characters and qualities are crystallised in musical style choices and even orchestrations; these have ramifications and echoes, too, in Harvey’s concert and electronic music.

Passion and Resurrection is a church opera in 12 scenes and provides examples of sharply delineated musical materials. In its large canvas, use of instruments and formal design it seamlessly connects church with stage music, while also being firmly integrated in the context of Christian rite and community. The church opera begins and ends in the rite of the mass itself, amplifying the text’s unflinching depiction of torture and crucifixion and its radical vision of resurrection, compelling the listener into an inherently dramatic nexus. Harvey’s work draws in the congregation as participants, who stand to sing interleaved commentaries in the form of ‘hymns’ – plainsongs which would become important in Harvey’s musical language, both

¹⁰ Jonathan Harvey, ‘Symmetrical Collaborations?’, University of Sussex Music Department seminar series Music and Collaboration, convened by Ed Hughes (2010), <http://musicand-collaboration.blogspot.com/2010/04/wed-21-april-2010-jonathan-harvey.html> (accessed 4 August 2022).

¹¹ Collaboration as a model of working has been identified by Laura Zattra as important to Harvey’s innovative and highly productive practice in electronic music, notably the tape and live research undertaken at IRCAM. Zattra focuses on Harvey’s collaborations with IRCAM computer-music designers and notes ‘the British composer is one of the few who always recognise, in statements, texts, articles or interview, the important role of the assistants’. Laura Zattra, ‘Symmetrical Collaborations. Jonathan Harvey and His Computer Music Designers’, *Nuove Musiche*, 4 (2018), pp. 29–57.

Example 1:

Jonathan Harvey, *Passion and Resurrection*: the trio of Marys. This and subsequent score examples © Faber Music Ltd; reproduced with their kind permission.

as recurring motifs and as sources for pitch collections capable of producing shimmering and non-functional harmony. Harvey has stated, 'There is a serial structure interwoven in the pentatonic plainchant.'¹²

The musical language is carefully defined according to dramatic needs and interwoven with technical innovation. Musical types are defined in terms of register, degree of chromaticism and 'brightness' ('the string harmonics are stuck on a spectrum; the more sacred the character the richer the spectrum'¹³). The three Marys sing in canonic, wide-ranging and expressive style (see Example 1). The angels have plainsong-like modal lines (see Example 2). The soldiers sing generally in an urgent, circumscribed and chromatic style (see Example 3). The characters are accompanied by halos of harmonics, more or less bright and complex according to their 'sanctity'. Core energies are conceived in terms of paired opposites – dark and light, male and female, and these are sounded in orchestrations of low brass/strings and high brass/strings. The closing, shocking dissonance in brass, percussion and organ, at 'dispersal', makes a powerful impact in contrast to the sensuous plainsong-based music elsewhere in the work, and anticipates the earthy scoring that memorably opens Harvey's later opera *Wagner Dream* (2006).¹⁴ As Elaine Gould notes, Harvey's deployment of distinctive and highly representational musical types enabled him to

¹² Harvey, 'Symmetrical Collaborations?'

¹³ Ibid. Elaine Gould, Jonathan Harvey's editor at Faber Music from 1987 until 2012, commented that the string harmonics confer a very particular, original and ritualistic identity on *Passion and Resurrection*. 'They arrest [the action] and make [the work] into a ritual unlike anything else in the output.' Conversation with Ed Hughes, 23 August 2022.

¹⁴ The meaning of this dissonance was given a powerful and new inflection by Flieder's production, here becoming a musical symbol of Judas' perceived victimisation. Harvey, 'Symmetrical Collaborations?'

Example 2:
Jonathan Harvey, *Passion and Resurrection: Angels*.

develop a language capable of sustaining improvisatory effects of plurality and simultaneity.¹⁵

Passion and Resurrection foregrounded dramatic qualities already implicit in the composer's language, reflecting, as Michael Downes has noted, the 'latently operatic qualities' which extend across many of Harvey's works.¹⁶ But, in Harvey's own account, this church opera also stimulated the discovery of a 'symmetrical' approach to harmony. Harvey commented that 'it took me a long time to find the resurrection music, because I wanted it to be a really new testament... The style I found, using the principle of symmetrical inversion around an axis, has remained my innermost mode of expression ever since. The music becomes bass-free, relieved of the earth-bound principle which has dominated it for four centuries. It floats.¹⁷ Thus innovation is led by socially situated and collaborative work. That this transformative technical discovery, a significant new compositional framework which would underpin Harvey's future work, arose out of dramatic need fits with his doctrine that the technical and technological must serve human aesthetic, social, spiritual, expressive and artistic needs, not the other way round. It is also apposite that Harvey's technical advance goes hand in hand with a musical structure governed by the earliest notated musical forms, plainsong: 'The audience... may participate in the singing of the plainsong hymns... upon which the musical fabric is based, thus emphasising the ritualistic rather than the conventionally operatic nature of the work'.¹⁸

¹⁵ [*Passion and Resurrection*] is so powerful in the way it uses contrasting musics: here is one thing happening, here is another; putting one music beside another and seeing what happens'. Elaine Gould, conversation with Ed Hughes, 23 August 2022.

¹⁶ Downes, *Jonathan Harvey*, p. 2.

¹⁷ Harvey, 'An Approach to Church Music', p. 53.

¹⁸ Jonathan Harvey, *Passion and Resurrection* (London: Faber Music Ltd, 1981), p. iv.

The image shows a page of a musical score. At the top, there are tempo markings: 'FASTER (3:2)' and 'SLOW'. The score is for a piece titled 'Passion and Resurrection: Soldiers' by Jonathan Harvey. The instrumentation includes Percussion 2, Soldiers (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass), Jesu (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass), Violins 4 and 5, Viola, and Cellos. The lyrics for the Soldiers are 'Je-sus tu Na-gue-ne, Alt-ful de-cei-ver.' and for the Jesu part, 'I am your god'. The score includes dynamic markings such as 'f', 'p', 'pp', and 'RHYTHMIC'. The time signature is 4/4.

Example 3:
Jonathan Harvey, *Passion and
Resurrection: Soldiers*.

A good example of the further resonance of plainsong in Harvey's work is *Come, Holy Ghost* (1984), commissioned for Winchester Cathedral Choir for the 1984 Southern Cathedrals Festival. Here, plainsong shapes the work's expressive and structural world, but not through mere arrangement or paraphrase: transformation of materials is evident from the beginning. An initial statement of the plainchant by Bass 1 is delicately transformed as lower-register singers catch individual notes and quietly sustain them, producing the pentachord implied by the chant's line: an effect not unlike the live electronic technique of freezing a chord via audio time-stretching without transposition (see [Example 4](#)). As Harvey notes, the sound of the plainchant is on the surface of this music, its rhythms deriving from natural stresses, which Harvey refers to as 'floating rhythms',¹⁹ thus extending the idea of floating music from the harmonic to the linear.

Change in Harvey's personal musical language now follows immersion in the contours and harmonic implications of early monody, a

¹⁹ Programme note by the composer, www.fabermusic.com/music/come-holy-ghost-1068 (accessed 28 July 2022).

Examples 4a and 4b:
Jonathan Harvey, *Come, Holy Ghost*,
opening pages.

different world from the astringency of *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* yet not simple diatonicism. Complexity comes from non-tonal effects of 'light' (as Harvey would say) expressed in diaphanous interplays of dyads, triads and more complex chords, produced by gradual layering of melodies at different transpositions, softly woven into novel choral textures. Striking also is the use of slowly shifting chords in the lower registers, floating free from a functional bass, which would become a signature sound in some contemplative textures found in choral and orchestral works of later years.

Slowly and ritually repeating chords feature even more prominently in the unaccompanied choral work of a decade later, *The Angels* (1994). The work is structured by a repeating diatonic two-chord pattern of almost Feldman-like concentration. The chords could be understood as an inverted D major triad and a G major triad, both with added 2nds and 6ths (implying a tonal relationship therefore). But because they float free of the bass line, the chords are not perceived as conventional tonal successions: indeed, they sound as though they are alternating stepwise. These hypnotic repetitions, hummed by Choir 2, produce a mesmerising effect of non-functional harmonic continuity. This is human choral sound, a *human* representation of eternity as shimmering harmony, outside time, made explicit in the anthem's words, by John V. Taylor, which imagine angels as intelligences 'old as sunrise', whose melody 'strides not from bar to bar, but, like a painting, hangs there entire, one chord of limitless communication'. The hypnotic and tranquil effect is made uncanny by chromatic motifs in Choir 1 which create

S. I

S. II

A. I

A. II

T. I

T. II

B. I
Thou the a - noin - ting... Spi - rit art, Who_ dost thy... sev'n-fold gifts... im-part.

B. II

Examples 4a and 4b:
Continued

an echo chamber through canon (see [Example 5](#)). This representation of timelessness is Ivesian in its humanness and in its counterpoint to 'noise', and again one senses a further development in musical discourse, in the crucible of a choral composition, this time motivated by an aesthetic response to a compelling poetic image.

The idea of hypnotic diatonicism, with associations of eternity, plays out on a large scale in the concert orchestral work *Tranquil Abiding*, composed in 1998. A two-chord pattern acquires the connotation of breathing, confirmed in Harvey's own words, 'a single slow breathing rhythm... consists of an "inhalation" on an upper note followed by an "exhalation" on a lower one'.²⁰ In terms of pitch-centricity, the stepwise movement is here between E flat and D flat sonorities, but again devoid of functional meaning, and voiced chorally. As in *The Angels*, faster moving melodic fragments contribute a higher, chromatic layer; their organisation in pitch collections defined by the Fibonacci sequence recalls the modernist structuring of *Bhakti* (1982), but the overriding aim here is to attain a clear, gradually

²⁰ Programme note in Jonathan Harvey, *Tranquil Abiding*, for orchestra (London: Faber Music Ltd, 2000), p. iv.

The image displays a musical score for a choral and piano work. The top section features vocal parts for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass, with lyrics: "Should you hear them / Should you hear them". The tempo is marked $\text{♩} = 69$ and the dynamic is *mp*. Below this is a piano accompaniment section for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass, with lyrics: "m(hum) er m er er". The piano part includes markings for *pp legato* and *p*. A section labeled "for rehearsal" follows, with lyrics: "sing - ing a-mong stars or whis - per-ing se - crets". The piano accompaniment continues with *mp* and *p* markings.

Example 5:
Jonathan Harvey, *The Angels*,
opening.

unfolding design. In *The Angels*, the two-chord pattern is interrupted by altered 7th chords on the words 'God' and 'holy'.

In *Tranquil Abiding*, the pattern is interrupted at bar 62 by an overwhelming chord on C, containing within itself simultaneously dissonant (minor 2nd, major 7th, 4th) and relatively consonant notes (3rd, minor 7th). It has the force of a spectral chord in that, though static, its internal elements seem to be alive; it seems to represent an intervention, a moment of insight or enlightenment in the context of meditation and time suspension; its rootedness creates a disturbance which ripples on through the musical texture until the calm, non-rooted, floating two-chord pattern is restored. *Messages* (2007), for choir and orchestra, also employs a floating two-chord pattern. An alternation of E flat and D flat chords, constant throughout *Messages*, brings the breathing, contemplative human subject of *Tranquil Abiding* into counterpoint with the invisible 'mobility of angelic beings', the names of Judaic and Persian angels, recalling the anthem *The Angels*. In this moment, Harvey's choral legacy is joined to his concert music.

ANGELIC REALM
Con moto ♩ = 120

S1
S2
A1
T2
B1
B2

Example 6:
Jonathan Harvey, *Marahi*, for
unaccompanied choir (composed in
1999, published in 2008), opening.

Another demonstration of the wildly contrasting, yet somehow serenely unified, nature of Harvey's choral output is *Marahi* (1999), for at least 24 voices, which, like *Messages* and a substantial number of his other choral works is definitely not intended for the church (see [Example 6](#)).²¹ In its level of difficulty, this is music clearly conceived for professional choirs²² and is a hymn of adoration to the 'Divine Feminine in the form of the Virgin Mary and the Buddhist Goddess Varahi'.²³ It is an example of a work emerging in a Harvey-esque space between church and concert hall, and offers fertile ground for professional secular choirs to explore. It is an extraordinary montage of different religious traditions. The choices around

²¹ These include *Ashes Dance Back* (1997), *Summer Cloud's Awakening* (2001), *Weltethos* (2009–11). I am grateful to Michael Downes for this point.

²² The Joyful Company of Singers, entirely a group of amateur singers, gave performances of *Marahi* in Norwich Cathedral and in Oxford in 1999, and at the Three Choirs Festival in 2000. The work was recorded by Latvian Radio Choir conducted by James Wood (2011, Hyperion, CDA67835).

²³ Programme note in Jonathan Harvey, *Marahi*, for unaccompanied choir (London: Faber Music Ltd, 2008), p. ii.

musical types are sharply delineated to produce explicit focus. The human world is represented through angular monody, performed gamut-like with fixed pitches and intervals in an intensified form of a style recalling the soldiers from *Passion and Resurrection*; the realm of animals is introduced with ululations, growls and whistles, the angelic realm evoked through non-functional triadic harmonies. Thus different and distinctive musical types circulate and evolve their identities across Harvey's work.

Spotify plays suggest that Harvey's simpler works, such as *Come, Holy Ghost* and *I love the Lord*, attract more listeners than the more complex, experimental choral compositions, but Harvey was not interested in generic diatonicism as a route to popularity. His music always explores time and musical form as complex and nuanced expression, by 'dissolving some of the clear classical formalities' and envisioning music as an artform whose purpose is to 'reveal the nature of suffering and to heal',²⁴ articulating this in terms of relatable, individual experience. But the works for Winchester Cathedral in the 1970s and 1980s forged an empathy for understanding and practising musical composition in context. Harvey was able to reflect on representations of the origins of music in the earliest materials, chant and bell, and through a host of collaborative contacts, including but not limited to the technological, he took decisive steps in the development of a broadly applicable non-functional floating harmonic language. 'Church' and 'concert' music became intimately connected, not separate categories.

In 2012 I was one of several composers²⁵ who assisted Jonathan Harvey in the period at the end of his life when he was affected by symptoms of motor neurone disease. Between April and September 2012 I worked with him at his house in Lewes, East Sussex, on what became his final work, the eight-minute *Plainsongs for Peace and Light* (2012), for an unaccompanied choir of 16 solo voices. We used a laptop, midi keyboard, a second screen and Sibelius software to enable Harvey to view the evolving notation and to compose by devising and signalling lines of development. Harvey did not live to hear the first performance but it has since been interpreted and recorded by leading European contemporary choirs.²⁶

Harvey oversaw the preparation of the score for publication. In the preface he referred to this work's compositional process as an 'elaboration' of 'plainsong hymns'. The choice of plainsongs recalls both the collective expression evoked in *Passion and Resurrection* and the compositional methods seen in that work and others, such as *Come, Holy Ghost*: that plainsong could be the source for many different kinds of elaboration – monodic, harmonic and polyphonic – and could govern an entire musical section or structure. In conversation, Harvey was clear that he was drawing on past experience of choral and vocal writing: 'the voice has the ability to re-enliven simple chords astonishingly... I know how well simple music sounds in voices.'²⁷ Elements of memory and experimentation collide in this final composition, a work which meditates on the history and practice of choral

²⁴ Whittall, *Jonathan Harvey*, pp. 15, 34.

²⁵ Others included the composer Edmund Finnis, who worked on *Cirrus Light* (2012) and *Fanfare* (2012) (duet for clarinet and trumpet) – confirmed by email, 1 August 2022.

²⁶ The first performance was given by the Latvian Radio Choir, directed by Kaspars Putniņš, on 13 March 2013. Recordings include *Les Métaboles*, directed by Léo Warynski (2021, NoMadMusic, NMM089), and *Ensemble Aedes*, directed by Mathieu Romano (2015, NoMadMusic, NMM019).

²⁷ Jonathan Harvey to Ed Hughes, meeting 30 April 2012, Lewes, East Sussex.

Table 1:
Methods of elaboration, set out by the composer during the composition process, in Jonathan Harvey's *Plainsongs for Peace and Light*

Simple	Complex
Following the character and natural speed of plainsong	Diatonic, but not rhythmically synchronised; the voices sing the same material at different speeds, blurring and producing resultant harmonies
Go into polyphony in a 'rather free' way	Moving from clarity to polyphony to diatonic chaos
Diatonic clusters through eight-note chords, formed around the major or harmonic minor scale	Developing 'filtered' clusters, to be experienced as pure colour
Melody in soprano and bass	From distinctness to indistinctness
Hummed chords 'filling in'	Blurring, reforming and blurring again

music and the significance of the singing voice in collective music-making, while resisting categorisation as either church or concert music.

'Elaboration' for Harvey, in practical terms, therefore, meant a kind of personal writing through and expansion of thousand-year-old notations. His aim was to imaginatively inhabit the pre-existing chants ('hymns') in a distinctive way. Through the use of techniques developed in previous work (variation, chromatic drift, prolongation, layering, canons and independent rhythm), and inspired by examples of monody, a new expressive world would unfold so that *Plainsongs for Peace and Light* could generate new choral textures out of primary material. The work would fuse the earliest surviving notated compositions for voice with Harvey's own methods, evolved over a long engagement with choral, vocal and instrumental ensembles.

We first met to discuss the project on 30 April 2012. Harvey knew what he wanted to achieve: a piece for 16 voices, lasting around five to ten minutes. It would be 'plainsong-like' and we would 'find a plainsong hymn in Latin as a basis'. He set out the methods to be used; these divided between simple and more complex methods of elaboration. I noted these comments at the time and they are documented in Table 1.

These methods reveal a sense of implied form and process that is governed by plainsongs yet shaped by an artistic sense linked to a kind of primordial narrative: from beginnings, to complexity, to chaos, to indistinctness and dispersal.

By drawing on techniques honed in works such as *Come Holy Ghost* and *The Angels*, Harvey was able to devise and articulate methods with impressive clarity in the pre-compositional stage. He used found/notated plainsong hymns to build complex polyphonic effects from 'simple' materials through elaboration of monody, and thus developed a contemporary musical and choral discourse out of some of music's earliest practices. But the process would still take several months, recalling his description of the composition process as a 'groping in the dark, sensing powerfully but incompletely what is to come'.²⁸

²⁸ Harvey, 'An Approach to Church Music', p. 52.

Composition process

Harvey selected three plainsong hymns for elaboration in this work. They mark important celebrations in the Christian calendar:

- Easter, Graduale II ad Missam in die
- Christmas, Alleluia II ad Missam in die
- Ordinary time week III, Alleluia VIII

The source was the *Liber Usualis*, which discloses through neumatic notation the 'Rules for the proper execution and interpretation of... Roman Chant'.²⁹ The three plainsong hymns provided a structure for the three phases of the composition and were transcribed into modern notation by the singer Andrew Robinson. Then Harvey and I held a series of meetings over the summer of 2012, typically 90 minutes in length. I would transcribe his ideas using computer-based notation, which he could see in real time via a screen. He would identify the main melodic idea for each section and indicate how it should be realised across the voices.

A priority throughout the process was to respect the ebb and flow of the chant by following its natural stresses as they aligned to significant syllables in the words. This led to a flexible rhythmic structure that initially defined the metrical rendering of the composition. Gradually, however, Harvey's musical vision dissolved bar lines, although the source material's ebb and flow remained in subtle counterpoint with Harvey's polyphonic elaborations.

We started by subdividing the Easter chant into modern bars according to the stress of the words, a process evident in the handwritten notes I made on the transcription shown in [Example 7](#).

Also noted on the transcription are the comments 'solo' and 'tutti'; these were early decisions by the composer and reflected his immediate sense that solo lines should alternate with tutti, and that these alternations would later be subject to further contrapuntal inventions, independent freedom and 'dissolves'. Comparing the published score (see [Example 8](#)) with these digital 'sketches' shows how the composer's aims developed through the composition process.

Differences in focus were obtained through the addition and withdrawal of singers sharing the opening monody. This was a gentle but very effective form of orchestration. Just as the rhythm ebbs and flows so does the timbre. Later, the lines split apart and became independent (see [Example 9](#)).

[Example 9](#) also shows how Harvey's spoken comments were captured using digital sticky notes attached to the score as we worked on it, enabling work to continue between the sessions. One note demonstrated how the composer's clear conception was communicated during the process:

first six notes as if everything is normal; then gradually go out of synch between four parts; on the seventh note the 2nd sop goes slower; on the eighth S3; ninth S4. Independently and slightly slower. Peter out one by one. Before S4 peters out, Altos should enter with next phrase. Altos will continue for a certain period then begin to dissolve themselves; the Sops will also join in with the Altos, pick up the line and then begin to dissolve; so there's an eight part dissolve of independent voices all based on the plainchant. At that point the men enter with very soft hummed chord

²⁹ Catholic Church, *Liber Usualis: with Introduction and Rubrics in English* (Tournai and New York: Desclée Company, 1961), p. vii.

Easter, Graduale II ad Missam in die

S solo octave higher

Example 7:

Easter, Graduale II, transcribed by Andrew Robinson, with Jonathan Harvey's spoken comments transcribed by Ed Hughes.

$\text{♩} = 152$

Example 8:

Jonathan Harvey, *Plainsongs for Peace and Light*, p. 1.

The introduction of low voices at bar 33 signalled a new section based on the second piece of chant, the Christmas Alleluia. This unfolds with a gorgeous diatonic layering. The chant continues in free canon (see [Example 10](#)) and at bar 52 the upper voices move in parallel with occasional chromatic twists (see [Example 11](#)).

Such moments demonstrated transition between simple tracing and complex elaboration, and a natural sense that these two methods overlap. But as the composition progresses, the layers produced novel

The image shows a screenshot of a musical score for 'Plainsongs for Peace and Light'. It features six staves: Soprano 1, Soprano 2, Soprano 3, Soprano 4, Alto 1, and Alto 2. The lyrics 'ni - am bo mus' are written below the Soprano staves. Performance markings include 'rit. a tempo' and 'Full Score'. Two text boxes provide performance instructions: one for Ed Hughes dated 20/07/2012 16:58 regarding dynamics, and another dated 05/07/2012 13:18 regarding phrasing and dynamics for the Soprano and Alto parts.

Example 9:

Jonathan Harvey, *Plainsongs for Peace and Light*, screenshot from early sketch of the score.

harmonies and timbral colours, and a third phase arose, which might be considered coexistence of musical types. This is confirmed in a note attached to the Sibelius score draft: 'The sops part is like another independent piece of music, conducted, played over the top of the canon' (see [Example 12](#)).

As the method moved into complex elaboration, using coexisting planes and fields of transformation, a sensory world of pure colour emerged, still built on the foundation of tracing the plainchant lines, and in the final section (commencing at bar 62) coexistence and fragmentation yielded simultaneous modes, pitch centres and chord clusters. The tenors and basses sing fragments of the Alleluia VIII. Pauses heralded imminent closure as the work moved towards its final sonorities and into silence. Overall, the composition moved from simple to complex elaboration and then back to an altered simplicity in which voices blurred, before joining together once again in unison (see [Example 13](#)).³⁰

By studying the score and digital sketches, Harvey's methods of elaboration can be perceived, but they are complicated by further processes of layering, simultaneity and dissolve that add to the work's special impact and mystery, the whole becoming more than the sum of its methods. In this piece, the composer created waves of memorable musical images by drawing together three disparate elements: the importance to vocal traditions of chant, the human and spiritual significance of unaccompanied group singing and the distinctive soundworld conferred by imaginative use of methods such as free rhythm and diatonic clusters. *Plainsongs for Peace and Light* collapses the distance between the early and the contemporary, transcends time and moves towards the immaterial.

³⁰ By August 2012 we had a draft. There were still questions about endings and beginnings which seemed important to the narrative and what the piece represents. On 31 August 2012 Harvey telephoned to say, 'in the final pages, where the women blur, I think keep in strict tempo and just compose some delays and prolongations to get a blur effect – four or five voices only'. On 3 September 2012 Harvey telephoned to say, 'number of openings are not for individual voices; more and more voices through each pause; the type of articulation should vary'. Ideas about blur, focus, flux and density were concerns right to the end of the composition process.

The musical score is arranged in a system with 16 staves. The top four staves are for Soprano (S1-S4), the next four for Alto (A1-A4), the next four for Tenor (T1-T4), and the bottom four for Bass (B1-B4). The vocal parts feature a melodic line with a fermata at the end of the phrase. The Bass parts have a more complex, multi-measure line with dynamic markings of *PPP* and *m*. A 'CUE' box is located above the Bass 1 staff. The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Example 10:
Jonathan Harvey, *Plainsongs for Peace
and Light*, p. 5.

I now see this work in the context of Jonathan Harvey's radically situated musical practice, which synthesised modernism with the broadly sacred. Developments in the concert work were supplemented by the deftly articulated critical and spiritual concerns of the church music. The two worlds are fused and co-dependent. *Plainsongs for Peace and Light* is a kind of coda to this, and still another step in exploring composition as elaboration, multi-part, neither church nor concert, in fact, existing curiously in its own realm. *Plainsongs for Peace and Light* speaks to collectivity, origins of music and the centrality of the singing voice in human cultural history, as well as the importance of these elements to Jonathan Harvey's aesthetic convictions. The non-functional diatonic harmonic clusters, arising from blurring of lines based on plainsongs and their melodic variants, align with the contemplative. The chromaticism, arising from the elaborations of the chant, creates complexity and aligns

52 *pp* *m* 52a 52b 52c 52d *p* 52e 52f

S¹ *pp* *m* *p*

S² *pp* *m* *p*

S³ *pp* *m* *p*

S⁴ *pp* *m* *p*

A¹ *pp* *m* *p*

A² *pp* *m* *p*

A³ *pp* *m* *p*

A⁴ *mp* (with T² and B¹) *m* *p*
 Sanc-ti-fi-ca-tus il-lu-xit no

T¹ *independently, free canon with T²*
 sanc-ti-fi-ca-tus il-lu-xit no

T² (with B¹) *independently, free canon with T²*
 sanc-ti-fi-ca-tus il-lu-xit no

T³ *independently, free canon with T²*
 sanc-ti-fi-ca-tus il-lu-xit no

T⁴ *independently, free canon with T²*
 sanc-ti-fi-ca-tus il-lu-xit no

B¹ *mp* (with T²) *m* *p*
 Sanc-ti-fi-ca-tus il-lu-xit no

B²

B³

B⁴

Example 11:
 Jonathan Harvey, *Plainsongs for Peace
 and Light*, p. 9.

Soprano 1

Soprano 2

Soprano 3

Soprano 4

Alto 1

Alto 2

Alto 3

Alto 4

Tenor 1

Tenor 2

Tenor 3

Tenor 4

Bass 1

Bass 2

Bass 3

Bass 4

Example 12:
 Jonathan Harvey, *Plainsongs for Peace
 and Light*, screenshot from early
 sketch of the score.

gradually regain Tempo 1

The musical score consists of several staves. The vocal parts are labeled S¹, S², S³, S⁴, A¹, A², A³, A⁴, T, and B. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf* and *ppp*, and articulation marks like *m*. There are also breath marks: **eh*, **ooi*, **ee*, and *ah*. The lyrics are: Al - le - le - lu - ia, _____.

Tenors unis. al fine

Basses unis. al fine

* Gradually open the mouth to the given vowel/diphthong, returning to closed mouth before the onset of the next chord.

Example 13:

Jonathan Harvey, *Plainsongs for Peace and Light*, p. 15.

with tension and striving in human experience. While easy resolution is as always resisted, the possibility of a kind of plural coexistence and healing are imagined in the work's closure: 'let the earth rejoice: let many islands be glad'.