

## SHINE FORTH

Formerly a member of the Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge and now one of the Holst Singers, Barnaby Martin has always found that writing choral music has come naturally, and *Shine Forth* was no exception. 'It constructed itself quite quickly – it was a rather neat process,' the composer says. The piece was written as an entry for two competitions: one run by the Choir of Merton College, Oxford, and the other by *Choir & Organ* magazine, which was asking composers to submit an advent piece. Martin decided to set two texts: the Antiphon for the first Sunday of Advent, and an extract of Christopher Harvey's *The Nativity*. It was the latter which formed the basis for the main choral texture, with the composer transposing or altering the Antiphon's plainchant to ensure it complemented the harmonies of the main choral parts.

The main choir initially accompanies a solo quartet as it presents the first verse of the Antiphon, before it is repeated over an overlapping texture. 'When I was singing in the Trinity College Choir with Stephen Layton, we did a lot of pieces by people like Ēriks Ešņvalds who use this overlapping texture, and I rather liked it,'



▲ Drawing on experience: Barnaby Martin

Martin explains. The choir then begins to sing the English text quietly, building towards the words 'shine forth', repeating it before dying away.

The sopranos then take up the plainchant, inverting it over lots of moving parts. The movement and polyphony builds, creating what Martin describes as an 'orchestral' texture, with the combination of rubato with semiquaver, quaver and triplet quaver movement creating a sense of fullness. 'The text at this point is "Draw near then, and freely poure / Forth all thy light" which is much more ecstatic, so I was looking for something a bit more detailed,' the composer remembers.

'Some parts double one another for maybe a bar, then they'll split off and return to each other, then do something else different. That goes on for three pages, then they all come back together. This independent movement seems quite disparate, but ecstatic.'

The singers begin to repeat 'his birth' to the same rhythm as 'shine forth', but with a slightly denser harmonic structure. The rhythmic idea continues, driving the piece towards its climax; at this point, the quartet reappears on top of the texture, concluding the composition with a complete telling of the Antiphon.

However, the piece concludes in D major, rather than in its home key of E major. 'It doesn't quite finish in a complete way, because it's an advent piece; you're looking forward to the birth of Christ, so the story isn't finished. It maybe doesn't feel exactly like the ending you're expecting; there's a sense of anticipation, of something more to come.'

### ► 16 DECEMBER

**Barnaby Martin** *Shine Forth* (Illuminare, Jeremy Cole, conductor, Holy Trinity Church, Sloane Square, London, 7.30pm)