

# Les Arts Florissants: Charpentier at Christmas

**Start time:** 7.30pm

**Approximate end time:** 9.30pm, including a 20-minute interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

## Programme

**Marc-Antoine Charpentier** *Antiennes 'O' de l'Avent*, H36–43  
and *Noëls pour les instruments*, H531 and 534

Noël 'Laissez paître vos bêtes'

Salut: O salutaris hostia

Noël 'O créateur'

Premier O: O Sapientia

Deuxième O: O Adonai

Noël 'Vous qui désirez sans fin'

Troisième O: O radix Jesse

Noël 'Les bourgeois de Châtre'

Quatrième O: O clavis David

Noël 'Où s'en vont ces gais bergers'

Cinquième O: O Oriens splendor

Noël 'Joseph est bien marié'

Sixième O: O rex gentium

Noël 'Or nous dites Marie'

Septième O: O Emmanuel

*Sur la Naissance de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ*,  
H482

1. Overture

2. Scene 1

3. Scene 2

*In nativitatem Domini Canticum*, H416

1. Prelude

2. Chorus of the Just

3. Night

4. The Shepherds' Awakening

5. Shepherds' Chorus

6. The Angel

7. Chorus of Angels

8. The Shepherd

9. The Shepherds' Journey

10. Chorus

11. Final Chorus

## Les Arts Florissants and William Christie offer a typically unorthodox helping of seasonal cheer.

Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643–1704) never held a position at the court of Louis XIV. Yet his prolific output – almost 500 religious works survive – and a mastery of pretty much all genres brought him considerable renown in Paris. He began his career in Italy, where he studied with Giacomo Carissimi (no documentation exists to support the claim that Charpentier came from a family of artists and initially went to Rome to study painting). Carissimi, who seems to have never left Italy during his lifetime, was appointed in 1656 by Christina of Sweden as her *maestro di cappella del concerto di camera*. Charpentier studied with him for three years, and among his extant autographs are copies of his teacher's *Jephthé*. The Frenchman soaked up all manner of Roman techniques, and we can trace the influence of Domenico Mazzocchi, Alessandro Stradella, Bonifatio Gratiani and Francesco Foggia on his compositional style, too.

According to the contemporary biographer Titon du Tillet, on Charpentier's return to Paris from Rome, he was given an apartment in the Hôtel de Guise by Marie de Lorraine. 'Mademoiselle de Guise' was an important figure in Parisian life, and Charpentier clearly won her favour. He seems to have served as her composer-in-residence and as a singer until shortly before her death in 1688. But enduring success was not guaranteed. His composition *Médée*, a tragic opera that premiered on 4 December 1693, though well received by some critics, can be considered a flop having only ran for some few months. Charpentier would devote the rest of his career to composing only religious music.

He composed his 10 *Noëls sur les instruments* in the 1690s. Scored for flutes, strings and continuo, they are instrumental versions of some of the most well-loved French traditional Christmas carols of the time. Three of these (H531) were apparently composed for performance along with his Christmastide motets, *In Nativitatem Domini canticum*; the remainder (H534) to accompany the so-called 'O' *Antiphons*. Some scholars have argued that the textures in the *Noëls* suggest that Charpentier was not composing for a small chamber ensemble, such as the one from his earlier years in the service of Mademoiselle de Guise, and that the contrast between tutti and solo passages, as well as the large organ suggest a much bigger orchestra. In his orchestration, Charpentier specifically indicates flutes which strongly evoke the pastoral.

barbican

The *Antiennes 'O' de l'Avent* ('O' antiphons for Advent) stem from a long liturgical tradition. While each antiphon was sung on a separate day in the week leading up to Christmas, they seem to have been conceived as a kind of whole. The textural contrasts between them are at the heart of their charm. There is a sumptuousness to the first three, which are scored for three male voices with basso continuo; the fourth and fifth are for four voices and four instrumental parts; in the sixth we glimpse a world beyond Paris with interjections from two solo violins that dance between sprightliness and luscious longing; the seventh, 'O Emmanuel', brings a semblance of symmetry to the collection with a return to the opening sonority.

The antiphons make an appeal to the coming of the saviour. Their rhetoric is characterised by a movement from expectation to impatient desire. Charpentier gloriously explores the invocation 'O' through suspension and melisma, these vowels of expectant mystery bloom and drift away like vapour. The 'veni' sections shift into more dance-like patterns which embody an eager expectation as well as gesture to the literal eschatological entrance – Jesus's feet will dance on earth. Each antiphon concludes in a mood of solemnity.

Charpentier set *In Nativitatem Domini Canticum* to music no fewer than four times; this one, H416, dates from 1690. He was clearly drawn to the text – three of the settings have almost identical words – and seemingly rejoiced in creating different combinations of soloists, chorus and instruments to evoke the narrative. The work also speaks of his teacher's influence, being an oratorio. As the musicologist Catherine Massip observes, in the 17th century the term *canticum* was used somewhat arbitrarily to designate both motet and oratorio. Here, an evangelist retells the Christmas story, while groups of singers represent angels and shepherds.

But perhaps it is Charpentier's powers of evocation that make the oratorio so special: he combines high art music with more folky, popular elements as a way of telling the story. His melodies are often cast in shapes that invoke French *Noëls*; rhythmically, many have their roots in pastoral dances. Charpentier takes us through the still of night-time in the fields, the sparkling awakening of the shepherds by the angels – flutes cast the scene in radiance as the heavens are opened – and an angel proclaiming the good news in dance-like Italianate profusion. Time then seems to move slower during the 'et in terra pax', a particularly neat trick that makes the ensuing 'Shepherds' journey' even more energetically joyous – an emotion that then transform into wide-eyed mystery at their first glimpse of the baby Jesus.

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## Performers

**William Christie** conductor  
**Emmanuelle de Negri** soprano  
**Julie Roset** soprano  
**Nicholas Scott** high tenor  
**Bastien Rimondi** tenor  
**Lisandro Abadie** bass-baritone

### Les Arts Florissants

violin I

**Tami Troman** solo violin (*Antiennes* and *Noël*)  
**Emmanuel Resche** solo violin  
**Augusta McKay Lodge**  
**Sophie de Bardonneche**

violin II

**Lucia Peralta**  
**Christophe Robert**

viola

**Simon Heyerick**  
**Samantha Montgomery**

cello

**Cyril Poulet \***  
**Elena Andreyev**  
**Magali Boyer**  
**Alix Verzier**

violone

**Hugo Abraham \***

recorder

**Sébastien Marq**  
**Tiam Goudarzi**

oboe

**Pier Luigi Fabretti**  
**Yanina Yacubsohn**

bassoon

**Evolène Kiener**

harpsichord/organ

**Béatrice Martin \***

\* basso continuo

soprano

**Maud Gnidzaz**  
**Cécile Granger**  
**Danaé Monnie**  
**Juliette Perret**  
**Virginie Thomas \*\***

high tenor

**Camillo Angarita**  
**François Olivier Jean \*\***  
**Vojtech Semerad**  
**Renaud Tripathi**

tenor

**Martin Candela \*\***  
**Edouard Hazebrouck**  
**Thibaut Lenaerts**  
**Michael Loughlin Smith**

bass

**Anicet Castel**  
**Laurent Collobert**  
**Jérémie Delvert**  
**Julien Neyer**  
**Matthieu Walendzik \*\***

\*\* soloist

choir director

**Thibaut Lenaerts**

répétiteurs

**Marouan Mankar-Bennis**  
**Natan Katz**

Produced by the Barbican

This performance is supported by Aline Foriel-Destezet, major donor of Les Arts Florissants.

## Antiennes 'O' de l'Avent, H36–43

### O salutaris:

O salutaris hostia quae caeli pandis ostium  
bella premunt hostilia da robur fer auxilium.

### Premier O: O Sapientia

O Sapientia quae ex ore altissimi produisti  
attingens a fine usque ad finem fortiter  
suaviterque disponens omnia veni ad  
docendum nos viam prudentiae.

### Deuxième O: O Adonai

O Adonai et dux domus Israel qui Moysi in  
igne flammae rubi apparuisti et ei in sina  
legem dedisti veni ad redimendum nos in  
brachio extento.

### Troisième O: O radix Jesse

O radix Jesse, qui stas in signum populorum  
super quem continebunt reges os suum quem  
gentes deprecabuntur veni ad liberandum nos  
jam noli tardare.

### Quatrième O: O clavis David

O clavis David, et sceptrum domus Israel;  
qui aperis, et nemo claudit ; claudis, et  
nemo aperit : veni, et educ vincitum de domo  
carceris, sedentem in tenebris, et umbra  
mortis.

### Cinquième O: O Oriens splendor

O Oriens, splendor lucis aeternae, et sol  
justitiae : veni, et illumina sedentes in tenebris,  
et umbra mortis.

### Sixième O: O rex gentium

O rex gentium, et desideratus earum, lapisque  
angularis, qui facis utraque unum : veni, et  
salva hominem, quem de limo formasti.

### Septième O: O Emmanuel

O Emmanuel, Rex et legifer noster, expectatio  
gentium, et salvator earum : veni ad  
salvandum nos, Domine, Deus noster.

O salutary Host, who opens the gates of  
Heaven, our foes afflict us with war, give us strength  
and help.

O Wisdom, proceeding from the mouth of the  
Most High, stretching from end to end,  
disposing all things in strength and sweetness:  
come and teach us the way of understanding.

O Adonai, Lord of the house of Israel, who  
appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning  
bush, and gave him the Laws on Mount Sinai:  
come and deliver us with your strong arm.

O root of the tree of Jesse, who stands as a  
sign to the nations, before whom Kings are  
silent, and whom the nations implore : come  
and deliver us, do not tarry.

O key of David, sceptre of the house of Israel,  
who opens and no one can close: come and  
break the bonds of those who lie captive in  
darkness and in the shadow of death.

O Star of the Morning, splendour of eternal  
light, and sun of righteousness : come and  
shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the  
shadow of death.

O King of all nations, their desire and the  
keystone that holds everything together:  
come and redeem mankind whom you fashioned  
out of clay.

O Emmanuel, our King and Legislator, Hope  
and Saviour of nations : come and save us,  
Lord our God.

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## Sur la Naissance de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ, H482

### Overture

### Scene 1

#### Silvie

Qu'il est charmant, qu'il a d'appâts!  
Est-il un coeur assez sauvage  
pour lui refuser son hommage?  
Qu'il est charmant, qu'il a d'appâts!  
Est-il un coeur assez sauvage  
pour ne l'aimer pas?

How sweet he is, how lovable!  
Could any heart be so hard  
as to refuse him its tribute?  
How sweet he is, how lovable!  
Could any heart be so hard  
as not to love him?

**Tircis**

Je te l'avouerai, sage bergère,  
je n'ai pu retenir mes pleurs  
de voir ce Seigneur des Seigneurs  
loger sous cette humble chaumière.  
Je te l'avouerai, sage bergère,  
je n'ai pu retenir mes pleurs  
de le voir souffrir tant de misère.

**Silvie**

Il n'a pas de quoi se couvrir,  
cependant, d'un oeil sec, sa mère le  
contemple.

**Duo**

Ah, son humilité nous donne cet exemple  
pour nous enseigner à souffrir.

**Tircis**

Mais que peux-tu penser de sa mère divine?

**Silvie**

On juge à son air gracieux et par le noble  
éclat  
qui brille dans ses yeux  
qu'elle est de royale origine.  
Mais toi, que penses-tu du vieillard, son  
époux?

**Tircis**

Il est ce qu'il nous dit,  
mais cette vierge mère,  
par un mystère nouveau pour nous,  
lui donne cet enfant sans qu'il en soit le père.

**Silvie**

Et Joseph n'en est point jaloux?

**Tircis**

Il est vrai que Marie enceinte,  
quand moins il s'en devait douter,  
lui fit méditer comment il quitterait  
une Épouse si sainte.  
Mais un Ange envoyé des cieux  
lui tint en songe ce langage :  
Garde-toi bien, Joseph,  
qu'un divorce odieux  
ne rompe les liens de ton saint mariage.  
Marie est mère et vierge  
et son fruit précieux  
est le parfait ouvrage  
du Dieu qui détruit les faux dieux.  
C'est le salut enfin de tout l'humain lignage.

**Duo**

Que ne devons-nous pas, Seigneur, à tes  
bontés?  
Tu quittes les voûtes célestes  
pour venir en ces lieux funestes  
te charger avec nous de nos infirmités.  
Que ne devons-nous pas, Seigneur, à tes  
bontés?

**Menuet**

I tell you, gentle shepherdess,  
I could not hold back my tears  
on seeing the Lord of Lords  
housed in that humble dwelling.  
I tell you, gentle shepherdess,  
I could not hold back my tears  
on seeing him endure such privation.

He has no covers to keep him warm,  
and yet his mother watches him without crying.

Ah, such humility is an example to us,  
teaching us how to endure sorrow.

But what do you think of his divine mother?

From her graceful air and the noble  
light  
that shines in her eyes  
you would think she was of royal birth.  
And you, what do you think of the old man,  
her husband?

He is what he seems,  
but, by some mystery unknown to us,  
this virgin mother has borne him  
a child although he is not the father.

And is Joseph not jealous?

It is true that once he suspected  
that Mary was pregnant  
he considered how to leave  
so virtuous a bride.  
But an angel sent from heaven  
appeared to him in a dream and said:  
'Hold back, Joseph,  
let not a hateful divorce  
break the bonds of your holy marriage.  
Mary is both mother and virgin,  
and her precious offspring  
is the perfect creation  
of the God who destroys false gods.  
He is the salvation of all mankind.'

Lord, what do we not owe to your  
goodness?  
You have left the vaults of heaven  
to come to this dark, drear place  
and help us bear our weaknesses.  
Lord, what do we not owe to your  
goodness?

## Scene 2

### Chorus

D'où venez-vous, bergers,  
tous deux de compagnie?  
D'où venez-vous au point du jour?  
À peine le soleil a commencé son tour  
que vous et vos moutons quittez la bergerie.

Ah, si vous ne craignez pour vous  
ni la faim, ni les dents des loups,  
craignez pour vos troupeaux leur cruelle furie.

### Duo

Pour nous, pour nos troupeaux, cesse toute  
frayeur.  
Nous n'appréhendons plus de fâcheuse  
aventure.  
Et vous-mêmes, je vous assure,  
quand vous saurez votre bonheur,  
vous serez comme nous, sans peur.

### Trio

Est-ce donc que des loups  
qui nous mettaient en crainte  
le ciel favorable a permis  
que la race cruelle aujourd'hui soit éteinte?  
Ou ces fiers animaux n'auraient-ils point  
appris  
à redouter nos craintives brebis?

### Silvie

Nous sommes les brebis fidèles  
du pasteur que nous attendons.  
Depuis longtemps nous demandons  
qu'il daigne nous montrer ses bontés  
paternelles.  
Ô miracle étonnant autant qu'il est nouveau,  
bonheur qui de bien loin surpasse notre  
espérance.  
Ce pasteur est venu,  
Jésus est au berceau.  
**(Duo)** Ce pasteur est venu,  
Jésus est au berceau.  
**(Silvie)** Poussez, heureux bergers,  
**(Duo)** Poussez à sa naissance  
Mille chants de réjouissance.

### Chorus

Le Messie est donc né!  
Ô nouvelle agréable!  
Ô jour mille fois fortuné!  
Quoi, le Verbe s'est incarné  
pour sauver les humains  
du malheur déplorable  
où le crime d'Adam,  
cet illustre coupable,  
avait tout le monde entraîné!  
Ô nouvelle agréable!  
Ô jour mille fois fortuné!  
Ô nouvelle agréable!  
Le Messie est donc né!  
Ô jour mille fois fortuné!

Whence do you come, shepherds,  
the two of you together?  
Whence do you come at break of day?  
The sun has barely begun its travels  
and you and your sheep are leaving the fold.

Ah, even if you do not fear the wolves'  
hunger and teeth for your own sake,  
beware their cruel fury for that of your flocks.

Whether for us or our flocks, all alarm is  
gone.  
We no longer dread any untoward  
event.  
And you too, I promise you,  
when you learn of your joy  
will be like us, free from fear.

Has favourable heaven then granted  
that the cruel race of wolves  
which has instilled such terror in us  
should be destroyed?  
Or could it be that these fierce beasts  
have learned to fear our timid sheep?

We are the faithful flocks  
of the shepherd for whom we have waited.  
We have long been asking him  
to show us his paternal kindness.

O miracle as astonishing as it is new,  
o joy that so greatly surpasses our  
hope.  
That shepherd has come,  
Jesus lies now in a crib.  
That shepherd has come,  
Jesus lies now in a crib.  
Sing aloud, merry shepherds,  
Sing aloud a thousand songs  
in praise of his birth.

So the Messiah is born!  
What wonderful tidings!  
O day of a thousand blessings!  
The Word is made flesh  
to redeem mankind  
from the wretched misery  
into which the crime of Adam,  
that legendary sinner,  
had dragged all men on earth!  
What wonderful tidings!  
O day of a thousand blessings!  
What wonderful tidings!  
So the Messiah is born!  
O day of a thousand blessings!

## Solo/Chorus

### Sarabande

Heureux bergers, reprenez vos musettes,  
que la douleur avait rendu muettes  
et répandez dans le vague des airs  
le bruit charmant de vos joyeux concerts.  
Plus de tristesse, plus de soupirs,  
un dieu naissant dans ce jour d'allégresse  
ne doit-il pas suffire à vos désirs?

### Sarabande

Du Tout-Puissant célébrez les louanges,  
et de concert avec les chœurs des Anges,  
poussez vos chants en l'honneur de son Fils  
jusqu'au séjour des bienheureux esprits.  
Plus de tristesse, etc.

### Sarabande

Merry shepherds, take up the pipes  
that sorrow had rendered mute,  
and fill the night air with  
the sweet sound of your joyful music.  
No more sadness, no more sighs,  
is the birth of a God on this happy day  
not enough to satisfy your desires?

Praise and celebrate the Almighty Lord,  
and in harmony with the choirs of angels  
lift up your songs in honour of his Son  
to the realm of the blessed spirits.  
No more sadness, etc.

Translation © Susannah Howe

## In Nativitatem Domini Canticum, H416

### Prelude

### Recitative

Usquequo avertis faciem tuam Domine,  
et oblivisceris tribulationis nostrae.

How long will you turn your face from us, O Lord,  
and ignore our distress?

### Chorus of the Just

Memorare testamenti tui quod locutus es,  
veni de excelso et libera nos.

Remember the promise you made,  
come from heaven and save us.

### Recitative

Consolare, filia Sion, quare moerore  
consumeris.

Veniet ecce rex tibi mansuetus,  
plorans nequaquam plorabis,  
et tacebit pupilla oculi tui.

In illa die stillabunt montes dulcedinem,  
et colles fluent lac et mel.

Consolare, confortare, filia Sion,  
et sustine Deum salvatorem tuum

Be consoled, daughter of Zion, who are  
consumed with mourning.  
Behold, your gentle king will come to you,  
beseeching you not to plead,  
and the pupil of your eyes will be still;  
one day the mountains will distil sweetness  
and the hills will flow with milk and honey.  
Be comforted, be consoled, daughter of Zion,  
and uphold God, your salvation.

### Chorus

Utinam dirumperes coelos,  
Redemptor noster, et descenderes?

Open up the heavens,  
our redeemer, and come down.

### Recitative

Prope est ut veniat Dominus,  
veniet et non mentietur,  
juxta est salus Domini.

Qui venturus est modo veniet,  
qui mittendus est veniet modo,  
veniet et non tardabit:

The time is near when the Lord should come,  
he will come and not deceive us,  
the redemption of the Lord is nigh.  
He will come in the way he will come  
and must be sent in the way he will come,  
he will come and will not delay.

### Chorus

Rorate coeli de super,  
et nubes pluant justum.  
Aperiatur terra et germinet Salvatorem.

Rain down, you heavens, from above,  
and the clouds will rain the just one.  
The earth shall be opened and a saviour will grow  
forth.

## Night

### The Shepherds' Awakening

#### Shepherds' Chorus

Coeli aperti sunt,  
lux magna orta est,  
lux magna, lux terribilis.

The heavens were opened,  
a great light arose,  
a great light, a terrible light.

#### Recitative

#### The Angel

Nolite timere pastores.  
Ecce enim annuntio vobis  
gaudium magnum quod erit omni populo,  
quia natus est vobis hodie Salvator Christus  
Dominus, in civitate David;  
et hoc erit vobis signum:  
Invenietis infantem pannis involutum,  
et positum in proesepio.  
Surgite, ergo ite, ite, properate,  
et adorete Dominum.  
Vos autem Angeli, cantate mecum Domino  
canticum novum, quia mirabilia fecit super  
terram.

Fear not, shepherds,  
behold: I announce to you  
great joy which will be for all the people,  
for a saviour is born for you today, the anointed  
one, the Lord, in the city of David;  
and this shall be a sign for you:  
you shall find a baby wrapped in swaddling bands  
and laid in a manger,  
So get up, go, go, hurry  
and adore the Lord.  
But you too, angels, sing with me to the Lord,  
a new song, for he is doing marvels on the  
earth.

#### Chorus of Angels

Gloria in altissimis Deo. Et in terra pax  
hominibus bonae voluntatis.

Glory to God in the highest  
and on earth peace to men of good will.

#### Recitative

#### Shepherd

Transeamus usque Bethleem,  
et videamus hoc verbum quod factum est,  
quod Dominus ostendit nobis.

Let us go to Bethlehem  
and see this word made flesh  
that the Lord will show us

### The Shepherds' Journey

#### Chorus

O infans, o Deus, o salvator noster,  
Sic eges, sic clamas,  
sic friges, sic amas.  
Pastores undique certent concentibus,

O child, O God, our saviour,  
how poor you are, how you cry,  
how cold you are, how loving.  
The shepherds vie with each other in making music.

Pastorum hodie natus est Dominus.  
Certent muneribus,  
certent amoribus,  
Palmas victori legere.  
Agni cum matribus caulis prorumpite,  
Aqua de fontibus agros perfundite,  
Aves in vallibus concordent cantibus,  
Silvae, lac et mel facite.

The shepherds' Lord is born today.  
They contend with gifts,  
they contend with love,  
in bringing palms to the victor.  
Lambs, leave your folds with your mothers;  
waters, flood out from springs on fields,  
let birds in the valleys join in the singing,  
woods, make milk and honey.

#### Final Chorus

Exultemus, jubilemus  
Deo salutari nostro.  
Justitia regnabit in terra nostra  
et pacis non erit finis.

Let us exult, let us rejoice  
in God our saviour.  
Justice shall reign in our land  
and of peace there will be no end.

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