

# Composer's note

*The Night Before Christmas* was written for Lancaster Priory's Christmas Concert in 2021 and is suitable for church or concert performance. The work sets the poem *A Visit from St Nicholas*, attributed to Clement Clarke Moore, which was first published in 1823 and is often known as *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*. The poem remains one of the most enduring Christmas texts in the English-speaking world and has helped to shape the now-familiar image of St Nicholas.

This setting aims to capture the magic of Moore's poem and at times has a distinctly quirky character. The vocal lines, however, are generally straightforward. In rehearsal it is often helpful to establish overall rhythmic security before focussing on the individual lines. Parts are frequently paired (soprano with tenor, alto with bass), lending strength and confidence to the texture.

A recurring jaunty and characterful theme, featuring a descending chromatic line, unifies the work and reflects the story's sense of anticipation and excitement on Christmas Eve. The poem is interwoven with well-known carols, both sacred and secular: 'Silent night', 'Good King Wenceslas', 'God rest ye merry, gentlemen', 'On Christmas night' (Sussex Carol), and 'We wish you a merry Christmas'. These may be performed by choir alone or with audience or congregational participation for a more festive feel. The section beginning 'His eyes, how they twinkled!' (rehearsal letter V) was originally written for a children's choir, but may equally effectively be sung by sopranos.

Above all, it should be a joy to perform and to hear. Performances should be lively and characterful, with singers bringing the words fully to life and shaping the shifting moods of the story as it unfolds.

Duration: 20 minutes

This note may be reproduced as required for programme notes.

## Instrumentation

The accompaniment to this work exists in two versions:

### 1. For small orchestra

flute (doubling piccolo)  
oboe  
clarinet in B $\flat$   
bassoon  
horn in F  
trumpet in B $\flat$   
timpani  
percussion (2 players)  
harp  
piano  
strings

### 2. For chamber ensemble

flute (doubling piccolo)  
oboe  
clarinet in B $\flat$   
bassoon  
horn in F  
timpani  
percussion (2 players)  
harp  
piano

Full scores and instrumental parts are available on hire/rental.

If required, the work may also be accompanied by piano, playing from the vocal score.

for Don Gillthorpe and Lancaster Priory

# The Night Before Christmas

attrib. Clement Clarke Moore (1779–1863)  
adap. Oliver Tarney

OLIVER TARNEY

Magically ♩ = 66

SOPRANO  
ALTO

TENOR  
BASS

Magically ♩ = 66

PIANO

*pp*

*con Ped.*

5

9

13

*mp*

17

S. A. *f magically*

'Twas the

T. B. *f magically*

*mf*

20 **A**

night be - fore Christ - mas, when all through the house

**A**

*f*

23

Not a crea - ture was stir - ring, not e - ven a mouse;

ossia\*  
*mf furtively*

26

*mf legato*  
The stock-ings were hung by the  
*mf legato*  
*mp*  
*mp*

\* Ossia staves in the piano give alternative right-hand passages.

29

chim - ney with care, In hopes that St Ni - cho - las soon would be there.

32

'Twas the night be - fore Christ - mas, when

35

all through the house Not a crea - ture was stir - ring, not

94

Musical score for measures 94-97. The score consists of three systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a circled '8' indicating an octave and a pedal marking '(Ped.)'. The second system continues the piano accompaniment with a long slur. The third system shows the final notes of the piece.

**E**

98

*pp*

Musical score for measures 98-101. The score consists of two systems. The first system shows the vocal line with lyrics: "\*Si - lent night, ho - ly night,". The piano part includes a circled '8' and a 'Ped.' marking. The second system continues the piano accompaniment.

**E**

*pp*

Musical score for measures 102-105. The score consists of two systems. The first system shows the piano accompaniment with a circled '8' and a 'Ped.' marking. The second system continues the piano accompaniment.

\* Melody by Franz Gruber (1787–1863); text by Josef Mohr (1792–1848), trans. John F. Young

† small notes optional

102

All is calm, all is bright;

This system contains measures 102 through 105. It features a vocal line with lyrics and a piano accompaniment. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line consists of four measures of music, with lyrics 'All is calm, all is bright;'. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) with chords and single notes.

106

Round yon virgin mother and child.

This system contains measures 106 through 109. It features a vocal line with lyrics and a piano accompaniment. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line consists of four measures of music, with lyrics 'Round yon virgin mother and child.'. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) with chords and single notes.

110

Ho - ly in - fant so ten - der and mild,

This system contains measures 110 through 113. It features a vocal line with lyrics and a piano accompaniment. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line consists of four measures of music, with lyrics 'Ho - ly in - fant so ten - der and mild,'. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) with chords and single notes.

179

**H**

184 *mf*

S. *mf*  
A.  
\* Good King Wen - ces - las looked out \_\_\_ On the \_\_\_ feast \_\_\_ of Ste - phen,

T. *mf*  
B.

**H**

*mf*

188

When the snow lay round a - bout, \_\_\_ Deep, and \_\_\_ crisp, \_\_\_ and e - ven:

\* Melody from *Piae Cantiones* (1582); text by J. M. Neale (1818-66)

192

Bright - ly shone the moon that night, Though the frost\_ was cru - el, \_

196

When\_ a poor man came\_ in\_ sight, Ga - th'ring win - ter fu - -

200

-el.

**L** Excitedly

280

*mf*

More ra - pid than ea - gles his cours - ers they came, He

*mf*

**L** Excitedly

*mf*

**poco accel.**

283

whis - tled, and shout - ed, and called them by name: \_\_\_\_\_ 'Now,

whis - tled, and shout - ed, and called them by name: \_\_\_\_\_

'Now,

**poco accel.**

286 **Assertively** ♩. = 63 *poco* *mf*

Dash - er! now, Danc - er! now, Pranc - er and Vix - en! On,

**Assertively** ♩. = 63

289 *poco* *mf*

Co - met! on, Cu - pid! on, Don - ner and Blitz - en! To the

*poco* *mf*

accel.

292

top of the porch! to the top of the wall! Now dash a - way all,

*f*

accel.

*f*

295

dash a - way all, dash a - way, dash a - way, dash a - way all? \_\_\_\_\_

*ff*

*ff*

\* small notes optional

317

S. A. *f* **N**

\*God rest ye mer - ry, gen - tle - men, Let

T. B. *f* **N**

321

no - thing you dis - may, For — Je - sus Christ our Sa - viour Was

325

born on Christ - mas Day, To save us all from Sa - tan's power When

329

we were gone a - stray: O ti - dings of com - fort and

333

joy, com - fort and joy, O ti - dings of com - fort and

337 **accel.**

joy. From

*unis. mf*

*mf*

**Q** Anxiously ♩ = 76

390

*f dim.*

*chiming*

392

*rall.*

Relaxed and heart-warming ♩ = 60

394

*pp legato*

*con Ped.*

397

S. *p* *sweetly*

As

T. *p* *sweetly*

400

leaves be - fore the hur - ri - cane, as leaves, they

*p* *sweetly*

403

fly, When they meet with an ob - sta - cle,

*mp*

*mp*

406

mount to the sky,

*mf* *warmly*

S. A. As

T. B. *mf* *warmly*

**W** With excitement ♩. = 58

553 *mf*

S. A. He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,

T. B. *mf*

**W** With excitement ♩. = 58

*mf*

556

And filled all the stock - ings; then turned with a jerk,

559

And lay - ing his fin - ger a - side of his nose, And

**molto rall.**

562

giv - ing a nod, up the chim - ney he rose.

**molto rall.**

**X** Measured and calm ♩ = 152

566

*mf* \*We wish you a mer - ry Christ - mas, we wish you a mer - ry  
Ding, dong, ding,

*mf* \*We wish you a mer - ry Christ - mas, we wish you a mer - ry  
Ding, dong, ding,

**X** Measured and calm ♩ = 152

570 Christ - mas, We wish you a mer - ry Christ - mas

dong, ding, dong, and a hap - py New Year. Good

Christ - mas, ding, dong,

dong, ding, dong,

575

ti - dings we bring to you and your kin; We wish you a mer - ry

580

Christ - mas and a hap - py New Year.