

SOMMCD 0166

JOHN JOUBERT (b.1927) South of the Line

Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir Paul Spicer *director*

Nicholas Wearne *organ**, Matthew Firkins *timpani*** Harry Bent, Stephen Plummer, Miriam Kitchener, George Kirkham *percussion*** Domonkos Csabay, György Hodzso *pianos***

First recordings 1st Rec

1 O Praise God in His Holiness, 0p. 52* 1:48		III Be not Afeard, Op. 179 1st Rec	5:02
② O Lorde, the Maker of Al Thing*	4:14	(soprano soloist: Alexis Cooling)	
3 There is no Rose	2:43	Sonnet, Op. 123 ^{1st Rec} (soloists: Alexis Cooling, Ania Szypula,	7:13
Incantation 1st Rec	[8:26]	Robert Tilson, Andrew Randall)	
4 I Chorus 5 II Solo	2:56 2:23	13 This is the Gate of the Lord, Op. 164 1st Rec	3:09
(soprano soloist: Katherine Liggins) 6 III Chorus	3:05	4 Autumn Rain, Op. 105 1st Rec (Domonkos Csabay, piano)	4:45
7 Pilgrimage Song, Op. 169 1st Rec (baritone soloist: Andrew Randall)	6:49	South of the Line, Op. 109 ** 15 1. Embarcation	[26:15] 5:07
Three Portraits, Op. 97 1st Rec B To Mistress Isabel Pennell To Mistress Margery Wentworth To Mistress Margaret Hussey (soprano soloist: Chloe Salvidge)	[8:54] 3:36 3:25 1:53	 2. A Wife in London (soloist: Chloe Salvidge) 3. Drummer Hodge 4. The Man He Killed (soloist: Timothy Emberson) 5. A Christmas Ghost Story 	5:47 6:05 2:22 6:52
()		Total duration:	79.30

Recorded at St Alban the Martyr, Highgate, Birmingham, 28 June 2016,

14 - 19 at the Adrian Boult Hall, Birmingham Conservatoire, 27 June 2016

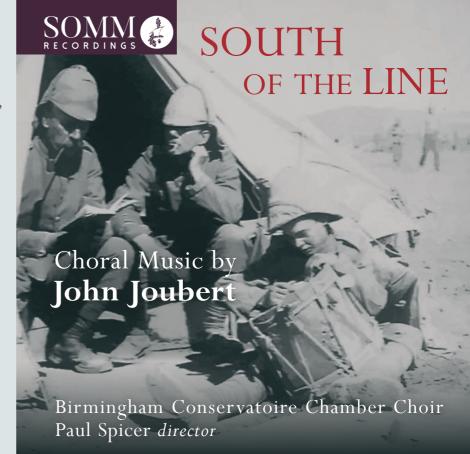
Recording Producer: Siva Oke Recording Engineer: Paul Arden-Taylor

Front Cover: after photograph: Drummer Boy, Boer War Design: Andrew Giles





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Choirs are at the heart of the John Joubert's music. He is, of course, a prolific composer whose operas, orchestral works, chamber music, and songs have earned him a place of considerable respect in British music (as has teaching generations of composers). Yet it is by his choral music that he is best known – a medium through which he seems to communicate most directly with audiences.

This does not diminish his other achievements; the heart of a body of works is only one part. But the question lingers: What gives his choral music its particular endurance and power? Its strength must come in part from the special place it holds in his life and career. Joubert received some of his earliest premières from the choir at the Anglican Diocesan College Rondebosch in Cape Town. After training at the Royal Academy of Music and Durham University in the UK, he began his career teaching at the University of Hull, where his earliest important works were for choir. *O Lorde, the Maker of Al Thing* (1952) won the Novello Anthem competition, and reveals Joubert's fondness for texts that are as evocative as they are obscure (the poem is by Henry VIII). The music's implacable swell to a stirring climax also powerfully announces the composer's intention to write music that speaks directly to the listener. Even more than its personal importance to Joubert, this ability to connect with audiences would come to set his choral music apart.

Appearing soon after *O Lorde the Maker of al Thing* is the lullaby-like *There is no Rose* (1954), another work with a firm place in the English choral repertoire, and another setting of an ancient text. These two works show the strong influence of Benjamin Britten, and external influences upon Joubert have been frequently commented upon. Roderic Dunnett, for instance, writes that Joubert 'was perhaps one of the earliest composers to soak in and capitalise upon Britten's example'. But Ernest Bradbury and Andrew Burn clarify that, though both Walton and Britten are evident in Joubert's style, his idiom remains his own. Perhaps

Joubert's strongest tie to Britten is not in technique or idiom, but in the near-operatic drama presented by the voices. The strange, stringent intensity of the text setting in *Incantation* (1956) both exposes this quality, and hints at its centrality to later works. The powerful musical language ideally supports poet W.B. Yeats's dense web of Dionysian and Christian symbolism.

Soon after his 1967 appointment at the University of Birmingham, Joubert produced O Praise God in His Holiness (1967), a short Psalm 150 setting revealing a knack for jaunty angularity. The Three Portraits (1983) further explore this mixture of the charming and the off-kilter, of diatonic directness and chromatic, contrapuntal cunning, in a way perfectly suited to the quirks of Tudor poet John Skelton's lively encomiums. The dense, archaic language of the texts is brought to life with madrigalian writing that smooths the convoluted rhetoric without softening Skelton's wit and verbal grace. (The 'Portraits' are dedicated to his daughter, his wife, and his late sister, respectively.) A commission for the Cantamus girls' choir, **Autumn Rain**, followed two years later in 1985. This setting of D.H. Lawrence's poem written in 1916, commissioned to recognise the poet's centenary, harks back to the lilting simplicity of *There is no Rose*, and seems to have something of the madrigalian character of the Three Portraits. But the austere octaves of *Incantation* resurface near the end where the poet refers to 'the sheaves of dead men that are slain now winnowed soft on the floor of heav'n', and powerfully point the way towards one of Joubert's most extraordinary pieces, South of the Line (1985).

An unabashed anti-war statement in equal parts grief and scathing irony, *South of the Line* pits choir against a battery of percussion – even the two pianos are essentially treated as drums. The evocative text setting perfected in works like the *Three Portraits* and the devastating musical imagery of *Incantation* are deployed

to capture these altogether less coy, abstruse texts. It is no wonder these poems, Thomas Hardy's responses to the Boer War, evoked such compelling music from a South African-English composer. The work has significance to Birmingham Conservatoire also: it was commissioned for the opening of the Adrian Boult Hall, and was the last music heard there, for this recording, before its demolition.

The first movement, *Embarcation*, presents a march in which clear, diatonic ostinatos are marred by acerbic dissonances; the choir reaches its height with mention of wives, sisters, parents who join in the grotesque march, waving away their doomed soldiers. The ensemble's unrelenting hammering only ceases for a brief, clear-eyed a cappella passage ('As if they knew not that they weep the while'). A wife is personified in the next movement, *A Wife in London*, by solo soprano and piano. Both this and the penultimate movement, *The Man He Killed* for baritone and piano (another heartbreaking personification) are more aria than song. The first movement's march is reduced, in the middle movement, to an errant timpani heartbeat under funereal chorales mourning the unceremonious, unsung departure of *Drummer Hodge* (the pianos are suitably silent in this movement). The final movement, *A Christmas Ghost-Story*, climbs and recedes several times before reaching a cataclysmic setting of words with a brutal, devastating message.

South of the Line is allied to Britten's War Requiem in both idiom and ethos. More importantly, though, it exposes again the most meaningful kinship between Joubert and his forebears: even in concert works, voices are used in a fundamentally dramatic way. This holds true in one of his last works of the decade, the Algernon Charles Swinburne setting **Sonnet** (1989) (of which the Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir has given the only performances since its premiere under Stephen Wilkinson whose 70th birthday the work celebrated).

The consecutive, 'planed' triads evoke Vaughan Williams or Holst, but it is through the focus on drama – harmonic decadence, angular vocal lines, expressive text setting – that musical influences are refashioned into his own voice.

That voice has remained strong into the 21st century. Several major choral works have been written for important occasions, including *An English Requiem*, for the 2010 Three Choirs Festival, and the *St Mark Passion*, commissioned by Wells Cathedral and premiered in March 2016. *This is the Gate of the Lord* (2007) is of both a time and a place, commissioned for the reopening of Birmingham Town Hall, where so many important choral premières have occurred. Another later work seems to pursue this sense of attachment to place: *Pilgrimage Song* (2010) juxtaposes St Cuthbert's voice (solo baritone) and the voices of pilgrims to his shrine at Durham Cathedral (the choir). The most recent work offered here, *Be not Afeard* (2015), is, of course, about a more fantastic place, the isle described by Caliban in *The Tempest*. Honouring the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, this commission for Novello (the source of the 1952 anthem prize) deploys a rich harmonic arsenal to draw us into a lush sound world.

Joubert once commented, 'Communication is important to me. I want to be understood, enjoyed and used'. And it is perhaps for this reason, this capacity for dramatic articulation of meaning, that his choral music holds such a certain place in listeners' hearts. Joubert's abilities to render complex texts immediately impactful, and to create pieces of both sophistication and emotional heft, serve his communicative goal especially clearly in his choral music. What this recording presents, then, is more than 63 years' choral music; it offers 63 years' witty, profound, compassionate, and dramatic communication with the listener.

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TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

6

O Praise God in His Holiness

O praise God in his holiness:

Praise him in the firmament of his power.

Praise him in his noble acts:

Praise him according to his excellent greatness.

Praise him in the sound of the trumpet:

Praise him upon the strings and harp.

Praise him in the cymbals and dances:

Praise him upon the strings and pipe.

Praise him upon the well-tuned cymbals:

Praise him upon the loud cymbals.

Let everything that hath breath:

Praise the Lord.

2 O Lorde, the Maker of Al Thing

O Lorde, the maker of al thing,
We pray Thee now in this evening
Us to defende, through Thy mercy,
From al deceite of our en'my.
Let neither us deluded be,
Good Lorde, with dreame or phantasy,
Our hearte wakyng in Thee Thou kepe,
That we in sinne fal not on slepe.

O Father, throughe Thy blessed Sonne, Grant us this our peticion, To whom with the Holy Ghost alwaies, In heav'n and yearth be laude and praise.

Words by King Henry VIII

Psalm 150

7

3 There is no Rose

There is no rose of such virtue As is the rose that bare Jesu; Alleluia.

For in this rose contained was Heav'n and earth in little space; *Res miranda*.

By that rose we may well see That He is God in persons three, Pares forma.

Then leave we all this worldly mirth And follow we this joyous birth; *Transeamus*.

Incantation

4 | Chorus

I saw a staring virgin stand
Where holy Dionysus died,
And tear the heart out of his side,
And lay the heart upon her hand
And bear that beating heart away;
And then did all the Muses sing
Of Magnus Annus at the Spring,
As though God's death were but a play.

8

Another Troy must rise and set,
Another lineage feed the crow,
Another Argo's painted prow
Drive to a flashier bauble yet.
The Roman Empire stood appalled:
It dropped the reins of peace and war
When that fierce virgin and her Star
Out of the fabulous darkness called.

5 II Solo

Astrea's holy child!
A rattle in the wood
Where a Titan strode!
His rattle drew the child
Into that solitude,
Barrum, barrum, barrum.

We wandering women, Wives for all that come, Tried to draw him home; And every wandering woman Beat upon a drum. Barrum, barrum, barrum. But the murderous Titans
Where the woods grow dim
Stood and waited him.
The great hands of those Titans
Tore limb from limb.
Barrum, barrum, barrum.

On virgin Astrea
That can succour all
Wandering women call;
Call out to Astrea
That the moon stood at the full.
Barrum, barrum, barrum.

9

6 III Chorus

In pity for man's darkening thought
He walked that room and issued thence
In Galilean turbulence;
The Babylonian starlight brought
A fabulous, formless darkness in;
Odour of blood when Christ was slain
Made all Platonic tolerance vain
And vain all Doric discipline ---

Everything that man esteems
Endures a moment or a day:
Love's pleasure drives his love away,
The painter's brush consumes his dreams;
The herald's cry, the soldier's tread
Exhaust his glory and his might:
Whatever flames upon the night
Man's own resinous heart has fed.

Words from the play "The Resurrection" From Collected Plays by W.B. Yeats.

Pilgrimage Song

Cuthbert of Durham

We climb the strenuous slope to
The far-seen ponderous pile that pins him down
With its tons of stone
Stone stonily hewn from nearby hills
Hauled, shaped and set –
This saint is set in echoing stone.

Day or night, alone
As seagulls cry
I rest my head on stone,
Here will I die.

At Cuthbert's shrine
We are required to venerate
These blackened chunks of coffin wood
Charred by the holocaust of time
Raked from the ash of thirteen hundred years
As his sleepless eyes seek God in the stars
From a windowless sea-girt cell
On Lindisfarne.

Priest, bishop, prior Or anchorite, I seek God's holy fire, Eternal light.

The iron rails of Telford's permanent way Close up behind us Pilgrims or tourists from a northern shrine. How permanent Are iron, wood, stone? Or prayer?

> Cuthbert of Durham © Stephen Tunnicliffe Reproduced with permission

12

Three Portraits

To Mistress Isabell Pennell

By saint Mary, my lady, Your mammy and your daddy Brought forth a goodly baby! My maiden Isabel, Reflaring rosabel, The flagrant camamel; The ruddy rosary, The sovereign rosemary, The pretty strawberry; The columbine, the nept, The gillyflower well set, The proper violet; Ennewed your colour Is like the daisy flower After the April shower;

Star of the morrow gray,

The blossom on the spray, The freshest flower of May; Maidenly demure, Of womanhood the lure; Wherefore I make you sure, It were an hevenly health, It were an endless wealth, A life for God himself. To hear this nightingale, Among the birds smale, Warbling in the vale, Dug, dug, Jug, jug.

Good year and good luck,

With chuck, chuck, chuck!

II To Mistress Margery Wentworth

With margerain gentle,
The flower of goodlihead,
Embroidered the mantle
Is of your maidenhead.
Plainly I cannot glose;
Ye be, as I divine,
The pretty primrose,
The goodly columbine.

Benign, courteous, and meek, With words well devised; In you, who list to seek, Be virtues well comprised. With margerain gentle, The flower of goodlihead, Embroidered the mantle Is of your maidenhead.

10 III To Mistress Margaret Hussey

Merry Margaret,
As midsummer flower,

Gentle as falcon

Or hawk of the tower;

With solace and gladness,

Much mirth and no madness,

All good and no badness; So joyously,

So maidenly,

So womanly

Her demeaning In every thing, Far, far passing

That I can indite,

Or suffice to write
Of Merry Margaret

As midsummer flower

Gentle as falcon

Or hawk of the tower.
As patient and still

And as full of good will

As fair Isaphill,

Coliander,

Sweet pomander,

 $Good\ Cassander;$

Steadfast of thought,

Well made, well wrought,

Far may be sought, Ere that ye can find So courteous, so kind As merry Margaret, This midsummer flower.

Gentle as falcon

Or hawk of the tower.

John Skelton (1460 – 1523)

III Be not afeard

Be not afeard: the isle is full of noises, Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not. Sometimes a thousand jangling instruments Will hum about mine ears: and sometimes voices That, if I then had waked after long sleep, Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming, The clouds methought would open and show riches Ready to drop upon me that, when I waked I cried to dream again.

> The Tempest III:ii William Shakespeare

O heart whose beating blood was running song, O sole thing sweeter than thine own songs were,

Help us for thy free love's sake to be free,

True for thy truth's sake, for thy strength's sake strong,

Till very liberty make clean and fair

The nursing earth as the sepulchral sea.

Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909)

13 This is the Gate of the Lord

This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter into it, I will thank thee, for thou hast heard me; and art become my salvation.

The same stone which the builders refused:

is become the head-stone in the corner.

This is the Lord's doing: and it is marvellous in our eyes.

Psalm 118, verses 20-23

12 Sonnet

Cor Cordium

O heart of hearts, the chalice of love's fire, Hid round with flowers and all the bounty of bloom: O wonderful and perfect heart, for whom The lyrist liberty made life a lyre: O heavenly heart, at whose most dear desire Dead love, living and singing, cleft his tomb, And with him risen and regent in death's room All day thy choral pulses rang full choir:

14 Autumn Rain

The plane leaves fall black and wet on the lawn;

The cloud sheaves in heaven's fields set droop and are drawn

in falling seeds of rain; the seed of heaven on my face

falling - I hear again like echoes even that softly pace

Heaven's muffled floor, the winds that tread out all the grain of tears, the store harvested in the sheaves of pain

caught up aloft: the sheaves of dead men that are slain

now winnowed soft on the floor of heaven; manna invisible

of all the pain here to us given; finely divisible falling as rain.

D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930)

South of the Line

15 1 Embarcation

Here, where Vespasian's legions struck the sands, And Cerdic with his Saxons entered in, And Henry's army leapt afloat to win Convincing triumphs over neighbour lands,

Vaster battalions press for further strands, To argue in the selfsame bloody mode Which this late age of thought, and pact, and code, Still fails to mend. - Now deckward tramp the bands.

Yellow as autumn leaves, alive as spring; And as each host draws out upon the sea Beyond which lies the tragical To-be, None dubious of the cause, none murmuring,

Wives, sisters, parents, wave white hands and smile, As if they knew not that they weep the while.

16 2 A wife in London

That the Thames-side lanes have uprolled, Behind whose webby fold on fold Like a waning taper The street-lamp glitters cold.

A messenger's knock cracks smartly, Flashed news is in her hand Of meaning it dazes to understand Though shaped so shortly: He - has fallen - in the far South Land...

'Tis the morrow; the fog hangs thicker, The postman nears and goes: A letter is brought whose lines disclose By the firelight flicker His hand, whom the worm now knows:

Fresh-firm-penned in highest feather Page-full of his hoped return,
And of home-planned jaunts by brake and burn
In the summer weather,
And of new love that they would learn.

3 Drummer Hodge

They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest Uncoffined - just as found:
His landmark is a kopje-crest
That breaks the veldt around;
And foreign constellations west
Each night above his mound.

Young Hodge the Drummer never knew Fresh from his Wessex home The meaning of the broad Karoo,
The Bush, the dusty loam,
And why uprose to nightly view
Strange stars amid the gloam.

Yet portion of that unknown plain Will Hodge for ever be; His homely Northern breast and brain Grow to some Southern tree, And strange-eyed constellations reign His stars eternally.

18 4 The man he killed

Had he and I but met By some old ancient inn, We should have sat us down to wet Right many a nipperkin!

But ranged as infantry, And staring face to face, I shot at him as he at me, And killed him in his place.

I shot him dead because -Because he was my foe, Just so: my foe of course he was; That's clear enough; although He thought he'd 'list, perhaps, Offhand like - just as I -Was out of work, had sold his traps, No other reason why.

Yes, quaint and curious war is! You shoot a fellow down You'd treat, if met where any bar is, Or help to half-a-crown.

20 5 A Christmas Ghost Story

South of the Line, inland from far Durban,
A mouldering soldier lies - your countryman.
Awry and doubled up are his gray bones,
And on the breeze his puzzled phantom moans
Nightly to clear Canopus: "I would know
By whom and when the All-Earth-gladdening Law
Of Peace, brought in by that Man Crucified,
Was ruled to be inept, and set aside?
And what of logic or of truth appears
In tacking "Anno domini" to the years?
Near twenty-hundred liveried thus have hied,
But tarries yet the Cause for which He died."

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)



Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir

Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir is conducted by Paul Spicer and is a group of twenty-four auditioned student singers who form an expert and flexible group. They perform with sensitivity, energy and panache and are gathering an enviable reputation for their musicianship partly through their increasing recording presence which reflects their conductor's specialist interest in 20th and 21st century British music. Their first CD called *To Music* was an Anthology of English 20th century choral music and was released on the Regent label. It was CD Review recording of the month (MusicWeb International) and the review commented: "...this is one of the finest discs to have come my way in some time". Their disc of music by Kenneth Leighton and James MacMillan had five star reviews and MacMillan (who attended the sessions) wrote: 'I am delighted to be the focus of this new disc by this exceptional young choir from the Birmingham Conservatoire. I was present at some of the recording sessions and was astounded at how high the performance standards were.'

Their disc of music by Ireland and Delius part songs on the Somm label was also awarded 5 star reviews and their recording of the first ever disc to be devoted to Stanford's part songs (also on Somm) was chosen as 13th out of 24 discs considered the best releases of 2013 on Classic FM and *The Observer* commented that the music was 'dressed in the richly jewelled sound of the Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir' and that 'many a choir could learn from these singers.' Their disc of rare repertoire by Herbert Howells was regarded by MusicWeb International as 'the most impressive of all.' It was chosen as Editor's Choice in the *Gramophone* magazine in December 2014 and received 5 stars again in *Choir and Organ*. The choir's recording of the complete choral music of Samuel Barber was released in July 2015 to yet further acclaim and they made their debut broadcast concert on BBC Radio 3 in 2015. *English Visionaries*, the Choir's most recent release, was highly acclaimed: "Impeccable singing... an intense and involving experience" Classical Ear.

Paul Spicer

Paul Spicer was a chorister at New College, Oxford. He studied with Herbert Howells and Richard Popplewell (organ) at the Royal College of Music.

Paul is best known as a choral conductor, partly through the many CDs he made with the Finzi Singers for Chandos records. He conducted Bach Choirs in Chester and Leicester before moving to conduct the Bach Choir in Birmingham in 1992. He has conducted the Whitehall Choir in London since 2000. He taught at the Royal College of Music in London between 1995 and 2008. He now teaches choral conducting at the Birmingham Conservatoire, where he also directs the chamber choir which has an increasing reputation through its regular recordings of British music, and at Oxford and Durham Universities.

Until July 2001 Paul Spicer was Artistic Director of the Lichfield International Arts Festival and the Abbotsholme Arts Society, posts he relinquished in order to pursue a freelance musical career. He was Senior Producer for BBC Radio 3 in the Midlands until 1990 and today is in considerable demand as a composer. He has also been a much sought-after recording producer.

Paul Spicer's highly-acclaimed biography of his composition teacher, Herbert Howells, was published in August 1998 and has been reprinted twice. His large-scale biography of Sir George Dyson was published in 2014 and he is now writing a biography of Sir Arthur Bliss. His *English Pastoral Partsongs* volume for OUP is widely used. As a writer he has written countless articles for many periodicals and is a contributor to the *Dictionary of National Biography*. He was commissioned by the Britten-Pears Foundation and Boosey & Hawkes to write the first practical guide to all Benjamin Britten's choral music for the Britten centenary in 2013, something he continues to do for all James MacMillan's growing choral output.

As a composer his *Easter Oratorio* was hailed as 'the best of its kind to have appeared... since Howells' *Hymnus Paradisi*.' It was also chosen as an Editor's Choice in the same magazine. His new large-scale commission, a choral symphony *Unfinished Remembering* to a text by Euan Tait commemorating the centenary of the First World War was premiered in Symphony Hall, Birmingham in September 2014.

Paul Spicer is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, an Honorary Research Fellow of Birmingham University, an Honorary Fellow of Birmingham Conservatoire, an Honorary Fellow of University College, Durham, a Trustee of the Finzi Trust, Vice-President of the Herbert Howells Society, and Chairman of the Sir George Dyson Trust.



Recording session photograph showing performers. In front, left to right, John Joubert, Siva Oke and Paul Spicer

Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir

SOPRANOS Róza Csabaynè Bene Myfanwy Holywell Amy van Walsum Alexis Cooling Gina Baker Chloe Salvidge Olivier Thornber Bethany Cox Lily Allen-Dodd Katherine Liggins	ALTOS Darrel Chan Nicola Starkie Maria Suciu Annie George Ellie Waterhouse Ania Szypula Lufuno Ndou Emma Cowper Lucy Morton	TENORS Luke English John Eclou Robert Tilson Richard James James Gribble Andrew Armstrong	BASS Andrew Randall Timothy Emberson Alistair Donaghue Daniel Galbreath Domonkos Csabay Lewis Jones* (*Sonnet and Pilgrimage Song only)
PIANO Domonkos Csabay Giörgy Hodzso	ORGAN Nicholas Wearne	TIMPANI Matthew Firkins	PERCUSSION George Kirkham, Harry Bent, Stephen Plummer,

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Miriam Kitchener

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