

Bob Chilcott – *Salisbury Vespers* première

The world premiere of *Salisbury Vespers* – the magnificent new work by Bob Chilcott, published by OUP – took place at Salisbury Cathedral on 23rd May 2009.

Commissioned by six musical organisations from the city as part of the 2009 Salisbury International Arts Festival, Chilcott's 55-minute work for large chorus and orchestra pays homage to this most ancient of services. It combines settings of the traditional Vespers psalms with anonymous early texts and words from the Sarum Primer of 1516.



The premiere involved over 600 singers from local choirs and the Salisbury Symphony Orchestra, conducted by David Halls. Drawing on the varying strengths and experience of the city's abundant musical groups, the performers ranged from Salisbury Community Choir with 180 members, to the 16-strong Sarum Voices. The performers were arranged throughout the Cathedral to create a stunning and dramatic effect.

Chilcott describes the shape and influences of his composition:

“After the opening antiphon, three psalm settings and a setting of the great Passiontide hymn *Vexilla Regis prodeunt* are interspersed by four motets on Marian texts, reflecting the dedication of Salisbury Cathedral to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The work ends with a setting of the Magnificat, based, as in the great setting of 1610 by Claudio Monteverdi, on the plainsong melody Tone 1.

“The piece was designed in such a way that the choirs could be situated in different parts of this huge building and could therefore use the complete space to surround the audience with sound. The challenge this presented musically dictated the way that several of the sections have been put together, but it was always my intention that this work would function just as well within the normal set-up of a performance space.”

This major new work is a must for all lovers of Chilcott's music and is sure to become a cornerstone of the modern choral repertory, particularly looking forward to the 400th anniversary of Monteverdi's *Vespers* in 2010.

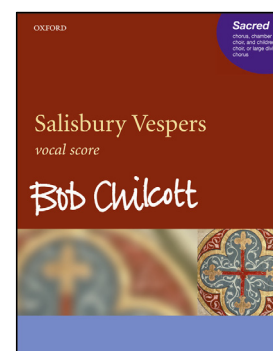
Salisbury Vespers was published by Oxford University Press on 28 May 2009.

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