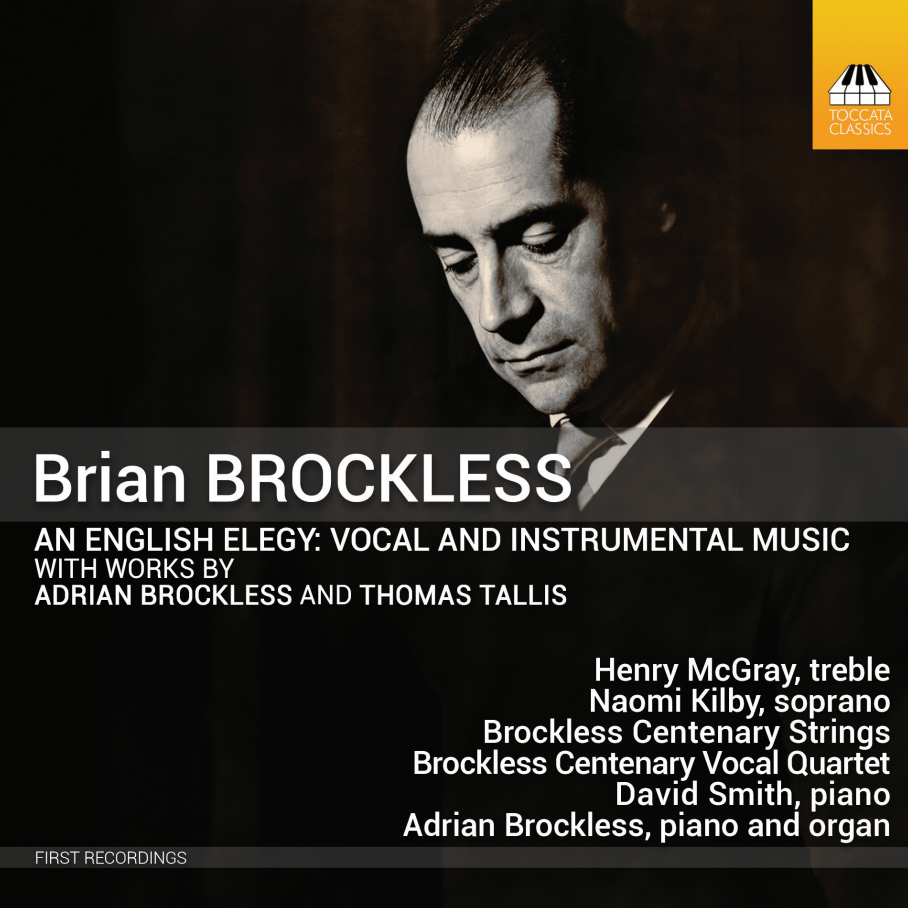




Brian BROCKLESS

AN ENGLISH ELEGY: VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC
WITH WORKS BY
ADRIAN BROCKLESS AND THOMAS TALLIS

Henry McGray, treble
Naomi Kilby, soprano
Brockless Centenary Strings
Brockless Centenary Vocal Quartet
David Smith, piano
Adrian Brockless, piano and organ

BRIAN BROCKLESS Vocal and Instrumental Music

BRIAN BROCKLESS

- ① *Toccata for an Occasion* (1981, arr. strings 2026 Adrian Brockless) 8:10
- ② *May the Grace* (before 1955) 2:31
- ③ *Prayer for a Choir Boy* (date unknown, rev. 1987) 1:22

ADRIAN BROCKLESS

b. 1980

- ④ *Berceuse* (2007) 4:28

BRIAN BROCKLESS

French Suite for piano (1951) 14:03

- ⑤ I Allemande 3:40
- ⑥ II Courante 3:49
- ⑦ III Sarabande 3:30
- ⑧ IV Gigue 3:04

- ⑨ *Three Young Rats (A Nonsense Song)* (date unknown) 1:04

- ⑩ *An English Elegy for String Orchestra* (c. 1946) 8:22

Three Poems of Shelley (c. 1948, rev. 1980s) 6:44

- ⑪ No. 1 Music, When Soft Voices Die 2:34
- ⑫ No. 2 To the Moon 1:32
- ⑬ No. 3 The Widow Bird 2:38
- ⑭ *Prayers* (date unknown) 3:31

THOMAS TALLIS

c. 1505–c. 1585

15 9th Tune (date unknown)

0:35

BRIAN BROCKLESS

16 Toccata upon Tallis' 9th Tune (1989)

4:09

ADRIAN BROCKLESS

17 Looking for a Sunset Bird in Winter (2026)

2:55

BRIAN BROCKLESS

18 Missa brevis (1955)

8:41

19 Orion (1989)

2:19

TT68:55

FIRST RECORDINGS

Brockless Centenary Strings **1 4 10**

Afonso Fesch, Kana Kawashima, Siún Milne, Michelle Dierx, violins

Francesca Gilbert, Marsailidh Groat, violas

Niamh Molloy, Christoff Fourie, cellos

Margarida Castro, double bass

Brockless Centenary Vocal Quartet **2 9 14 15 17**

Frederica Davies, soprano **14 18**

Livia Bell, alto **18**

Nathan Green, tenor **14**

James Gooding, bass

Henry McGray, treble **3**

Naomi Kilby, soprano **11–13**

Adrian Brockless, organ **3 16**, **piano** **14 19**

David Smith, piano **5–8 11–13**

BRIAN BROCKLESS: AN INTRODUCTION

by Adrian Brockless

This recording was conceived to mark the centenary of my father's birth and to bring a substantial body of his largely unknown music into performance. It has essentially been a labour of love.

Brian Brockless died in 1995, when I was fifteen. My understanding of him then was inevitably that of a child, and it was only many years later, when I began working through the manuscripts that had remained largely untouched since his death, that I came to appreciate more fully the extent of his compositional work and the range of his musical personality.

There is an unmistakable Englishness in much of his music, perhaps most clearly expressed in *An English Elegy* [10], alongside a modernity characteristic of the second half of the twentieth century. Preparing the manuscripts for performance and recording has allowed works that were unpublished, and in many cases unheard, to be brought together for the first time.

I have included two works of my own partly because they help shape the musical sequence of the album, marking points of transition between groups of my father's works. *Berceuse* [4], for example, follows *Prayer for a Choir Boy* and leads into the stylistically different *French Suite*, whereas *Looking for a Sunset Bird in Winter* [17] serves a similar purpose before the final group of works; their inclusion also reflects the personal nature of the project and, in a different sense, allowed me to work musically with my father as an adult.

The purpose of this album is therefore not simply commemorative. It is intended to make my father's music available to listeners, to allow it to be considered on its own merits, and to give a more complete account of Brian Brockless as a composer.

The recording is dedicated to both of my parents, in gratitude for the musical environment in which I was brought up.

Brian Brockless was a conductor, composer, organist and teacher who combined a deep knowledge of choral and orchestral repertoire with a lifelong commitment to musical education and the revival of early music.

Born in London on 21 January 1926, he was educated at the Stationers' Company's School and the Royal College of Music. He studied composition with Herbert Howells and Mátyás Seiber and organ with John Dykes Bower. Conducting became a central focus of his career through his studies with Sergiu Celibidache at the Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Siena between 1960 and 1963. He won the conducting prize there in 1963 and subsequently assisted Celibidache on conducting courses throughout Europe during the 1960s and 1970s.

The orchestras with which he appeared as a conductor include the English Chamber Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the Northern Sinfonia; he also served as Musical Director of the London Schubert Orchestra. His work took him across Europe and beyond, with guest appearances in Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Romania, Sweden and Venezuela. In Caracas in 1975 he conducted the Orquesta Sinfónica Venezuela in programmes that included music by Beethoven, Delius, Elgar, Mozart, Schubert and Vaughan Williams. He also made numerous broadcasts and contributed to early television presentations of classical music, including the ITV series *A Date with Music*.

Choral music lay at the heart of his musical life. From 1961 to 1971, and again from 1979 until his death, he served as Director of Music at St Bartholomew the Great, Smithfield. There he developed its choral tradition and founded the St Bartholomew Singers, later known as Pro Cantione Antiqua and developed by Bruno Turner. His work formed part of the wider revival of Renaissance music in Britain. The singer and conductor Mark Brown later described him as 'a leading light in the renaissance of Renaissance music'.¹ During his years at St Bartholomew the Great, he also composed a substantial body of fanfares for the annual services of the Imperial Society of Knights Bachelor and the Worshipful Company of Butchers.

¹ Richard Williams, 'Obituary: Brian Brockless,' *The Independent*, 28 December 1995.

His understanding of vocal music was grounded in his own experience as a singer. As a countertenor, he appeared both as a soloist and as an ensemble singer, giving Wigmore Hall recitals with his sister, Pauline Brockless, and singing with the Savoy Chapel Choir, Henry Washington's Schola Polyphonica and the Elizabethan Singers.

Alongside his performing career, he was a highly respected teacher. For two decades he served as Professor of Harmony and Orchestration at the Royal Academy of Music and directed conducting classes at Morley College. Earlier in his career he worked at Battersea Polytechnic, and later at the University of Surrey, where he became the first Musical Director of the institution and played a central role in designing its music degree course, including the pioneering Tonmeister programme that brought musical study and recording technology together.

In 1982 he was elected an Honorary Member of the Royal Academy of Music, in the same year as Claudio Abbado, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli and Ida Haendel.

After his death – in Guildford, Surrey, on 18 December 1995 – a substantial collection of manuscripts came to light among his papers, revealing a considerably broader compositional output than his published works alone had suggested. Much of this music remained unpublished, and some of it had never been performed. This album brings a representative selection of that material into the catalogue for the first time.

My father's *Toccata for an Occasion* □ was written in 1981 and commissioned for the Peterborough Cathedral Organ Week by London Brick in 1982, marking both the rebuilding of the cathedral organ and the centenary of the Fletton brick-making process. The work draws upon material from the plainchant *Tu es Petrus* ('Thou art Peter'), linking the dedication of Peterborough Cathedral to St Peter with the words of Matthew 16:18: 'upon this rock I will build my church' – an appropriately architectural reference for a commission celebrating cathedral and brickmaker alike.

Festive, rhythmically energetic and brightly coloured, the work contrasts an exuberant opening section with a more reflective central episode before returning to its opening material and driving towards a triumphant conclusion. I first arranged the piece for string quintet a few years before this recording was made, as a birthday present

for my mother, and as this album was taking shape, I expanded that version for string orchestra.

Published in 1955, *May the Grace* [2] was dedicated to Canon Frederic Hood, later Archdeacon of Lewisham and a Canon of Southwark Cathedral. The work dates from the period when my father was organist at St Mary Aldermary in the City of London. Its compact setting of John Newton's benediction places clear, direct vocal writing at the service of the words.

The date of composition of *Prayer for a Choir Boy* [3] is unknown, but my father revised it in September 1987 for me, then aged seven. The work sets an adaptation of verses 10–12 of Psalm 51 for treble voice and organ, concentrating the appeal of the psalm for renewal into a brief and intimate prayer.

My *Berceuse* [4] was written in 2007 for a school string quartet. It was conceived so that much of the music could be played using first and second fingers and open strings, allowing young performers to concentrate on phrasing, tone and ensemble within modest technical demands. The version heard here incorporates a small number of revisions to the original score. Its first professional public performance was given by the Harris Quartet at a Tilford Bach Society concert in 2010, where it was repeated as an encore. A local review described it as 'a gentle berceuse or cradle song, in a very English style, with harmonies reminiscent of Vaughan Williams'.² Its position here provides a brief point of repose between contrasting areas of my father's music.

My father's *French Suite* was written between January and May 1951, with the movements composed out of order: he began with the Sarabande [7], followed by the Courante [6], then the Allemande [5] and finally the Gigue [8], which, the manuscript reveals, was completed on 4 and 5 May in Battersea Park, although it gives no indication of the circumstances. The four movements retain the characteristic profiles of their Baroque models but treat them in a more Romantic spirit, their measured tempi allowing the harmonic language and musical detail to emerge clearly.

² Rosemary Wisbey, 'Members' Evenings', 26 February 2010, online at <https://www.tilbach.org.uk/archive/2010%20concerts.htm>.

Three Young Rats [9] is a true nonsense song, setting an anonymous nineteenth-century nursery rhyme. The date of composition is unknown, but the work probably belongs to his student years or early twenties, perhaps the late 1940s. Its character is shaped by lively rhythmic writing and the use of close harmony, which gives the piece much of its wit and momentum.

My father wrote *An English Elegy* [10] around 1946, when he was a student, as the slow movement of his B.Mus. string quartet; it was later dedicated to Herbert Howells. It reflects the lyrical English tradition in which his early musical education was rooted, although its harmonic language is already individual. The movement was subsequently re-scored and partially revised for publication in 1960, and is performed here in that published version. The opening establishes the principal thematic material in the lower strings before it is taken up by the upper voices. A secondary melodic idea in the violins leads to a more intimate central section. The principal material returns in varied form, and the work concludes with a melancholic recollection of the opening theme, now combined with a more expressive counter-line in the lower strings.

The *Three Poems of Shelley* were first performed on 1 July 1948 by Barbara Roach (contralto), with my father at the piano, in Finchley Methodist Church. They were later (at some point in the 1980s) transposed and revised for soprano for performance by my mother.

No. 1, 'Music, When Soft Voices Die' [11], is shaped by a delicate three- or four-note semiquaver figure in the piano accompaniment, which returns throughout the setting and contrasts with the more sustained, *legato* vocal line. The music gradually intensifies towards its expressive climax on the word 'love', where the writing assumes an almost operatic breadth and warmth. From there, it subsides through the final words, 'itself shall slumber on', the recurring piano figure appearing once more as the voice dies away on a long, sustained final note.

In 'To the Moon' [12] much of the movement and detail lies within the piano accompaniment, while the vocal line remains poised and almost still. Marked *quasi parlante*, the words are to be delivered in a natural, speech-like manner, although the line

itself remains smooth and *legato*. This restrained approach gives the song a contemplative quality, with the voice seeming to observe rather than dramatise the poem. The setting maintains its quiet inwardness to the end, drawing to a gentle and subdued close.

‘The Widow Bird’ [13] is the darkest of the three Shelley settings. The low-register opening of the piano establishes a bleak atmosphere, above which the voice unfolds in a sustained, sorrowful line. The word ‘mourning’ is drawn out with particular dramatic intensity, while a recurring figure of shorter notes introduces a sense of cold, restless movement. At ‘There was no leaf upon the forest bare’, the accompaniment becomes strikingly still, reduced to two chords in each bar. Activity gradually returns as the poem reaches ‘And little motion in the air / Except the mill-wheel’s sound’. In spite of the desolation of the text, the song closes unexpectedly on a major chord, introducing a final suggestion of consolation. A wren can also be heard singing faintly during the recorded performance; this spontaneous contribution was retained as an apt and touching accompaniment to Shelley’s widow bird.

Prayers [14] sets words by H. C. Beeching from *In a Garden and Other Poems*.³ Beeching had been Rector of St Mary Aldermary in the City of London, where my father later served as organist before his appointment to St Bartholomew-the-Great. *Prayers* was published in 1952 by Edward Arnold & Co. as No. 660 in its ‘Singing Class Music’ series, edited by Herbert Howells, who had been my father’s composition teacher. Scored for unison voices with descant and piano, it follows Beeching’s threefold prayer from the thanksgiving of a boy, through the strength and service of adulthood, to a final prayer of the spirit. The direct unison writing is enriched by the added descant line. *Prayers* also formed part of my first concert as a treble at St Bartholomew-the-Great in 1987, performed by a quartet of choristers drawn from St Bartholomew’s, St John’s College, Cambridge, and Rochester Cathedral.

A verse of Tallis’ ‘Ninth Tune’ [15] serves as a brief vocal prelude to the *Toccata upon Tallis’ Ninth Tune* [16] because the organ work is based upon this melody and was conceived with these particular words in mind. The text uses Jean-Baptiste de Santeuil’s

³ John Lane, London, 1895.

hymn ‘The heavenly Child in stature grows’, in John Chandler’s translation, sung to Tallis’ Ordinal, also known as ‘Tallis’ Ninth Tune’, and appears as No. 78 in the 1924 standard edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*.

Composed between 3 and 5 August 1989, the *Toccatina* was commissioned by the godfather of twin boys as a christening gift. Brockless chose Tallis’ melody with its associated words specifically in mind: their depiction of Christ growing within the care and authority of his earthly family made them especially appropriate to the occasion. Reflecting the dedication of the work to twins, every musical phrase is presented twice. The *Toccatina* was first performed by its composer at the baptism service in Dorking Parish Church. Later that year, he played it at St Paul’s Cathedral as the voluntary following the service at which I was admitted as a full chorister.

I wrote *Looking for a Sunset Bird in Winter* [17] – a compact SATB setting of Robert Frost’s poem – in February 2026 during the preparation of this recording. The music seeks to capture the mingling of winter stillness, uncertainty and disappointed expectation in the poem: an apparent sighting gives way to absence, leaving only the cold landscape and a single distant star. Its position here provides a gentle transition between the *Toccatina* and the final group of works in this album.

My father’s *Missa Brevis* was written in January 1955 during a bout of influenza. It is scored for soprano and alto or, alternatively, tenor and bass. Its first performance took place at a Society for the Promotion of New Music concert at Wigmore Hall in October 1955, with Pauline Brockless (my aunt) and my father as the two singers. The first performance was reviewed in both *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* on 18 October 1955, the reviewer in *The Times* describing the work as ‘an agreeable surprise’. A version for tenor and bass was subsequently broadcast on the BBC Third Programme in August 1956 by the tenors and basses of the BBC Chorus, and was reviewed in *The Times* on 22 August 1956. The setting is characterised by expressive contrapuntal writing in which the two vocal lines continually intertwine, reflecting my father’s deep engagement with earlier sacred traditions. On this recording the Kyrie, Sanctus and Benedictus, and Agnus Dei form a single continuous track [18]: the brief pauses of varying lengths between them are part of the musical and spiritual shape of the work.

Orion [19] was written for me in March 1989 and takes its inspiration from the familiar winter constellation. The principal theme is derived from the pattern of Orion's main stars, transposed onto manuscript paper and transformed into a musical motif. The work opens with Orion rising above the horizon, the theme appearing successively at higher pitches before reaching its fullest statement. A contrasting central section evokes Orion's celestial retinue, including Canis Major, the Great Dog, whose presence is suggested by a playful 'barking' figure in the piano. A more ethereal passage alludes to the Orion Nebula before the constellation begins its gradual descent. The work ends with a final, slower statement of the principal theme as Orion sinks below the horizon, with Betelgeuse lingering briefly above it.

Henry McGray is a chorister at Guildford Cathedral and a member of the Surrey Youth Orchestra. He plays the piano and cello and has recently taken up the organ. Henry is a passionate young musician who enjoys developing his skills across a range of instruments and ensembles. Away from music, he enjoys swimming and table tennis.



David Smith is an experienced, prize-winning and sought-after accompanist, having performed at venues such as the Wigmore Hall and Amsterdam Concertgebouw. He has been featured on BBC Radio 3 and at festivals that include Aix-en-Provence and Heidelberg, partnering some exceptional singers and instrumentalists. He studied at both the Royal College of Music and Royal Academy of Music and, as both accompanist and coach, is now linked with those conservatoires, as well as with Trinity College of Music. He has also worked as a freelance répétiteur and pianist at, the Royal Opera House, Opera Holland Park and Dorset Opera among other companies.



Naomi Kilby trained at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music and the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. She is the founding producer of Opera Alegria. She is based in London and works as a freelance opera singer and singing teacher.

www.naomikilby.com



Adrian Brockless (b. 1980), piano and organ, began his musical life as a chorister, first singing at St Bartholomew-the-Great in London and making his solo debut there as a treble in 1987, before joining the choir of St Paul's Cathedral in 1988. He remained at St Paul's until 1990, when he transferred to Guildford Cathedral, becoming Head Chorister (Decani) in 1993. As a treble he appeared regularly as a soloist in services and concerts across London and the Home Counties, and recorded Allegri's *Miserere* as first treble on the Passiontide recording *Crucifixus* (on the Herald label). His musical interests later developed increasingly towards composition and the organ. Alongside his musical activities, he has pursued a career in academic philosophy, teaching and lecturing at a number of institutions while continuing to write and teach independently. He also maintains a longstanding interest in the natural world and conservation.



Sung Texts

② *May the Grace*

May the grace of Christ our Saviour
and the Father's boundless love,
with the Holy Spirit's favour,
rest upon us from above.

Thus may we abide in union
with each other and the Lord,
and possess in sweet communion
joys which earth cannot afford.

—John Newton, *Olney Hymns*, 1779,
paraphrase of 2 Corinthians 13:14

③ *Prayer for a Choir Boy*

Make me a clean heart, O God,
and create a steadfast spirit in me.
Cast me not away from thy presence,
and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.
Strengthen me with thy saving help again,
and thy free spirit shall be my joy.
Make me a clean heart, O God,
and create a steadfast spirit in me.

—Psalm 51:10–12,
The Book of Common Prayer, 1928

④ *Three Young Rats (A Nonsense Song)*

Three young rats with black felt hats,
Three young ducks with white straw flats,
Three young dogs with curling tails,
Three young cats with demi veils,
Went out to walk with two young pigs,
In satin vests and sorrel wigs;

But suddenly it chanced to rain,
And so they all went home again.

—Anonymous nineteenth-century
English nursery rhyme

Three Poems of Shelley

① No. 1, *Music, When Soft Voices Die*

Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory;
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heap'd for the beloved's bed;
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.

—Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Posthumous Poems*,
John and Henry L. Hunt, London, 1824

② No. 2, *To the Moon*

Art thou pale for weariness
Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth,
Wandering companionless
Among the stars that have a different birth, —
And ever changing, like a joyless eye
That finds no object worth its constancy?

—*Ibid.*

③ No. 3, *A Widow Bird*

A widow bird sate mourning for her love
Upon a wintry bough;

The frozen wind crept on above,
The freezing stream below.

There was no leaf upon the forest bare,
No flower upon the ground,
And little motion in the air
Except the mill-wheel's sound.

—'Archy's Song' from
Charles the First, in *ibid.*

14 Prayers

God who created me
Nimble and light of limb,
In three elements free,
To run, to ride, to swim:
Not when the sense is dim,
But now from the heart of joy,
I would remember Him:
Take the thanks of a boy.

Jesu, King and Lord,
Whose are my foes to fight,
Gird me with Thy sword
Swift and sharp and bright.
Thee would I serve if I might;
And conquer if I can,
From day-dawn till night,
Take the strength of a man.

Spirit of Love and Truth,
Breathing in grosser clay,
The light and flame of youth,
Delight of men in the fray,
Wisdom in strength's decay;
From pain, strife, wrong to be free,

This best gift I pray,
Take my spirit to Thee.

—*H. C. Beeching*, In a Garden
and Other Poems,
John Lane, London, 1895

15 TALLIS, 9th Tune

The heavenly Child in stature grows,
and, growing, learns to die;
and still his early training shows
his coming agony.

—*Jean-Baptiste de Santeuil*,
transl. John Chandler;
Hymns Ancient and Modern,
Standard Edition (1924), Hymn 78

17 Looking for a Sunset Bird in Winter

The west was getting out of gold,
The breath of air had died of cold,
When shoeing home across the white,
I thought I saw a bird alight.

In summer when I passed the place
I had to stop and lift my face;
A bird with an angelic gift
Was singing in it sweet and swift.

No bird was singing in it now.
A single leaf was on a bough,
And that was all there was to see
In going twice around the tree.

From my advantage on a hill
I judged that such a crystal chill

Was only adding frost to snow
As gilt to gold that wouldn't show.

A brush had left a crooked stroke
Of what was either cloud or smoke
From north to south across the blue;
A piercing little star was through.

—Robert Frost, New Hampshire,
Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1923

18 Missa brevis

Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison. Kyrie eleison.

*Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord,
have mercy.*

Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus Dominus
Deus Sabaoth:
pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua.
Hosanna in excelsis.

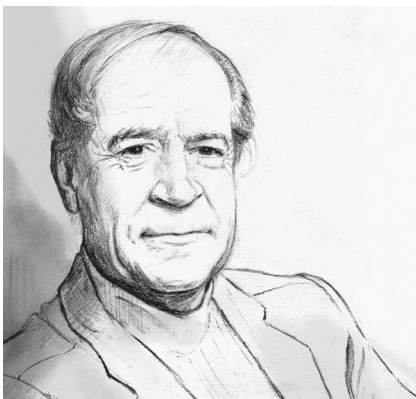
Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
Hosanna in excelsis.

*Holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts:
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.*

*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.*

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere
nobis. Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
dona nobis pacem.

*Lamb of God, you who take away the sins of the
world, have pity on us. Lamb of God, you who
take away the sins of the world, give us peace.*



*A pencil sketch of Brian Brockless by Katy Jackson,
commissioned by his wife*



Recorded on 5 March 2026 in St Mary's Church, Stoke d'Abernon (*Toccata upon Tallis' Ninth Tune*), on 2 and 3 May 2026 in Stockbridge Parish Church, Edinburgh (*Toccata for an Occasion*; *Berceuse*; *An English Elegy*; *Orion*), on 28 March and 28 June 2026 in St John's Church, Redhill (*French Suite*; *Three Poems of Shelley*), on 6 and 7 May in a Cambridge recital hall (*May the Grace*; *Three Young Rats*; *Prayers*; *Tallis' Ninth Tune*; *Looking for a Sunset Bird in Winter*; *Missa Brevis*) and on 9 May 2026 in the Church of St Peter and St Paul, Godalming (*Prayer for a Choir Boy*)

With grateful thanks for practical assistance in bringing this recording to completion: Jenny Brockless, Victoria Crawley, Ann De Renais, Katherine Dienes-Williams, James Gooding, Matthew Greenfield, Kana Kawashima, Daniel Schroyens and Claire Tait

Thanks are owed also to the Church of St Peter and St Paul, Godalming, St John's Church, Redhill, St Mary's Church, Stoke d'Abernon, and Stockbridge Parish Church, Edinburgh, for making their instruments and facilities available.

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