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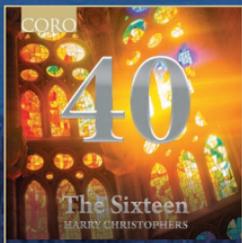
Highlights from some of the most celebrated recordings from Harry Christophers and his award-winning ensemble. Equally appealing to fans of The Sixteen and those who are new to the group, this disc provides a definitive collection of familiar classics and lesser-known treasures.

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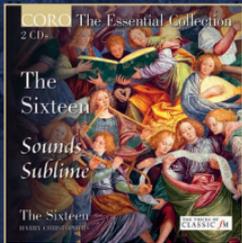
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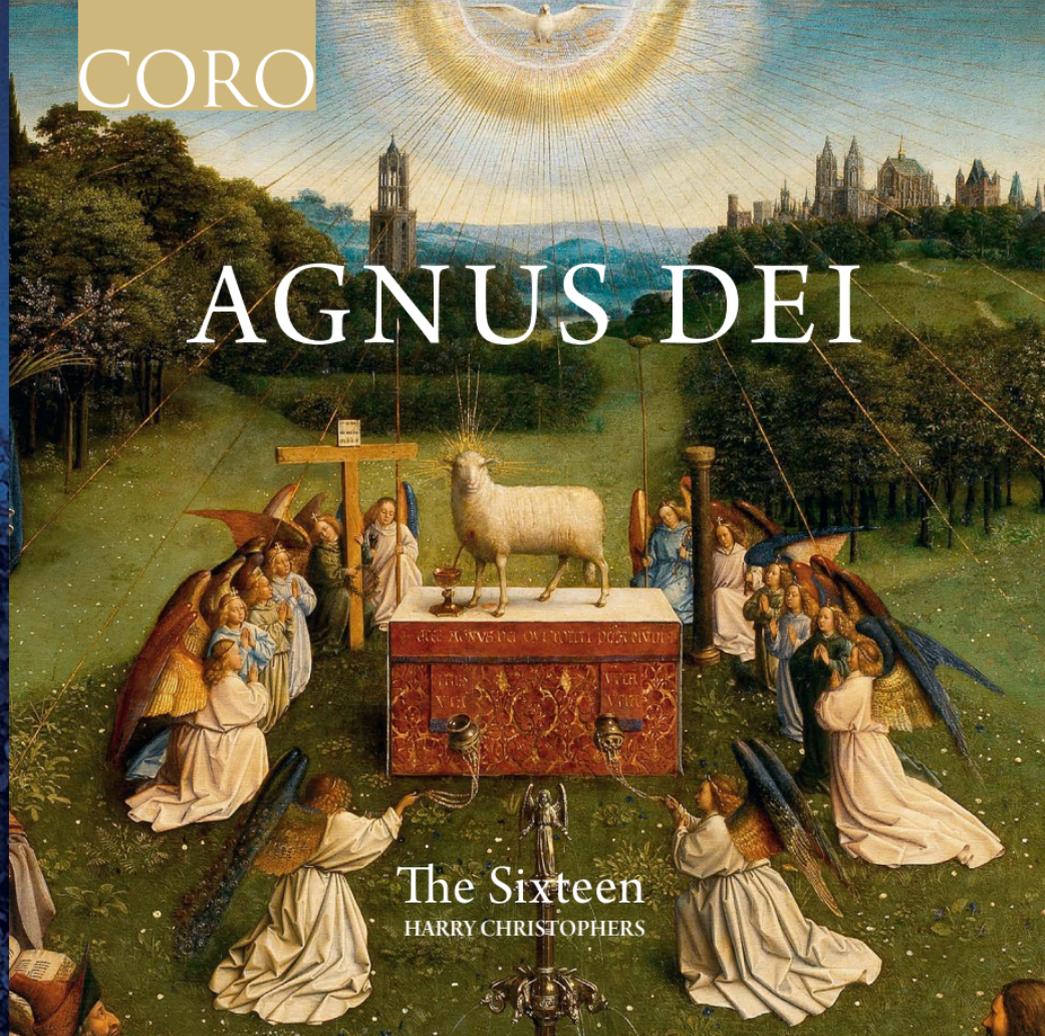


CORO

AGNUS DEI

The Sixteen
HARRY CHRISTOPHERS

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Photograph: Marco Borggreve

There are certain texts which inspire composers more than others, but there is one in particular that has provided us with sublime music ever since it appeared centuries ago, and that is *Agnus Dei*. We all know it as the last movement of the Mass sung after the breaking of bread at Communion, but where did it originate? We need to go back to St John's Gospel and the moment when, on seeing Jesus, John the Baptist proclaims the words:

Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

In Renaissance Mass settings we not only get one polyphonic setting closing with the words *miserere nobis* (have mercy upon us) but two, the second ending with *dona nobis pacem* (give us peace). The result is music of incredible calm but nevertheless full of deep emotion.

In this compilation we have chosen as many varied settings as possible, from Palestrina's legendary *Missa Papae Marcelli* to Bach's majestic close to the *Mass in B minor* replete with trumpets and drums, and then Fauré's eternally sympathetic rendition from his *Requiem*.

I am sure, like you, I would be hard pushed to choose my favourite Renaissance setting when one is featuring the likes of Victoria, Duarte Lôbo and Tallis but, if push came to shove, I would be veering towards Tye or Sheppard. Time just stands still while we sit back and listen to those arching melismas and subtle imitation. We have included the masters of the Baroque alongside some less-well-known composers, from Monteverdi and Handel to Domenico Scarlatti and Pękiel. And then to the modern day; the variety of settings and musical language is quite astounding from Rubbra and Martin to Britten and Poulenc; the latter's soaring soprano solo at the opening is so poignant and ethereal and sung so effortlessly here by Julie Cooper.

The album closes with one of the most famous settings written in more recent times, that of Samuel Barber, but one which most of you will know as a piece without words, his *Adagio for Strings*. Barber took this work through numerous transformations. Originally, it was the slow movement of his Opus 11 string quartet which he wrote in 1936; he then re-arranged it for string orchestra, immortalised in Leonard Bernstein's recording, where every sinew of emotion is accentuated, and then 30 years later he reworked it to the words of *Agnus Dei*. It rarely leaves a dry eye.

Harry
Christophers

AGNUS DEI

1	GABRIEL FAURÉ (1845-1924)	Agnus Dei (from <i>Requiem</i> , Op. 48)	5.16
2	THOMAS TALLIS (c.1505-85)	Agnus Dei (from <i>Missa Puer natus est nobis</i>)	8.53
3	DOMENICO SCARLATTI (1685-1757)	Agnus Dei (from <i>Missa Breve 'La Stella'</i>)	1.44
4	TOMÁS LUIS DE VICTORIA (1548-1611)	Agnus Dei I, II & III (from <i>Requiem</i> of 1605)	3.57
5	CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI (1567-1643)	Agnus Dei (from <i>Messa a 4 da cappella</i> , SV 257)	2.06
6	EDMUND RUBBRA (1901-88)	Agnus Dei (from <i>Missa Cantuariensis</i> , Op. 59)	2.04
7	ORLANDE DE LASSUS (c.1532-94)	Agnus Dei (from <i>Missa Bell' amfritit' altera</i>)	4.29
8	J S BACH (1685-1750)	Agnus Dei – Dona nobis pacem (from <i>Mass in B minor</i> , BWV 232)	2.40
9	DUARTE LÓBO (c.1565-1646)	Agnus Dei (from <i>Missa pro defunctis a 8</i>)	2.33
10	BARTŁOMIEJ PEKIEL (fl.1633-70)	Agnus Dei (from <i>Missa Concertata 'La Lombardesca'</i>) (Conductor: Eamonn Dougan)	1.47

11	FRANK MARTIN (1890-1974)	Agnus Dei (from <i>Mass for Double Choir</i>)	5.42
12	G P DA PALESTRINA (1525-94)	Agnus Dei (from <i>Missa Papae Marcelli</i>)	3.34
13	BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913-76)	Agnus Dei (from <i>Missa Brevis in D</i> , Op. 63)	2.10
14	CHRISTOPHER TYE (c.1505-73)	Agnus Dei (from <i>Missa Euge bone</i>)	6.30
15	GREGORIO ALLEGRI (1582-1652)	Agnus Dei (from <i>Missa Che fa oggi il mio sole</i>)	4.15
16	FRANCIS POULENC (1899-1963)	Agnus Dei (from <i>Mass in G</i> , FP 89) (Soli: Julie Cooper <i>soprano</i> , Kim Porter <i>alto</i> , Jeremy Budd <i>tenor</i> , Ben Davies <i>bass</i>)	4.39
17	JOHN SHEPPARD (c.1515-58)	Agnus Dei (from <i>Missa Cantate</i>)	4.55
18	G F HANDEL (1685-1759)	Behold, the Lamb of God (from <i>Messiah</i> , HWV 56)	3.13
19	MANUEL CARDOSO (1566-1650)	Agnus Dei (from <i>Missa Regina caeli</i>)	2.11
20	SAMUEL BARBER (1910-81)	Agnus Dei (Solo: Ruth Dean <i>soprano</i>)	8.29
Total running time			81.11

The compositions on this album, diverse in style and from four different centuries, share a common feeling for one of the simplest of all Christian prayers, a humble petition to *Agnus Dei*, the Lamb of God. In early Christian times Jesus became synonymous with the lamb slaughtered to satisfy one of the divine laws of the Jewish festival of Passover. The paschal lamb represented purity, innocence, helplessness. Yet it also stood for almighty power. Mankind's sins were redeemed not, as St Peter so memorably put it, by the payment of "corruptible things, like silver or gold" but by "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot". The apostle's words recall those of John the Baptist after he first saw Jesus: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

The Lamb of God appears in private prayers, public rituals and countless devotional images and liturgical texts. Its message is perhaps most memorably expressed in the *Agnus Dei*. This three-line prayer from the Latin Mass probably originated in the Syrian practice of venerating the Lamb of God and was most likely added to the Mass in the

late seventh century. As part of the so-called Ordinary of the Mass, repeated daily without variation, it follows the *fractio panis* or breaking of the bread during Communion. The *Agnus Dei* acquired a rich repertory of plainsong and polyphonic settings over many centuries. The prayer, meanwhile, was modified to suit the mood of the Requiem Mass, transforming its plea from the living for God's mercy into a petition calling for the dead to receive eternal rest.

Fauré's Requiem, an exquisite early product of Belle Époque Paris, was originally written in 1888 for the funeral service of an architect. The composer gave himself licence to freshen the stuffy atmosphere of the funerals he had known for so many years as organist and choirmaster. He lightened the sombre Requiem text with music that echoes the style of his secular songs, notably so in his tender setting of the *Agnus Dei*, at once seductive and reverent.

The *Missa Puer natus est nobis* ('A child is born to us') may have been composed for a special service held at St Paul's Cathedral on Advent Sunday 1554 for Mary Tudor and her husband, the future Philip II of Spain. **Tallis's** intricate counterpoint for seven voices, a

musical adornment of the Catholic ritual that had only recently been restored to England, is certainly in keeping with an occasion of such religious and political significance. Tallis captures the affective power of the *Agnus Dei*, creating space for listeners to meditate on the innocence of the child Jesus and of the crucified Christ. His contemporary, **Christopher Tye**, learned his craft as a student and lay clerk at King's College, Cambridge, and composed works for the Chapel Royal under Edward VI and Mary Tudor. Tye's *Missa Euge bone* for six voices, although possibly his doctoral submission to Cambridge University, most likely dates from Mary's reign. Its *Agnus Dei* displays Tye's total mastery of counterpoint, skilfully woven to create tonal and textural contrasts between groups of high and low voices.

Domenico Scarlatti makes a virtue of concision in the *Agnus Dei* of his early *Missa Breve 'La Stella'* (a Mass shortened by omission of the *Credo*), graced by its melodic charm and lucid mix of solo and choral voices. While Scarlatti is best known today for his industrial-scale production of keyboard sonatas, **Gregorio Allegri** is famous for one thing, a setting of the

Miserere. He rose from humble origins to become music director of the papal choir, for which he wrote his greatest hit and much more. Allegri's *Missa Che fa oggi il mio sole*, based on a lively madrigal by Luca Marenzio, is cast in the old style of church counterpoint. Each voice of its *Agnus Dei* combines with its fellows to create an interdependent network, metaphor for an essential truth of God's creation.

The Spaniard **Tomás Luis de Victoria**, an ordained priest who wrote nothing but sacred music, was known for his 'naturally sunny' disposition and unshakeable Roman Catholic faith. He composed his *Requiem* in 1603 for the funeral of the Dowager Empress María of Austria, Philip II's sister, and published it two years later as *Officium defunctorum*. Victoria's unadorned counterpoint projects every word of the *Agnus Dei* with the utmost dignity. There's something of the theatre of death about **Duarte Lôbo's** austere *Missa pro defunctis* for eight voices, embodied in the solo tenor's *Agnus* chants and sustained chordal responses that follow. The Portuguese composer intensifies the drama with each petition from the choir before finding

peace in the closing “*sempiternam*”. Lôbo’s countryman and contemporary **Manuel Cardoso**, who studied music from an early age, became a monk in Lisbon in the late 1580s. His music and piety attracted the patronage of João II, the Duke of Bragança, Portugal’s future King João IV, and of Philip IV of Spain. Cardoso’s second book of Masses (1636), dedicated to the Duke of Bragança, contains the *Missa Regina caeli*. The composer crowns his uplifting mass to Mary, Queen of Heaven, with a blissful *Agnus Dei*.

Monteverdi’s music triggered the late 16th-century equivalent of a Twitter storm, attracting criticism from conservatives offended by the expressive dissonances of his revolutionary new music for the church. While he was ready to break time-honoured rules, he also knew how to apply them: his *Messa a 4*, for instance, echoes the style of counterpoint associated with **Palestrina** and others active around three generations before the work’s publication in 1641. Monteverdi’s heartfelt *Agnus Dei* is informed by the past but not inhibited by it; in fact, his setting stands comparison with the final *Agnus* for seven voices from

the *Missa Papae Marcelli*, one of the most famous of all 16th-century compositions. Palestrina’s ‘Pope Marcellus’ Mass became the model for Roman Catholic composers to follow during Counter-Reformation times.

Edmund Rubbra, with encouragement from his working-class parents, gained a scholarship to study music at the Royal College of Music, where his composition teachers included Gustav Holst and Ralph Vaughan Williams. Music’s spiritual nature was of supreme importance to him. “I’m old-fashioned enough to believe that the highest function of music is to release one from personal pre-occupation in order to know something of the Divine forces that shape all existence”, he observed in the 1950s. Rubbra’s belief in a higher power underpins the majesty of his *Missa Cantuariensis*, written for Canterbury Cathedral in 1945. The work’s *Agnus Dei* enlists the timeless technique of canon to convey a sense of the infinite.

Born in the Flemish province of Hainaut, **Orlande de Lassus** developed his all-round musical skills in Italy before joining the Duke of Bavaria’s court in Munich. His *Missa Bell’ amfritit’ altera*, based on the

melody of a now lost madrigal, remained unpublished until 1610, when it was included in a posthumous collection of the composer’s Masses for six or eight voices. The work’s *Agnus Dei* finds the highest virtue in the combination of slow-moving eight-part counterpoint and contrasting choral textures.

Although Latin was occasionally heard in the Lutheran church, it seems likely that **Johann Sebastian Bach** created his great *Mass in B minor* to impress the new Elector of Saxony, a Catholic convert, in the hope of securing a job. A more recent theory suggests that it was compiled for performance at the Roman Catholic Cathedral of St Stephen’s in Vienna. The *Agnus Dei*, like so much of the Mass, was recycled from one of the composer’s existing pieces, an aria in German from a wedding serenade, now lost.

Overseas trade and a close connection with Italy brought abundant wealth and fresh ideas to Poland during the Renaissance and beyond. The multi-ethnic Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, as it became in the late 1560s, was one of Europe’s largest and most prosperous territories. The latest trends in sacred music, especially those promoted by

the Counter-Reformation, were cultivated at the court of Sigismund III Vasa and his successors, chiefly by Italians but also by such outstanding homegrown talent as **Bartłomiej Pękiel**. The *Missa Concertata ‘La Lombardesca’*, a vibrant blend of voices and instruments, contains some of Pękiel’s finest music, nothing finer than its spellbinding *Agnus Dei*.

Now almost a century old, **Frank Martin’s** *Mass for Double Choir* was written as a private confession of faith. The Geneva-born composer clearly found inspiration in sacred music’s past yet used modern harmonies to colour the ancient Latin text. His sublime *Agnus Dei* setting sounds more like an extended love-letter to the Lamb of God than a supplicant’s plea for mercy. **Benjamin Britten** was inspired by the choir of Westminster Cathedral, and above all by its full-throated boy choristers, to write his first (and only) setting of the Mass. When he learned that George Malcolm was soon to retire as the Catholic institution’s Master of Music, Britten composed the *Missa Brevis* in time for one of his friend’s final services. Its “slow and solemn” *Agnus Dei* packs a great deal into a small space and, with

brehtaking economy of means, raises the tension with each statement of the prayer's petition.

Unlike Britten, a dentist's son burdened by the English obsession with class, **Francis Poulenc**, scion of a rich bourgeois family, waged a long struggle with religion. He broke with the Catholicism of his childhood to enjoy the profane pleasures of interwar Paris, but returned to the faith in 1936 following a pilgrimage to Notre Dame de Rocamadour. Poulenc's *Mass in G*, a *Missa Brevis* in all but name, dates from the following year. The crystalline soprano solo of its *Agnus Dei* and the chant-like choral writing it engenders evoke the mystery of faith, redolent of something infinitely greater than the little self that all too often holds our minds captive.

In 1552 **John Sheppard**, former choir master at Magdalen College, Oxford, became a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal. Like his older colleagues Tallis and Tye, he composed sumptuous polyphonic works for Mary Tudor's Latin liturgy. Sheppard's *Missa Cantate*, possibly written during the final years of Henry VIII's reign, is based on an unknown model identified only by one

word, *cantate* or 'sing', an instruction ideally suited to a work hallmarked by flowing vocal lines like those of its *Agnus Dei*.

Christ's crucifixion, the supreme act of divine love and of a son's unconditional obedience to his father's will, heralds the overcoming of death, the forgiveness of sin and the promise of everlasting life. **George Frideric Handel** captures the human drama of the Passion story in his oratorio *Messiah*. The composer punctuates its brutal narrative with moments of reflection, none more profound or affecting than the chorus *Behold, the Lamb of God*.

Modernism periodically filtered into the music of **Samuel Barber** without ever compromising his love for lyrical melody and lush romantic harmonies. His *Agnus Dei*, perhaps the greatest choral transcription of an instrumental work ever made, began life in 1936 as the second movement of his String Quartet and was soon immortalised by its composer in his arrangement for string orchestra, the *Adagio for Strings*. Barber returned to the piece again in 1967, finding it to be the perfect match for the words and sentiment of the *Agnus Dei* prayer.

Harry Christophers stands among today's great champions of choral music. In partnership with The Sixteen, the ensemble he founded almost 40 years ago, he has set benchmark standards for the performance of everything from late medieval polyphony to important new works by contemporary composers. His international influence is supported by more than 150 recordings and has been enhanced by his work as Artistic Director of Boston's Handel and Haydn Society and as guest conductor worldwide.

The Sixteen's soundworld, rich in tonal variety and expressive nuance, reflects Christophers' determination to create a vibrant choral instrument from the blend of adult professional singers. Under his leadership The Sixteen has established its annual Choral Pilgrimage to cathedrals, churches and other UK venues, created the *Sacred Music* series for BBC television, and developed an acclaimed period-instrument orchestra. Highlights of their recent work include an Artist Residency at Wigmore Hall, a large-scale tour of Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610*, and the world premiere of James MacMillan's *Stabat mater*; their future projects, meanwhile, comprise a new series devoted to Purcell and an ongoing survey of Handel's dramatic oratorios.

Harry has served as Artistic Director of the Handel and Haydn Society since 2008. He was also appointed as Principal Guest Conductor of the City of Granada Orchestra in 2008 and has worked as guest conductor with, among others, the London Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic, the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra and the Deutsches Kammerphilharmonie. Christophers' extensive commitment to opera has embraced productions for English National Opera and Lisbon Opera and work with the Granada, Buxton and Grange festivals.



Photograph: Marco Borggreve

He was appointed a CBE in the Queen's 2012 Birthday Honours for his services to music. He is an Honorary Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, as well as the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, and has Honorary Doctorates in Music from the Universities of Leicester, Northumbria, Canterbury Christ Church and Kent.

§ The Sixteen

Whether performing a simple medieval hymn or expressing the complex musical and emotional language of a contemporary choral composition, The Sixteen does so with qualities common to all great ensembles. Tonal warmth, rhythmic precision and immaculate intonation are clearly

essential to the mix. But it is the courage and intensity with which The Sixteen makes music that speak above all to so many people.

The Sixteen gave its first concert in 1979 under the direction of Founder and Conductor Harry Christophers CBE. Their pioneering work since has made a profound impact on the performance of choral music and attracted a large new audience, not least as 'The Voices of Classic FM' and through BBC television's *Sacred Music* series.

The voices and period-instrument players of The Sixteen are at home in over five centuries of music, a breadth reflected in their annual Choral Pilgrimage to Britain's great cathedrals and sacred spaces, regular appearances at the world's leading concert halls, and award-winning recordings for The Sixteen's CORO and other labels.

Recent highlights include the world premiere of James MacMillan's *Symphony No. 5*, *Le grand Inconnu*, commissioned for The Sixteen by the Genesis Foundation, an ambitious ongoing series of Handel oratorios, and a debut tour of China.

§ The Sixteen

HARRY CHRISTOPHERS



Tracks are taken from the following recordings available on CORO:



- 1** COR16057
Fauré: Requiem
Live at the Barbican Hall, London
(with The Academy of St Martin in the Fields) August 2007



- 2** COR16037
Philip & Mary
St Jude on the Hill, Hampstead Garden Suburb, London
January 1998



- 3** COR16003
Iste Confessor
St Augustine's Church, Kilburn, London
April 1997



- 4** CORSACD16033
Victoria: Requiem of 1605
St Silas the Martyr, Kentish Town, London
April 2005



- 5** COR16101
Monteverdi: Selva morale e spirituale Vol II
St Silas the Martyr, Kentish Town, London
May & November 2011



- 6** COR16144
Edmund Rubbra
St Alban the Martyr, Holborn, London
January 2016



- 7** COR16053
Venetian Treasures
St Jude on the Hill, Hampstead Garden Suburb, London
January 1992



- 8** COR16044
J.S. Bach: Mass in B minor
St Augustine's Church, Kilburn, London
April 1994



- 9** COR16032
Renaissance Portugal
St Jude on the Hill, Hampstead Garden Suburb, London
June 1993



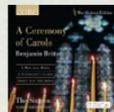
- 10** COR16110
Bartłomiej Pękiel
St Silas the Martyr, Kentish Town, London
October 2012
Eamonn Dougan conductor



- 11** COR16029
Frank Martin
St Michael's Church, Highgate, London
September 1995



- 12** COR16014
Allegri: Miserere
St Jude on the Hill, Hampstead Garden Suburb, London
November 1989



- 13** COR16034
A Ceremony of Carols
St Michael's Church, Highgate, London
September 1992



- 14** COR16056
Treasures of Tudor England
St Paul's Church, Deptford, London
October 2007



- 15** COR16047
Music from the Sistine Chapel
St Silas the Martyr, Kentish Town, London
November 2006



- 16** COR16149
Francis Poulenc
St Alban the Martyr, Holborn, London
November 2016



- 17** COR16170
An Enduring Voice
St Augustine's Church, Kilburn, London
November 2018



- 18** COR16062
Handel: Messiah
St Paul's Church, Deptford, London
November 2007



- 19** COR16032
Renaissance Portugal
St Jude on the Hill, Hampstead Garden Suburb, London
June 1993



- 20** COR16031
Barber Agnus Dei - An American Collection
Snape Maltings, Snape, Suffolk
January 1991

COMPILATION BY: The Sixteen Productions

MASTERING ENGINEER: Tom Lewington (Floating Earth)

COVER IMAGE: *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, from the Ghent Altarpiece by Hubert Eyck (c.1370-1426) & Jan van Eyck (1390-1441)
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