

For Benjamin Nicholas, Merton College Choir and Nigel Hamway – with enormous gratitude

# The Merton Service

for SSATBB and Organ

## MAGNIFICAT

Roxanna Panufnik

Oscillating between uncertainty and excitement  $\text{♩} = 78$

Soprano 1 & 2

Alto

Tenor

Bar. & Bass

Organ

$\text{♩} = 78$

$\text{pp}$

$\text{p}$

$8'$

*(Mary's emotions are all over the place ... She's not sure which way to turn.)*

S.1&2

A.

T.

B.1&2

$\text{mp}$

$\text{mp}$

$\text{mp}$

$\text{mp}$

## NUNC DIMITTIS

Tranquil ♩ = 44

S.1&2

A.

II *p*

3

S.1&2

A.

5

S.1&2

A.

B.1&2

Lord, now let test thy thou ser - - - vant de - part

\*) can be a solo, until bar 92

I was thrilled to be commissioned again by Merton College Choir, so soon after my anthem *Nocturn* for them. However, having already set the Canticles twice, I panicked a little about whether I could do something completely different with the same words. So, I sent a survey to the choir members, whom I had met on several happy occasions, as I knew that they would come up with some great ideas. And they did. I have tried to incorporate as many of their requests (in bold below) as I could and am so grateful for the musical ideas they inspired.

Starting with a request for **story-telling**, the Magnificat ('oscillating between uncertainty and excitement'), in **D flat major**, begins hesitantly with a **sense of unease**, as the Virgin Mary grapples with the momentous news that she is to bear God's son. The mood swings between scared and excited through **melisma** and **expression in rich and crunchy harmonies** (trying to incorporate the latter without sounding too louche for this reverential moment), **soprano suspensions with altos** and swaying gently in 12/8. The mood becomes more assertive at 'He hath showed strength...' and then ecstatic for the 'Glory be...'.

The Nunc Dimitis in **G flat major**, begins in a more 'tranquil' **reflective mood** as Simeon welcomes a peaceful end now he has seen the salvation of the infant Jesus's arrival into the world. These two people are represented by frequent duets between sopranos and basses, with Simeon's bass frequently coming out over the choir. It doesn't stay that way for long, though, as it becomes something in which you can really sing your heart out with a good build up from quiet to loud, more **melisma** and **ornamentation** enhancing the emotional atmosphere. Having been in 4/4, we return to an 'even more ecstatic' 12/8 'Glory be' from the Magnificat.

I'm hoping that I have also fulfilled a request for the **bewitching and sublime** – but the audience and performers will be the judge of that. The Magnificat is five minutes and the Nunc Dimitis three minutes.

I'm hugely grateful to Ben Nicholas and Merton College Choir for commissioning me and to Nigel Hamway for supporting the commission.

Roxanna Panufnik, 16 July 2025

*Commissioned by Merton College, Oxford and sponsored by Nigel Hamway*

*First performed on Sunday 26 October 2025 by the Choir of Merton College, Oxford,  
conducted by Benjamin Nicholas with Anna Steppeler (organ)*