



PROJECT MUSE®

---

*Choral Ikons* (review)

Mary Rose Adkins

Notes, Volume 66, Number 3, March 2010, p. 632 (Review)

Published by Music Library Association

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/not.0.0298>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/376393>

**Choral Ikons.** DVD. James Whitbourn / The Choir. Heathfield, East Sussex, UK: Opus Arte, 2002. OA 0855 D. \$25.00.

This film presents several *a capella* sacred choral works by Sir John Tavener in a virtual reality presentation featuring the Hagia Sophia church in Istanbul interspersed with Orthodox icons. Conductor James Whitbourn and his vocal ensemble, The Choir, are placed in the church and in front of icons. Individual singers and pairings of singers are also a part of many of the pieces. There are some pieces in which the church or the icons are presented with the choral music only heard. Whitbourn and The Choir give a very impressive and spiritual performance with attention to the importance of the religious text.

The choral works performed in this film are: *As One Who Has Slept*; *A Hymn to the Mother of God*; *Song for Athene*; *A Parting Gift for Tam Farrow*; *Annunciation*; *Magnificat*; *Nunc Dimittis*; *The Lamb*; *The Tyger*; *The Hymn of the Unwaning Light*; and *The Lord's Prayer*.

The DVD has three parts: "Choral Ikons," which is the performance of the pieces; "Manifestations of God," featuring Tavener's own words on the creation and meaning of his compositions, and "The Ikon Chooses You," an historical explanation on the artistic and religious origins of icons.

The viewer may choose to watch "Manifestations of God" to hear about all the pieces performed, or view the segment on each piece after viewing the performance of the individual pieces. Regardless of the order the viewer selects, Tavener's explanations of the texts, the occasions or events associated with composing some of the pieces, and his views on the "cosmic events" of the lives of Jesus and Mary, the Mother of God are a valuable and enlightening feature of this film. Tavener points out sections of Byzantine text, most of which deal with the risen Christ.

The pieces performed in this film deal with several spiritual concepts and entities, including Mary, the Mother of God and the

resurrected Christ. It also includes Tavener's choral settings for two poems by William Blake: *The Lamb* and *The Tyger*. Perhaps the best known piece in the film is *Song for Athene*, written on the death of a friend's daughter. An interview with the parents of Athene is included with the composer's description of the piece and the event. The most dramatic work and perhaps the climax of the film is "The Hymn of the Unwaning Light." This hymn of Resurrection proclaims that "Christ is risen from the dead; trampling down death by death . . ." Tavener explains that is a processional in one of the Easter services. The performance of the choir brings out this aspect of the hymn by beginning the piece at some distance from the conductor and walking forward for some sections so that they are right in front of the conductor as the piece ends.

The third segment of the DVD, "The Ikon Chooses You," features Robert J. Roozemond, director of the Ikon Museum, Stichting ODIGIA-Instituut, The Hague, The Netherlands. Roozemond lectures on the origin and history of the icon in Christianity, including the definition, religious meaning, and the painting technique. His definition of an icon is that it is "essentially an image of the word." The title of this feature refers to Roozemond's comment that when he assists an Orthodox family looking for an icon for their home he believes "the icon chooses them."

This DVD will interest viewers of several types. Those performing, researching, or conducting sacred choral works will find the performance of the pieces and the segment by Tavener enjoyable and educational. For those interested in Orthodox icons and their spiritual meaning, the segment with Roozemond should not be missed.

MARY ROSE ADKINS  
*University of North Carolina, Charlotte*

**Music for Airports.** DVD. Directed by Frank Scheffer. Music by Brian Eno. Performed by Bang on a Can All-Stars. [London]: Medici Arts, 2008. 3077558. \$24.99.