Programme note for *Nonmoriar*

Non moriar is a semi-improvised piece based on the "cantus firmus" line from a motet by Martin Luther, who, 503 years ago on 31 October,famously nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of All Saints Church in Wittenberg. This text (Psalm 118:17) seems to have been a favourite of his, in fact he is said to have inscribed both the words and the chant melody onto the wall of his study in Coburg. Speaking as it does of the triumph over life over death, it seems appropriate for an Allhallowtide concert.

When choirs are prevented from meeting by a pandemic, what methods can they find to keep singing? Online conferencing tools such as Zoom are not well suited to choral music-making, for example because of the time lag and the difficulty of balancing sound levels. One alternative is the so-called "virtual choir", where each singer sends in a recording of themself singing along to a guide track, and the recordings are stitched together electronically. This technique has stood us in good stead since March, but it is a time-consuming and somewhat artificial process.

What if, instead of striving to recreate the precise ensemble of a "real-world" choir, we went in a different direction, and each set our own tempo? For this piece, rather than assembling recordings made by isolated individuals at different times, we each recorded our part simultaneously during a Zoom meeting: physically distanced, but singing together, in real time, "as live".

The resulting combined recordings, with minimal editing, were playedinto the familiar (and much-missed) acoustic of the Memorial Chapel, where an organ part was improvised over the top by Kevin Bowyer.

The handwriting and artwork that accompanies the piece was contributed by choir members past and present. It was inspired by Luther's writing of the text on his wall, and the contribution he made to a literate society in translating the Bible into the vernacular.