

Full Score

# The Story of St Alban

For Narrator, Children's Choir, Baritone, SATB Choir and Ensemble



**Music: Liz Lane**  
**Words: Andy Rashleigh**



## Programme notes

*The subject matter of this iconic figure in history is a complex one but has been interpreted in an up-to-date way by the words of librettist Andy Rashleigh, mixing the pathos of Alban himself (baritone) with the chirpy pagans (children), the commentating chorus who take a variety of important roles, the narrator linking the characters and all underpinned by the soloistic and supporting role of the ensemble.*

*I wrote the ending - in this case the setting of the St Alban Prayer - near the beginning of the composition process and this became the basis from which the whole oratorio evolved, with various melodies, harmonies and motifs branching out like a tree to the rest of the music. The subject matter of course is not always pretty and I was grateful for the Prayer's tonality to ground my harmonic language throughout, interspersing with the more dissonantly portrayed dramatic and dreadful aspects of the story.*

*When writing *The Story of St Alban*, I was surprised how few people I talked to knew of the tale behind his sainthood. I hope this new work will help bring to light this important figure who, as the St Alban Prayer states at the beginning: 'Among the roses of the martyrs brightly shines Saint Alban'.*

Liz Lane, 2015  
[www.lizlane.co.uk](http://www.lizlane.co.uk)

# The Story of St Alban

## **Narrator**

Britannia: the Final Frontier.

When Roman troops occupied this island in the year 43, the natives could either fight and die or live in peace with the occupying forces.

One who died, fighting for her people's freedom, was Boudicca who burnt to the ground the Roman capital of Camulodunum, its trading port, Londinium and a prosperous market town, called Verulamium.

Verulamium was rebuilt and became the third wealthiest city in Britannia.

After two hundred years the local Celts and occupying forces had learned to work together: they inter-married, prospered and worshipped Roman gods.

And so in the furthest flung part of the greatest empire Europe had ever known, many of its native people became Roman citizens.

## **1. Roman Britain**

### **Choir of nouveau riche, pis-elegant Britons.**

Diana brings the moon to shine at night  
Apollo drives the sun to light our way  
Great Jove, you spare us from fields of Mars,  
It is to you we sacrifice and pray.

### **Alban**

Civis Romanus Sum!  
Civis Romanus Sum!  
Civis Romanus Sum!  
Civis Romanus Sum!

### **Women**

How we adore our central-heated homes,  
The banquets, waited on by handsome slaves.  
And gossip in the forum, heated baths  
Or theatre with its saucy comic plays.

### **Men**

We've learnt to live sophisticated lives  
And speak the Latin tongue, although we grant,  
Pronounce it with an accent all our own -  
'Amo, amas, amat, amat's amarnt'.

### **Narrator**

Life was easy for the newly sophisticated citizens of Rome. And the Governor knew how to keep them happy; how to keep the artisans happy; even to keep the slaves as happy as they could be. With bread and circuses.

### **Choir**

A bleating goat, a flock of sheep, a bear  
What fun it is to see the blood flow red.  
We thrill to watch a lion stalk the prey  
And tear it limb from limb until it's dead.

### **Narrator**

Then a strange sect made its appearance throughout the Empire. Followers of a long dead Jew called Jesus Christ whom they believed to be the son of the One True God. As the sect gained support, the Emperor Severus, feeling his own divinity to be threatened, licensed their persecution.

**Choir**

Best shows of all are days when people die  
The poisoner pinned down as food for rats,  
A cheating wife beneath a hail of rocks,  
And Christians torn to shreds by jungle cats.

**Narrator**

But the Christians would not willingly participate in the entertainment game.

**Choir**

These Christians do not run, they will not fight,  
But pray and sing until they're out of breath.  
They claim their god gave up his only son  
To die so they could live on after death.

**Narrator**

In Verulamium, some became intrigued: among them a respected Roman Citizen called Alban.

**Alban**

These Christian folk  
What do they want?  
There is nothing for them in our Roman world.

They act as though  
They understand  
An answer to a question no-one knows.

**Narrator**

But Britannia is an island covered in broadleaf forests. And human beings with all their conflicts are but recent visitors. The original inhabitants of this island are seldom seen but, believe me they are still here.

**Pagans**

Naiads, dryads, goblins, gnomes  
Call us what you like, cos we don't care  
Long legged beasties, ghoulies, ghosts,  
Can't see us, but we're always there.

Bogies, pixies, brownies, imps  
Ripe for mischief, up for fun  
Make you burp or even worse,  
Tickle your nose and make it run.

We can make you jump  
In the darkest dark  
With a crack of a twig  
What fun, what a lark.

We rustle in the leaves  
Then swing on a bough,  
Make the cry of a fox  
Or the screech of an owl.

If an acorn falls  
On your hatless head  
You think it was a squirrel  
But it's us instead.

When the sun goes down it's our delight  
Trip you, pinch you, give a little fright,  
So you run back home as fast you might.

When you're in bed and tucked up tight,  
Make room for us, we're the bugs that bite  
Make those things go bump in the night.

Naiads, dryads, goblins, gnomes  
Bogies, pixies, brownies, imps  
Long legged beasties, ghoulies, ghosts  
Ripe for mischief, ready for fun.

**Narrator**

These are the creatures of the night who keep nature in harmony with itself and bear witness to our troubles with wry amusement.

## 2. Amphibalus

**Narrator**

Throughout the Roman Empire brutal persecution of 'Christians' became ever more vicious. But the good hearted Alban was not in harmony with his time.

**Choir (the chasing mob) sing under Alban**

Catch him, beat him, knock him on the head,  
Feed him to the dogs when he's not quite dead.

**Alban**

An older man  
Approaching fast,  
Chased by a mob  
Who scented blood.

His breath was scant  
He did his best  
But losing ground  
There was no hope.

I did not think  
But pulled him hard  
In to my house  
And locked the door.

He needed food  
And drink, a bed  
Until such time  
As he could leave.

And when he spoke  
He talked of faith  
And love and of  
Forgiveness.

He'd set a course  
Through troubled seas  
No moon that night  
Nor stars to guide,

But all by chance  
He stumbled on  
A harbour safe  
To shelter in.

**Narrator**

The old man was a Christian priest, Amphibalus. Alban took his cloak and settled him comfortably by the fire. The priest spoke of his beliefs and Alban became intrigued.

**Alban**

What do you Christians ask of your god?

**Amphibalus (sopranos and altos)**

What can we ask?  
He gave his son,  
We cannot ask for more.

**Alban**

What do you want from Rome?

**Amphibalus**

All that we hope's  
To live in peace  
And worship as we wish.

We'll give to Caesar  
That which is his,  
To God our hearts and souls.

**Alban**

Are you afraid to die?

**Amphibalus**

Just like his son  
We'll rise again  
And rest in paradise.

**Alban**

Six days and nights, he shared the tales  
His saviour told when here on earth,  
Of how he cured the sick and lame,  
A simple message clear and strong.  
This faith was pure and so unlike  
The priestly cult we took from Rome  
No lust for power, money, social worth.  
I recognised my spiritual home.

If they should come  
To capture him  
I swear to God  
He shall escape.

He must be free  
To tell his tale,  
Spread the word  
Of sweet redemption.

### 3. The Arrest

**Alban**

God of the Christians  
I have no right to ask anything of you,  
But grant a way to save your  
Faithful priest, Amphibalus.

**Pagans**

They're getting close, no time to waste,  
Get out, you foolish man!  
They are too strong, you have no chance  
Go now as fast you can.

The clumpety clump of Roman boots.  
Will crush you like a fly  
We cannot stop them, nor can you,  
So be prepared to die.

*Loud banging on the door*

**Soldiers**

In the name of the Emperor Severus, unlock this door.

**Narrator**

Alban did not answer until he had bought enough time for Amphibalus to disappear into the night.

*More banging*

**Soldiers**

We know you shelter a so called Christian.  
As a Roman citizen it is your Imperial duty to give him up.

*More banging*

We will search your house and tear it down should we so wish.

**Alban**

I am here alone.

**Soldiers**

Is this your house?

**Alban**

As much as it is yours.  
I own nothing but my life  
And even that I give to Jesus Christ.  
My name is Amphibalus and I am the priest you seek.

**Soldiers**

Arrest him.  
Take him to the judge.  
He will stand trial for sacrilege and treason to the Emperor.



#### 4. Trial and Sentence

**Narrator**

Alban was taken to the basilica. The judge was sacrificing a goat to his gods: priests peered at its entrails for judicial guidance.

**Governor and Priests**

Is this the man we sent you to arrest?

**Soldiers**

He says his name is Amphibalus.

**Governor and Priests**

He is too young to be that man.

**Soldiers**

But he told us his name is Amphibalus.

**Governor and Priests**

And you were thick-headed enough to believe him!  
Imbeciles, idiots, clod-hopping fools.

*The soldiers mutter mutinously but musically.*

**Governor and Priests**

Silence!  
I know you.  
Your name is Alban is it not?

*No answer*

**Governor and Priests**

Where is the Christian that you sheltered?

*No answer*

Where is this so called priest Amphibalus?

*No answer*

You understand the punishment for protecting such as him?

*No answer*

Are you or have you ever been a follower of the mystic, Jesus Christ?

**Alban**

I am a Citizen of Rome.

**Governor and Priests**

Therefore like any citizen you worship the gods of Rome.

We are advised though you purport to be  
A man of worth and means,  
Your views on certain matters are unsound  
You're not what you may seem.

**Alban**

I am a Citizen of Rome.

**Governor and Priests**

Approach the altar and give sacrifice  
To all the gods on high  
Or feel the consequence of Roman law  
And be prepared to die.

*No response*

**Narrator**

The court deliberated: the court decided: the court passed sentence.

**Governor and Priests**

It is the decision of this court that Alban be punished as the Christian he sheltered will be punished in good time. He shall be taken from this court to a place of execution and there –

**Alban**

I am a Citizen of Rome.  
But I am Briton too  
A British Celt,  
A Christian soul  
Believer in the one true God  
Whose son gave up his life,  
Was crucified  
That we may have eternal life.

**5. The Martyrdom****Narrator**

Alban was taken under guard from the city to the execution site. Crowds blocked the bridge across the river.

**Pagans**

They poked and pushed him down to the riverside  
Drove him on, he might have drowned:  
Our water sprites had a word with the river god  
Who stopped its flow so he could cross.

Then up the hill they shoved him faster  
Puffing, panting, weak at the knees  
His mouth was dry and oh so thirsty,  
We drew a spring out of the ground.

And then we guessed they weren't just playing  
This wasn't fun, it was all for real  
We turned our backs so we couldn't see  
Just what fools these mortals be.

**Governor and Priests**

Do you have final words to speak?  
You must not pray or speak to your god  
But you may speak to us.

**Alban**

I freely gave to Caesar what I owed  
But to the Son of God, that which is his.  
You take my life in the Imperial name,  
And thus relinquish it to Jesus Christ.

This earthly life in brutal murder ends  
A new day dawns where all is pure and good

I have a journey, shortly needs must go,  
My saviour calls me, I must not say no.

**Narrator**

Alban was executed for his beliefs and so became the first Christian martyr from the Roman colony of Britannia.

**6. The Alban Prayer** *(adapted by kind permission of the Dean of St Alban's Cathedral)*

**Narrator**

Among the roses of the martyrs brightly shines Saint Alban.

**Omnes**

Almighty God,  
We thank you for the place built to your glory  
and in memory of Alban, our first martyr.  
Following his example in the fellowship of the saints,  
may we worship and adore the true and living God,  
and be faithful witnesses to the Christ,  
who is alive and reigns, now and for ever.  
Pray for us Alban, pray for us all Saints of God.  
That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.  
Amen.

## INSTRUMENTATION:

Narrator

Children's Choir

Baritone

SATB Choir

Flute/Piccolo

Oboe/Cor Anglais

Clarinet/Bass Clarinet

Horn

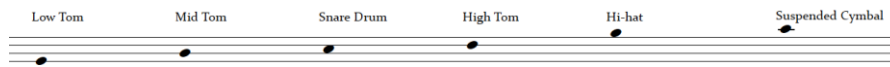
**Percussion:** suspended cymbal (including double bass bow if possible), hi-hat, snare drum, 3 tom-toms, glockenspiel, tubular bell (A)

Harp

Cello

Double Bass

### Drum Legend



Duration: 45 minutes

Score is transposed

*The Story of St Alban* was commissioned by St Albans Choral Society and first performed by St Albans Choral Society, narrator Andy Rashleigh, children's choirs from St Albans and London Colney, baritone Michael Bundy and members of Orchestra Nova, conductor George Vass, at the Weston Auditorium, De Havilland Campus, Hertfordshire University, Hatfield, UK, 12 July 2015.