

*The Chantry Singers*

**ENGLISH  
SACRED MUSIC FOR  
CHOIR AND ORGAN**

Organ -- Neil Maddox

Conductor -- Timothy Venvell

Chilworth Friary

Saturday 30th June 1990 8.00 p.m.

Admission by programme  
price £3.00 (concession £2.00)

## PROGRAMME

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| 1. Sing Joyfully<br>Salvator mundi   | Byrd<br>Tallis |
| 2. Fantasia in 4 parts for organ   | Gibbons        |
| 3. Mass in 4 parts<br>Kyrie : Gloria : Credo : Sanctus :<br>Benedictus : Agnus Dei | Byrd           |

## INTERVAL OF TWENTY MINUTES

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| 4. My beloved spake  | Hadley         |
| 5. Requiem<br>i Salvator mundi<br>ii Psalm 23<br>iii Requiem aeternam (I)<br>iv Psalm 121<br>v Requiem aeternam (II)<br>vi I heard a voice from heaven | Howells        |
| 6. Siciliana for High Ceremony   | Howells        |
| 7. Ave Maria<br>God is gone up   | Holst<br>Finzi |

## Programme Notes

If Byrd (1543-1623) had lived 150 years later, he would probably be talked of more readily in the same breath as Bach and Mozart, for he was undoubtedly the most gifted and prolific composer of his generation, achieving pre-eminence not just in the church sphere, but in the instrumental sphere, especially keyboard. However, it is his choral music which keeps Byrd's name before modern audiences, and it was in his church music that the contradictions in Byrd's life were most obviously worked out. Byrd was a practising Catholic in a distinctly Protestant court, and that he was tolerated in court circles at all is perhaps testimony to Elizabeth I's pragmatism rather than any personal conviction on her part. He assuaged his Protestant patronage by writing a number of English anthems and service settings for the Church of England, and tonight's first item is a good example. Its six-part counterpoint gives way at suitable moments to a rich chordal texture (e.g. *Blow the trumpet*), and provides a vigorous setting of the first four verses of psalm 81. Byrd's preference for the Catholic rite was given utterance publicly in the publication of his *Gradualia*, a substantial collection of Latin motets, and in his composition of three Mass settings, for three, four and five voices respectively. It is not certain when these

were composed, but it was probably in the last decade of the Tudor century (the 1590s). What is more certain is that the Mass settings would never have been publicly used in a service in the anti-Roman climate of the time, and it is conceivable that they received their first performances in the atmosphere of priest-holes and clandestine Mass celebrations deep in some country-house, far from London. The four-part mass is heard most today, being set for the traditional S.A.T.B. choir. The three-part Mass has no sopranos, and the five-part Mass has two tenor parts, neither feature likely to endear these Masses to the modern choral conductor. The four-part Mass setting takes the usual form - Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Benedictus, Agnus Dei - and is notable for the variety of texture Byrd achieves, especially in the longer movements, where one voice is dropped in turn, to give a constantly changing three-part texture.

In between the two Byrd pieces, we have a motet by Byrd's older contemporary, Thomas Tallis (1505-1585), and an organ fantasia by his younger contemporary, Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625). Tallis, like Byrd, managed to keep his head (literally!) as the religious climate swung from one extreme to the other as the 16th

century progressed, but wrote more Latin settings than English, due to his earlier historical position. *Salvator mundi* is a typical early Tudor motet, with perhaps less variety than a Byrd motet, but a strong, rich texture always present. Particularly notable are the two alto parts weaving patterns in the middle of the texture, and the presence of the occasional 'false relation', a typical early Tudor trait, when the dictates of the horizontal musical line outweigh the demands of the vertical harmony, causing a momentary clash, and adding real spice to pieces of this period.

The organ fantasia in four parts is a typical piece of contrapuntal writing in the late Renaissance style. The term *fantasia* was used at that time for pieces using a consistently polyphonic texture - the complete opposite of its use in the Baroque period.

The second half consists of works by composers of England's second Renaissance, the last sixty or so years. It begins with Patrick Hadley's setting of words from the Song of Solomon: 'My beloved spake'. Hadley (1899-1973) was Professor of Music at Cambridge University in the fifties and early sixties, and although a composer not especially associated with church

music, would have had plenty of opportunity to hear choral singing of the highest calibre. The colourful words of the text evoke lush and exotic harmonies from the composer, and although it still keeps within the bounds of what is suitable for a cathedral service, the piece has a freshness of inspiration which is most attractive.

Herbert Howells (1892-1982) began his career in the organ loft as Assistant Organist at Salisbury Cathedral, but his time there was cut short by ill-health. Although he claimed not to be a religious man, his contribution to the English cathedral repertoire is considerable, for he composed a whole series of settings of the Evening Canticles, and a number of fine anthems and motets. Among his larger scale compositions are some early attempts at chamber music, and, of course, the small oratorio, *Hymnus paradisi*. Only in the last eight years (since Howells' death) have we been able to become acquainted with his *Requiem*, which was, in fact, an earlier sketch for *Hymnus paradisi*. (Many of the harmonic progressions are common to both.) The reason for this was Howells' reluctance to publish the *Requiem* on account of its personal significance to him - it was written after the early death of his son (1936).

The deeply-felt quality of this music comes out on every page, with some really searching, painful harmonies occurring at the most intense moments. The piece is not a 'normal' requiem setting - all but two of the movements are in English. The first is a setting of the *Salvator mundi* text - *O Saviour of the world* - and quickly takes us into the eight-part texture which Howells uses to such good effect in this piece. The second movement is a setting of Psalm 23, and begins with soprano, alto and then tenor soloists weaving in and out in a contrapuntal texture. The full choir then joins in with a pseudo-plainsong melody, mostly in unison, and in a flexible rhythm. The third movement is the first of two movements setting part of the *Requiem aeternam* text, and here again the double-choir sonority is used sensitively, creating post-Impressionist harmonies as one choir blurs into the other. The fourth movement is a setting of Psalm 121, beginning with a baritone solo, and ending with a tenor solo. The fifth movement is the second *Requiem aeternam* setting, and the *Requiem* concludes with the consolatory *Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, for they rest from their labours.*

Howells composed a considerable amount of organ

music, and tonight we hear one short example:  
*Siciliana for High Ceremony*.

Gustav Holst (1874-1934) was, of course, a generation or more older than the other composers in this half, but many of his compositions set a decidedly mystical tone which characterises much of the music of England's second Renaissance; his setting of the well-known Marian text *Ave Maria* is for eight-part ladies' choir, which, like the Howells, gives ample opportunity for rich, luscious textures.

This evening concludes with *God is gone up* by Gerald Finzi (1901-1956). The words are from the *Sacramental Meditations* by Edward Taylor (d. 1729), and their jubilant nature inspired a quite brilliant organ accompaniment. It was composed in 1951 for the annual St. Cecilia's Day Service at the 'Musician's Church', the church of the Holy Sepulchre, Holborn.

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### Future Programme

Saturday November 17th 1990 at St. Saviour's, Guildford - A concert of festal choral music: "In Praise of God"

Saturday 9th February 1991 Holy Trinity Church, Guildford - Concert including Duruflé Requiem

Friday 28th June 1991 Summer Entertainment at Clandon Park

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