

The Chantry Singers

SAINT NICOLAS

Britten

BEATUS VIR

Monteverdi

**LET THY HAND BE
STRENGTHENED**

Handel

Tenor : Adrian Goss
Leader : Jeremy Sampson
Conductor : Timothy Venvell

St. Saviour's Church, Woodbridge Road, Guildford

8.00 p.m. Saturday 1st December 1990

Admission £4.00 (£2.50)

PROGRAMME

- | | | |
|----|---|------------|
| 1. | Beatus vir | Monteverdi |
| 2. | Christmas Concerto
Vivace - Grave - Allegro - Adagio - Vivace -
Allegro - Pastorale | Corelli |
| 3. | Let thy hand be strengthened | Handel |

INTERVAL OF FIFTEEN MINUTES

- | | | |
|------|---------------------------------------|---------|
| 4. | Saint Nicolas | Britten |
| i | Introduction | |
| ii | The Birth of Nicolas | |
| iii | Nicolas devotes himself to God | |
| iv | He journeys to Palestine | |
| v | He comes to Myra and is chosen Bishop | |
| vi | Nicolas from Prison | |
| vii | Nicolas and the Pickled Boys | |
| viii | His Piety and Marvellous Works | |
| ix | The Death of Nicolas | |

Orchestra

Violins

Jeremy Sampson (leader)

Jeffrey Pusey

Anne Criscuolo

Adrian Charlesworth

Cheryl Brown

Cellos

Emma Vidgeon

Rosalind Cox

Double bass

Nicola Bailey

Violas

Colin Dowland

David Hargraves

Timpani

Tessa Wright

Organ

Robert Langston

Piano Duet

Christopher and Helen Mabley

Future Programme

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

Friday 28th June 1991 Summer Entertainment at Clandon Park

Further details from Hon. Secretary, 3, Swayne's Lane, Merrow. GU1 2XX

Telephone Guildford 67062

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Programme Notes

Beatus vir was published as part of Monteverdi's *Selva Morale*, a collection of sacred compositions, in 1641, although its date of composition is probably nearer 1630. Monteverdi is generally seen as the main link between the Renaissance and Baroque styles of music, living as he did from 1567 to 1643, and this work clearly demonstrates his confidence in the new baroque style. Most of the contrast is achieved by using different sections of the 6-part choir, 2 or 3 parts at a time, in an antiphonal manner, with interpolations from two solo violin parts. The piece is broadly in three sections, with a contrasting triple-time section in the middle. At the end of the piece comes a chordal *Gloria*, with a richly harmonised *Amen* bringing the piece to a very satisfactory conclusion. The words are taken from Psalms 111 and 112, and may be found in the bibles in the pews.

The Christmas Concerto is one of the twelve *concerti grossi* (Op. 6) that Corelli (1653-1713) composed for strings, and one of the eight that are normally termed *church concertos*. Instead of the dance movement titles of the *chamber concertos*, each movement is merely labelled *Allegro* or *Adagio*, and so on. The concerto principle is played out between the normal baroque trio of two violins and cello as soloists, and the remainder of the string group, including violas, known as the *ripieno*.

Let thy hand be strengthened is the fourth and smallest of the four anthems composed by Handel for the coronation of George II in 1727. It is scored for strings and optional oboes (omitted in tonight's performance), and employs only a straightforward chorus without any solos, unlike the other three anthems, and consequently is performed less than the more famous *Zadok the Priest* and *The King shall rejoice*. Its three movements (*Allegro* - *Larghetto* - *Allegro*) are no less worthy of performance, however, and Handel brings all his usual vitality to the contrapuntal texture. The slow movement is particularly expressive, with poignant suspensions complimenting the supplicatory text.

The cantata *Saint Nicolas* was written for performance at the Centenary Celebrations of Lancing College, Sussex, on 24th July, 1948, but, as so often in his composing life, Britten transcended the 'occasional' requirements of the commission to produce a work of enduring vitality and meaning.

The story of St. Nicolas, Bishop of Myra, patron saint of children, seamen and travellers, and of course universally known in the guise of 'Santa Claus', is a colourful one, even if more is myth than fact. Nicolas was born at Patara in Asia Minor, and died during the first half of the 4th century, having long served as Bishop of Myra, the capital of his native country Lycia. He was born of wealthy parents, and from his babyhood he showed signs of exceptional grace. He was taught by the Church in boyhood and youth, and when his parents died of the plague he gave all his wealth to charity and went in pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Coming back to the city of Myra, he was chosen Bishop according to a revelation made before his arrival, and served this diocese faithfully until his death.

Most legends of Nicolas are concerned with his care of the poor and oppressed, and with his power of appearing from great distances to rescue those who called on him. Probably the most famous miracle is his healing of the three 'pickled' boys, killed in persecution, but brought to life by Nicolas's prayer and fasting.

Although the story of Nicolas is clouded in the mists of time, the fact that he was undoubtedly a very spiritual man comes through very clearly. A performance of *St. Nicolas* is always likely to be an entertaining musical experience, but I am sure that it can be more than that if the listener desires. The inclusion of two congregational hymns gives the audience an opportunity to participate in the performance, and a chance to praise God for the life of Nicolas, and, indeed, true saints of all ages, if they so wish.