

The Chantry Singers

Quattro Pezzi Sacri

Verdi

Messe Solennelle de Sainte Cécile

Gounod

Soprano: Jane Emmanuel
Tenor: Mervyn Collins
Baritone: Jonathan Fisher
Organ: Mark Mawhinney

Conductor: Peter Coulson

Saturday 16th March, 1996
Holy Trinity Church, Guildford

PROGRAMME

Quattro Pezzi Sacri	Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)
Soloists: Soprano	Claire Rennison
Bass	John Hart
I Ave Maria	III Laudi alla Vergine Maria
II Stabat Mater	IV Te Deum

The *Quattro Pezzi Sacri* (Four Sacred Pieces) were completed when Verdi was eighty-four. Three of them (*Laudi alla Vergine Maria*, *Stabat Mater* and *Te Deum*) were first performed in April 1898 in Paris. The two unaccompanied pieces (*Ave Maria* and *Laudi alla Vergine Maria*) were written almost a decade earlier, between *Otello* and *Falstaff*.

The *Ave Maria* is set for four unaccompanied voices, and based on an 'enigmatic' scale (that is a scale made up of strange intervals) known as the *scala enigmatica*. The scale is sung to the words "Ave Maria" and given to each of the parts in turn, starting with the bass. The four appearances of the *scala enigmatica* are accompanied by some extraordinary shifts of harmony and texture. The music has a meditative and reflective quality which suits the mood of the text.

The *Stabat Mater* reveals all the qualities most often associated with Verdi: drama, lyricism and depth of emotion. The references to Christ's wounds are depicted with anger, while the passage which begins "tui nati vulnerati" is set to a most warm and sensitive melody sung by the contraltos.

The *Laudi alla Vergine Maria*, scored for two sopranos and two contraltos, sets lines from Dante's *Paradiso*, and recreates the spirit of sixteenth century polyphony in romantic terms. The movement owes its structure to Palestrina, a composer whom Verdi greatly admired.

The *Te Deum*, scored for double chorus and orchestra, provides a masterly conclusion to the set. It begins with a line of plainsong for the tenors and basses, and almost all the themes of the movement are based on this incipit. Verdi was very proud of this movement, and it is said that he requested the score of the *Te Deum* be buried with him.

INTERVAL OF TWENTY MINUTES

Messe solennelle en l'honneur
de Sainte Cécile

Charles Gounod (1818-1893)

I	Kyrie	V	Benedictus
II	Gloria	VI	Agnus Dei
III	Credo	VII	Domine salvum
	Invocation - Offertoire		Prière de l'Eglise
IV	Sanctus		Prière de l'Armée
			Prière de la Nation

Gounod is primarily a musician of the theatre, and generally known as the composer of *Faust*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Mireille*, but few remember that he made a substantial contribution to religious music, with the composition of sixteen masses.

His *St. Cecilia Mass* was written in the summer of 1855, and he was concerned that the spirit of the piece should do honour to the patron saint of music. He wrote, "There is only one difficulty: it is to match in music the demands of this incomparable and inexhaustible subject: the Mass! ... In music! ... By a paltry man! ... My God, take pity on me!" He took certain liberties with the liturgy in the work, with the inclusion of the words, "Domine, non sum dignus" etc. in the *Agnus Dei*, and the addition of the *Domine Salvum*, sung three times, first by unaccompanied chorus, then sung just by the tenors and basses, and finally in a broad, majestic tutti. The mass was first performed on 22nd November 1855 in the Church of St. Eustache, the place where the first performance of his first mass was sung sixteen years before to the day.

The work, like the *Quattro Pezzi Sacri*, is conceived in operatic terms, as heard in the hauntingly beautiful opening in the *Gloria*, and also in the majestic declaration of the *Credo*, which is sung in a powerful unison by the choir. Saint-Saëns said that "the appearance of the *St. Cecilia Mass* caused a sort of stupor. This simplicity, this grandeur, this serene light which rose upon the musical world like a dawn troubled people greatly: one felt the approach of genius, and as everyone knows this approach is usually badly received ... The luminous rays streamed forth from this Mass ... at first one was dazzled, then charmed, then conquered."

Jane Emmanuel is building on a singing career that has so far encompassed extensive solo and choral engagements in Britain and across Europe. She has performed and recorded with the Royal Opera as an extra chorister, and also with London Sinfonietta Voices, London Voices and Metro Voices in styles ranging from Busby Berkeley through Bizet to Boulez and Berio. Oratorio and concert performances take her around the country; and from her London and Sussex bases she teaches singing both at London University and Haberdashers Askes School for Girls in Hertfordshire. Jane is also the principal soprano soloist at the Liberal Jewish Synagogue in St. John's Wood, London.

Mervyn Collins, after receiving an honours degree in music, studied at the Guildhall School of Music and the Rotterdam Conservatoire. He is now in demand as a concert and recital singer, performing an extensive repertoire throughout Britain, Ireland, Europe and North America. Notable broadcasts have included *The Songs of Tom Moore* with Seamus Heaney (BBC), Moeran's *English Lyrics* (BBC), Howell's *Requiem*, Britten's *St. Nicolas* (American Radio), as well as solo appearances on Canadian, Dutch and Independent Television. Recent engagements include Bach's *St. John's Passion*, and *St. Matthew's Passion*, Stainer's *Crucifixion*, Maunder's *Olivet to Calvary*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, and Vaughan Williams' *Sancta Civitas* with Vernon Handley.

Jonathan Fisher was born in Cardiff, and studied at the Guildhall School of Music (with Bernard Dickson) and the Cologne Musik Hochschule (with Franz Müller-Hauser). For the past five years, he has been a regular member of the Royal Opera House, performing roles in *Midsummer Marriage*, *Eugene Onegin*, *Elektra*, *Die Meistersinger*, *Death in Venice*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *La Traviata*, *Salome*, and *Katya Kabanova*. He has also toured Europe and Japan with them. He performed the role of Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady* for the Covent Garden Festival in 1994, and is a founder member of Larynx Unlimited.

Mark Mawhinney was born in County Down, Northern Ireland. He read music at Durham University, where he was organ scholar at University College, and at the cathedral. He went on to study with John Birch at the Royal College of Music. He is now the Director of Music at Hurstpierpoint College Junior School.

Peter Coulson has been conductor of The Chantry Singers since 1992. After graduating from Durham University, he moved to his present position as a Lay Clerk at Guildford Cathedral. As a conductor he has worked with orchestras and soloists, performing much of the symphonic and concerto repertoire, including Sibelius' 2nd Symphony, Dvorak's 8th Symphony and Grieg's Piano Concerto. He has also conducted opera, including staged performances of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*. With The Chantry Singers he has conducted an eclectic programme including Handel's *Messiah*, Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, and much unaccompanied repertoire ranging from Taverner to Tippett.

The choir would like to thank Peter Flatow for the use of his Allen organ.

The next Chantry Singers' concert will take place on Saturday 29th June, 1996 in Tormead School, Guildford. The programme will include Borodin's Polovtsian Dances.