

The Chantry Singers

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Five Mystical Songs

PARRY

I Was Glad, Blest Pair of Sirens

MATHIAS

Ave Rex

PURCELL

Rejoice In The Lord

Conductor: Andrew Wilson

Organ: Jeremy Filsell

Bass Soloist: Simon Wilson

Saturday 5th December 1998

Holy Trinity Church

Guildford

I Was Glad

Purcell

Rejoice in the Lord Alway

Purcell

Jubilate

Organ Solo: Jeremy Filsell

Mathias

Five Mystical Songs

Vaughan Williams

- (i) Easter
- (ii) I Got Me Flowers
- (iii) Love Bade Me Welcome
- (iv) The Call
- (v) Antiphon

Solo Baritone: Simon Wilson

Blest Pair Of Sirens

Parry

.....
INTERVAL
.....

I Was Glad

Parry

Two Handel Airs

- Ombra Mai Fu
- Arm, Arm Ye Brave

Solo Baritone: Simon Wilson

Two Pieces for Christmas

- The Lamb
- Sing Lullaby

Tavener
Wilson

Ave Rex

Mathias

- (i) Ave Rex
- (ii) A New Work Is Come On Hand
- (iii) There Is No Rose
- (iv) Sir Christemas

Henry Purcell (1659-1695) was fortunate to have had an education at the King's expense. His father Thomas, was one of the King's musicians and Henry became a boy chorister at the Chapel Royal. From this early age he was surrounded by the leading English composers of his day and sang in the choir in the venues where they had their music performed, the Chapel Royal and Westminster Abbey. He was a pupil of John Blow and he succeeded him as organist at the Abbey in 1679 (a position he took again after Purcell's death). Coronations in England were long affairs though James II wanted a shorter version of the service for his coronation in 1685. This was because as a Catholic he was determined not to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion from bishops belonging to the Church of England. However, the occasion still required much ceremonial music from the best composers of the day and this included both Purcell and Blow. The full anthem *I was glad* is a setting of Psalm 122 and was sung at the entrance of the King and Queen at the start of the service. The opening is celebratory with its rich five voice harmony and spirited dotted rhythms. This gives way to the imitation to symbolise the coming together of the tribes to give thanks for the name of the Lord. 'O pray for the peace of Jerusalem' is much more serene in its outlook before the more robust 'Gloria'.

Purcell had also absorbed the 'verse anthem' style from his contemporaries and teachers. These were anthems which alternated solo sections with sections for the whole choir or instruments (usually strings). These had been popular in England since Gibbons and Weelkes at the end of the previous century and composers such as Blow had added a more continental flavour by adding small string 'symphonies' to them. Indeed three large scale verse anthems were performed at the coronation of James II; *My heart is inditing, God spake sometimes in visions* and *The King shall rejoice* by Purcell, Blow and William Turner. *Rejoice in the Lord always* also dates from 1685, though not from the coronation and it is a setting of Philippians 4: 4-7. Purcell mixes the short and joyful 'Rejoice' sections with solo passages and instrumental interludes.

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) studied at Cambridge and the Royal College of Music under some of the composers who had rid England of the 'Land without music' title towards the end of the last century, most notably Parry and Stanford. He later studied abroad under Bruch and Ravel. His music owes much to the modal harmonies of folksong (he collected English folksongs with Cecil Sharp) combined with influences of Ravel and Debussy. He wrote a large amount of music in nearly all the genres including operas, symphonies (nine), concertos and many works for voices and orchestra. He also wrote music for every level of performer from amateur choirs as well as highly professional ones as this was part of his belief that

a composer should '...make his art an expression of the whole life of the community'. The *Five Mystical Songs* date from 1911 and were written for the Three Choirs Festival of the same year. They use the poetry of George Herbert, who was a younger contemporary of Shakespeare. The five songs all demonstrate the various influences on his compositional style. 'I got me flowers' with its parallel root position chords shows influences of Debussy, 'Easter' contains more than a hint of Elgar in its rich harmonic language and 'The Call' reflects his interest in folksong in its simplicity, both in melody and harmony.

Hubert Parry (1848-1918) is often overlooked when English music of the 19th century is surveyed, yet it was he and his near contemporary Charles Stanford who were at the forefront of the English renaissance. His style is deeply embedded in the rich harmonic language of the late 19th century (Brahms is a particular influence) and his works do not contain a hint of the atonal and serial techniques of his continental contemporaries. While his vocal music has remained popular, in particular *Blest pair of sirens* and *I was glad*, recent recording projects of his symphonies, concertos and the oratorio *Job*, have revealed that their neglect was unjustified. *Blest pair of sirens* is a cantata for eight-part chorus and orchestra and was first performed in 1887 by The Bach Choir under Stanford's direction. Parry chose to set Milton's ode 'At a solemn music' with all its opportunities for musical symbolism. The contrast in textures from simple unison at 'That we on earth with undiscording voice' to the more complex 8-part imitation on 'To live with Him and sing in endless morn of light' show Parry's mastery of successful vocal writing along with the picturesque depiction of the 'angel-trumpets blow'. Vaughan Williams was a great admirer of Parry and described the piece as his favourite piece of music written by an Englishman.

Like Purcell's anthem of the same name, *I was glad* was also written for a coronation. Parry's rise to prominence as a composer led to two royal commissions; *I was glad* for the coronation of Edward VII in 1902 and the *Te Deum* for George V's in 1911. After a stately introduction from the organ, the voices enter together and Parry immediately introduces a bold harmonic manoeuvre on the word 'glad'. Once again, the 8-part vocal texture is used to great effect for 'Jerusalem is builded as a city'. 'O pray for the peace of Jerusalem' is a moment for quiet reflection before the work climaxes with 'plenteousness within thy palaces'.

As we move further in to the 20th century and nearer to Christmas, a selection of less well known carols. John Tavener (b.1944) rose to being a household name in middle England after the performance of *Song For Athene* at the funeral of

Princess Diana. His music is heavily influenced by the Orthodox Church which he has been a member of since 1977. However, *The Lamb* shows little of it. It is a simple setting of Blake's poem based on small idea heard on the first line of the text. The idea is then repeated in inversion, with other parts in inversion and in a harmonised form. *Sing Lullaby* was written by Andrew Wilson (b.1969) in 1996 for the choir of the Royal Grammar School and their annual carol service.

William Mathias (1934-1992) has been described as 'one of the most versatile musical minds of his generation'. He was a prolific composer in a wide variety of genres, but in particular in the field of church and organ music. He studied under Lennox Berkeley at the Royal Academy of Music and it was not long before commissions were coming his way from cathedrals in both England and America. This culminated in the commission to compose a suitable anthem for the wedding of the Prince and Princess of Wales in 1981. The result, *Let the people praise thee* has become one of his most popular works and it encapsulates the qualities that have made his music so popular. While remaining in an essentially tonal idiom, it is tuneful, exhilarating, fresh and within the capabilities of choirs and organists of a reasonable standard. Both the organ piece *Jubilate* and the sequence of four Christmas carols *Ave Rex* also exhibit these qualities. The carol sequence was commissioned by the Cardiff Polyphonic Choir and first performed by them in 1969. 'Ave Rex' is quite dramatic and it returns at the end of the sequence after a short cadenza for the organ. 'Alleluya, a new work is come on hand' is another vigorous carol before the more intimate setting of the Medieval carol 'There is no rose'. 'Sir Christemas' has become one of the most popular carols of recent times with its jagged syncopation and joyous repetition of the word 'Noel'.

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Future Concerts to be given by the Chantry Singers:

Saturday 28th March 1999, 8pm, St. Nicolas Church

Programme to include Handel *Dixit Dominus*, Vivaldi *Gloria*, Bach *Violin Concerto*.

This concert forms part of the Guildford International Festival.

Jeremy Filsell is acknowledged to be one of the few true virtuoso performers on both the piano and organ. He studied as an Organ Scholar at Keble College, Oxford and as a pianist at the Royal College of Music in London. As a solo pianist he has appeared at many major UK concert venues and festivals and works regularly with the BBC Singers, The European Contemporary Music Ensemble and the City of London Sinfonia. As a prize-winning concert organist he has recorded recitals and concertos for BBC Radio 3 and has performed extensively in the USA, France, Germany and Russia. He has many recordings on the Guild, Herald and ASV labels including the piano works of Herbert Howells and the Reubke piano and organ sonatas. His 1992 disc of Vierne and Widor Symphonies was a Gramophone Critic's Choice. In the summer of 1998 he performed in nine critically acclaimed weekly concerts in London, the complete organ works of Marcel Dupre, a UK first and a project which was committed to CD in the USA in October this year to be released by Guild over the next two years. He has also had a number of Pierre Cochereau transcriptions published. These were transcribed by Jeremy from recordings of the original improvisations by Cochereau.

Simon Wilson was born in London and began his singing career in the Temple Church Choir. He is presently studying with Mark Wildman. In 1989 he won an award to study on the Postgraduate opera Course at the Royal Academy of Music. He has roles in many operas and oratorios, including last year the role of Nabucco for Guildford Opera. He combines his busy singing engagements with teaching at the Royal Grammar School in Guildford.

Andrew Wilson was born and educated in Leeds. He went on to study at Edinburgh university where he gained a First Class degree and won the prize for organ performance. Since leaving Edinburgh, he has spent time at Cardiff University studying for an MA in Eighteenth Century Music and in particular, English oratorio of the period, and has given recitals in Cambridge, Ipswich, Glasgow and Edinburgh. He is currently Assistant Director of Music at the Royal Grammar School in Guildford, having previously held a similar position in Ipswich, and accompanies the University of London Chamber Choir, with whom he has made a number of recordings. At present he conducts the Chantry Singers and the Guildford Chorale and Sinfonia, a youth choir and orchestra based in Guildford with whom he undertook a successful tour of Western France last summer, and examines for GCSE and A-level.

Ombra Mai Fu

Frondi tenere, e belle del mio platano
amato per voi risplende il fato.

Tuoni, lampi, e procelle non v'ol
traggiano mai la cara pace ne guin
gua pro fanarvi austro rapace!

Ombra mai fu, di vegetabile, cara
amabile soave piu.

*Forest beautiful, so sombre. in my
anguish and my trouble, to thee I
come for solace.*

*Thunder, lightning, storms defying,
thou art ever at peace. Therefore I
seek thee, for here within thy
shadows grief is forgotten.*

*Deep in thy shade, branches shall
cover me, lulling my troubled mind
to peace and rest.*