

The West Somerset Singers

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welcome you and present a

*Seasonal
Celebration*



*St George's R.C. Church, Taunton
Saturday 6th December 2008*

Musical Director - Nick Thomas



Programme

In Dulci Jubilo – R.L. Pearsall

Come To Bethlehem – Peter Warlock

Coronation Mass - Mozart

INTERVAL – 15 minutes

Christmas Cantata – Geoffrey Bush

The Shepherds' Farewell – Hector Berlioz

The Oxen – Thomas Hardy

Music by Johnny Coppin

Arr. Nick Thomas

Performed by James Smyth

God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen

Hark! the Herald Angels Sing

Angels' Carol – John Rutter

Programme Notes

Mozart Coronation Mass

On 15 January 1779 Mozart returned to Salzburg to earn daily bread after a musically abortive and domestically tragic journey to Paris with his mother. The "Paris" symphony apart, there was little to show for it – certainly no prestigious appointment – and he had had to bury his much tried and heroic mother in Paris. After dallying with a female relative in Augsburg, he buckled down to church music and finished on 23 March 1779 this extended mass. It was probably written for the annual service at Plain, near Salzburg, a place of pilgrimage for many, including his sister Nannerl. Its image of the Virgin was supposed to have been miraculously crowned – hence the name "Coronation" attached to this mass.

The opening Kyrie includes a delightful short centrepiece for soprano and tenor duet, with a Schubert-like alternation of major and minor. Though the orchestration is no larger than that of the pre-Paris Salzburg masses, its use on equal terms with the voices lends to the longer movements such as the Gloria the feel of a short choral symphony. The petitions in the middle of the Gloria are beautified by the use of the solo quartet, again with touches of the minor key. Mozart avoids the traditional fugue at 'Cum Sancto Spiritu' but this gives him more room for a modestly extended 'Amen'.

A notable feature of the Credo is a prolonged burst of perpetual motion on the violins, matching the glitter of an illuminated crown. This festive display is transformed, by an unerring sense of the mysterious, into muted modulatory descents accompanying the Crucifixion. The short and festive Sanctus is treated as an introduction and allegro, but is balanced by a blithe Benedictus for solo quartet which the choral Hosanna interrupts as well as concludes. In the Agnus Dei the soprano soloist uses in triple time the theme we instinctively link with the Countess singing "Dove sono" in Figaro. Perhaps Wolfgang's mind momentarily played with the imagined sound of his lost sweetheart Aloysia's voice here, and asked itself, in advance of the Countess, where the beloved moments had gone. But in any case such reuse would come naturally in the 18th century. As far as Wolfgang was concerned, when he composed Figaro, the writing of masses was for him a thing of the past, and he was by then inverting Luther's enquiry why the devil should have all the best tunes.

Programme Note by Ivor Keys. This note was supplied through the Programme Note Bank of Making Music, the National Federation of Music Societies.

Geoffrey Bush Christmas Cantata

Born in London and educated at the choir school of Salisbury Cathedral and at Lancing, Geoffrey Bush went up to Balliol College, Oxford, in 1938. He graduated with a B. Mus. degree in 1940 and after working as the warden of a hotel for evacuees during World War II he took his doctorate from Oxford in 1946. Bush earned his living as a teacher of music in extramural departments, first at Oxford, then (from 1952 to 1980) in the University of London. Generally considered a first-rate teacher, lecturer and writer, Bush also broadcast regularly. As a composer, he was basically self-taught, although he early received help and advice from John Ireland.

The work opens in tranquil mood. At the start of an extended Prelude, Bush introduces a theme that is prefaced by an elaborate little musical turn. This lyrical melodic fragment is a leitmotiv that recurs in subsequent movements, as does a descending minor second, later sung to the word "Jesu." This "Jesu" motif, plangent in character, carries with it an air of foreboding that will surface later in the work, notably in Bush's arrangement of the Coventry Carol. Meanwhile, after the instrumental introduction, the soprano voices give out a descending succession of phrases to the text "Lullay, Jesu" that also bear testimony to the Christ Child's ultimate fate. They are followed by the men's voices intoning part of the Collect for the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity.

In the second movement, the theme is the English traditional carol often called "Joys seven." The variations are primarily in the accompaniment. The voices of soloist and chorus give out the melody mostly unharmonized, but in the last variation the theme is heard in canon between sopranos and altos on the one hand and tenors and basses on the other, leading to an exciting Amen. A gentle, unaccompanied four-part chorale, setting words by Hilaire Belloc, forms the third movement, which is followed by a dreamy arrangement of the old Czech lullaby best known to us under the title Rocking. At the close of this number, the plangent "Jesu" motif puts in another appearance. The fifth movement is an extended unaccompanied choral scherzo that whips along at breakneck speed and is a tour de force for any choir. It is a brilliant setting of a rollicking text written about 1500.

The last three movements are slow and measured. A captivating arrangement of the lovely 15th-century English carol "This endris night" is followed by a lyrical and ethereal intermezzo for soprano solo of another familiar late medieval text, "I sing of a maiden." In the powerful lament that follows, the melody of the Coventry Carol is assigned mainly to the soloist and women's voices, while the men accompany them, first with a repeated exclamation, "Ah!" and then with the terror-struck iteration of the name "Herod." Women and men come together for the last bitter verse of lamentation and the final

angry, discordant shout of "Herod!" The finale is a spirited setting of the old English carol "I saw three ships." The little coda "Rejoice on Christmas Day in the morning" leads straight in to the reflective Epilogue, in which the music of the Prelude is reprised. Once again the sopranos sing their descending sequence of "Lullay, Jesu" and the men chant out the time-honoured words of St Paul, drawn from his second letter to the Corinthians and traditionally used to end the Anglican church service. In the closing bars of the work, the angelic voices of sopranos and altos soar upward in a final celestial Amen, to which the earthbound male voices respond with the dying minor-second fall of the "Jesu" motif.

Programme Note by William Gould. This note was supplied through the Programme Note Bank of Making Music, the National Federation of Music Societies.

Biographies

Musical Director - Nick Thomas

Nick trained at the College of St Mark and St John, Plymouth. During this time he played flute regularly with the Plymouth Symphony Orchestra. Nick is at present head of music at Kingsmead School, Wiveliscombe where he has recently staged a performance of West Side Story. His musical interests are wide and varied. He is a multi instrumentalist concentrating mainly on flute, piano and piano accordion. He was until recently musical director and organist at St George's Church, Wilton. He has performed and worked with many groups in the Taunton area including Orchestra West, and many local operatic societies.

Nick regularly plays accordion, flute and whistle with his folk band Tranters Folly. He greatly enjoys making music, and in particular bringing out the best in other performers - be they adults or young people. Nick has further widened his musical interests by joining a local Soul band!

Organist – Alex Davies

Alex Davies studied at Trinity College of Music London where his organ teachers included John Winter and Sean Farrell. On completion of his Bmus he was awarded a scholarship to pursue post graduate studies in organ with Roger Sayer at Rochester Cathedral. Whilst studying at college he won the Cardnell organ prize and was organ scholar to St Augustine's Queens Gate and St. Alfege in Greenwich. He has performed in concerts, and given recitals at venues throughout London including; Marylebone Parish Church, Royal Naval College Chapel, Royal Festival Hall, Southwark Cathedral. In 2003/4 he worked at Blackburn Cathedral as organ scholar assisting the busy music department, accompanying services and playing in concerts and recitals. Currently Alex is working in the family Hotel business in Lyme Regis and locally as a musician. He is organist at the Parish Church and a member of the Lyme Regis organ appeal committee and directs Lyme Bay Chorale. Over the last two years Alex has directed numerous concerts at the Parish Church in Lyme, which have raised significant funds for local charities and has recently produced the CD recording "With love from Lyme" capturing over one hundred local performers which has sold successfully in aid of the organ appeal.

Oboist – Lynn Collins

Born in the American Midwest, Lynn studied with Ray Still, first oboist of the Chicago Symphony, at Northwestern University. At the age of 21 she was offered the job of Principal Oboe of the Orquesta Filarmónica de la UNAM in Mexico City, where she also enjoyed frequent solo and chamber work. In 1977 she moved to Germany to study with Heinz Holliger at the Freiburger Musikhochschule. Thereafter she played in many German and Swiss orchestras, among them the West German Radio (WDR), Bonn, Bochum, Konstanz and Biel/Bienne orchestras. Lynn was soloist with the Heidelberg Chamber Orchestra, touring all over Europe and North America. She came to Somerset in 1985 and now plays with many local groups including Orchestra West, Somerset Opera, TAOS, Taunton Sinfonietta and others further afield such as the Ten Tors Orchestra and Welsh Sinfonia.

Strings

Violins - Mary Carson and Claire Goldie

Viola - David Hedges

Cello - Audrey Gullick

D.Bass - Val Mizen

Soprano – Frances Walker

Frances trained in North Wales and has taught singing for over 30 years. She began her career singing in Eisteddfodau and music festivals in the 1960's. She has taken roles in over 300 operas, musicals, Gilbert & Sullivan operettas as well as singing for choral societies in England and Wales and the West of England. Frances has performed in one woman shows promoted by Take Art and two women shows Art Deco and Nouveau with Freda Storey for several years. She has performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Revue for which she composed the music. She won two Rosebowls for musical performance and was nominated nine times.

Alto – Melinda Ball

Melinda Ball started her singing career in Bristol when she joined the Bristol Savoy Operatic Society. Since moving to Wellington, she is probably best known for her operatic roles in the Taunton area with Taunton Operatic Society and Somerset Opera Group, ranging from Benjamin Britten to 42nd Street, but she has also sung as contralto soloist in many oratorios in Somerset and Devon.

Tenor – Christopher Ball

Christopher has been active in the music life of the Taunton area for over 30 years. As a singer he has made numerous appearances on stage, in churches and in the concert hall. He has conducted a diverse range of pieces from Mozart to Sondheim for operatic societies in Wellington and Taunton and is currently Musical Director of Somerset Opera.

Baritone – Chris Doyle

Chris Doyle's performing career has included stage, choral and solo work. His range runs from barbershop quartets to *Zadok the Priest* - and most things in between! Since coming to Somerset, Chris has sung in Wells Cathedral and also venues in and around Taunton. As well as performing with WSS, Chris sings with Wilton Church choir, Taunton Choral Society and occasionally Taunton Camerata. This is Chris's second solo performance with the West Somerset Singers. He harbours a secret yearning to play the part of Fagin on stage...

West Somerset Singers meet on Monday evenings in the Gwyn Williams room at Taunton School. Our next rehearsal will take place on Monday 12th January 2009 at 7.30pm. New members very welcome.

Acknowledgments

The West Somerset Singers would like to thank St. George's RC Church for their hospitality.

Thank you also to Somerset Performing Arts Library for supplying the music copies and Making Music for programme notes.

Members would like to express their gratitude to Philip Lloyd for accompanying the choir at their Monday evening rehearsals.

God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen

All

God rest you merry, gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay,
For Jesus Christ our Saviour
Was born upon this day,
To save us all from Satan's power
When we were gone astray:

O tidings of comfort and joy,
comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy.

Choir

From God our heavenly Father
A blessed angel came,
And unto certain shepherds
Brought tidings of the same,
How that in Bethlehem was born
The Son of God by name:
O tidings ...

All

The shepherds at those tidings
Rejoiced much in mind,
And left their flocks a-feeding
In tempest, storm and wind,
And went to Bethlehem straightway,
This blessed Babe to find:
O tidings ...

Choir

But when to Bethlehem they came,
Whereat this Infant lay,
They found Him in a manger,
Where oxen feed on hay;
His mother Mary kneeling,
Unto the Lord did pray:
O tidings ...

All

Now to the Lord sing praises,
All you within this place,
And with true love and brotherhood
Each other now embrace;
This holy tide of Christmas
All others doth deface
O tidings ...

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Hark the herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild
God and sinners reconciled"
Joyful, all ye nations rise
Join the triumph of the skies
With the angelic host proclaim:
"Christ is born in Bethlehem"
Hark! The herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!"

Christ by highest heav'n adored
Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come
Offspring of a Virgin's womb
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see
Hail the incarnate Deity
Pleased as man with man to dwell
Jesus, our Emmanuel
Hark! The herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!"

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings
Ris'n with healing in His wings
Mild He lays His glory by
Born that man no more may die
Born to raise the sons of earth
Born to give them second birth
Hark! The herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!"

