



Unicorn Theatre
Abingdon
PROGRAMME
JUNE 23rd 1984

The Cherwell Singers

Conductor: Jeremy Cox

June 23rd 1984

The Summer is Coming Herbert Howells

On Wenlock Edge Vaughan Williams

On Wenlock Edge
From far, from eve and morning
Is my team ploughing?
Oh, when I was in love with you
Bredon Hill
Clun

Tim Robinson - Tenor
Clifton Graham - Piano
The Vuillaume Quartet

Brigg Fair Percy Grainger
Two Songs to be sung of a Summer Night on the Water..
..... Delius

INTERVAL

Wine and soft drinks will be served in
the Long Gallery.

Four English Folk Songs arr. Vaughan Williams

The Dark Eyed Sailor
The Spring Time of the Year
The Lover's Ghost
Just as the Tide was flowing

Two movements from "A Summer Serenade" .. Geoffrey Bush

Madrigal: Love is a Sickness
Nocturne: Music, when soft voices die

Five traditional Songs arr. John Rutter

The girl I left behind me
O Waly, Waly
The British Grenadiers
Golden Slumbers
Dashing away with the smoothing iron

THE CHERWELL SINGERS

June 23rd 1984

PROGRAMME NOTES

The seasons have always featured prominently among the favoured themes of writers and musicians. However, the manner in which they are treated as subject material often has little to do with real observation or experience, being more concerned with stereotyped images by which various stock human emotions may be illustrated. The portrayal of spring and, especially, summer as the pastoral seasons of rustic contentment and idealised, innocent love is perhaps the classic example of this trait. Tonight's concert does not abandon this tradition entirely, but attempts to present a more varied picture of the summer season, embracing more subdued and contemplative moods and also the authentically naive imagery of folk song.

The opening work: The Summer is Coming by Herbert Howells offers a far from traditional view of the season. The poem by Bryan Guinness, evoking the advent of summer in County Mayo, is firstly full of imagery that suggests direct observation in its simple, yet gently idiosyncratic character. Thus the cuckoo "breathes like a flute", while boats either "walk on the silver strand like beetles" or else "tilt on the western waves." Then, for all the air of expectancy, the prevailing tone is sombre; words like "dark", "grey", "sad" and "black" dominate the language until, shortly before the work's return to its brooding opening material, the beautiful image is conjured up of summer lighting "with soft kisses on you and on me." Howells' music captures to perfection the subtle blend of melancholy and warmth which characterises this memorable poem.

The poetry of A.E. Houseman, though it certainly uses the imagery of landscape to articulate human emotions, derives tremendous resonance from being identified with a specific geographical region whose place names seem to add a poetry of their own to the otherwise occasionally commonplace language and sentiments employed.

Vaughan Williams' early cycle of six Houseman poems, "On Wenlock Edge", for Tenor and piano quintet begins with a scene more evocative of autumn than of summer, the wind buffeting the trees so that "thick on Severn snow the leaves." However, the work's centre of gravity lies in the magnificent setting of "Bredon Hill" where, although the narrative later moves to a colder season, the opening image of distantly heard church bells from a hilltop on a summer afternoon inspires undoubtedly the most magical and atmospheric moment of this remarkably mature musical score.

Percy Grainger's arrangement of the folk-song "Brigg Fair" was the direct inspiration for Delius' "English Rhapsody" of the same name. In its suave harmonies yet perfect sensitivity to the poignant simplicity of the original tune, it represents the artistic appropriation of folk culture at its best. Delius' own two Part-Songs which conclude the first half of this concert are wordless settings which explore to the full the chromatic nature of his distinctive personal style, but even here, haunting snatches of a popular tune may be heard in the solo Tenor part of the second song.

The four folk-song arrangements by Vaughan Williams with which the concert's second half opens are firmly based in their source material, but their working out reveals an immaculate craftsmanship and considerable, though unobtrusive, sophistication. This is perhaps especially true of the superbly effortless counterpoint which is woven

around the melody in "The lover's ghost" but even the more boisterous tune of "Just as the tide was flowing" is extended and elaborated in the song's middle section.

With the next item in the programme, two movements from "A Summer Serenade" by Geoffrey Bush, the stock artistic and literary images of summer finally come to the fore. The work as a whole which, when complete, takes the form of a secular cantata for chorus, tenor soloist and small orchestra, is in reality more about love and its pleasures, frustrations and ironies than about the summer season. This emphasis is well displayed in the two unaccompanied numbers selected for performance which pay homage to the madrigalian tradition of sophisticated and stylised portrayal of the human emotions. Thus "Love is a sickness" instantly belies the apparent pessimism of its title with a nimble and adroitly syncopated rhythm which points up its ironic tone, while "Music when soft voices die" complements Shelley's lyrically elegiac poetry with choral writing of suave yet generous warmth.

The Five Traditional Songs of John Rutter conclude tonight's concert in a relaxed and breezy manner which in its own way is perfectly appropriate to the summer season. Again, however, it is love that emerges as the dominant theme of these well-known songs - although this trend is memorably counterbalanced by the suitably militaristic swagger and crisp rhythmical energy of "The British Grenadiers". These well crafted arrangements, which are a great pleasure to perform, will, we hope, provide an equally pleasurable finale to our musical celebration of summer.

The Cherwell Singers

Soprano

Marion Ackrill
Anne Fenwick
Sarah Franks
Theresa Gray
Margaret Johnston
Joelle Mann
Annabel McLeod

Contralto

Judith Ackrill
Jennifer Barnes
Glynne Butt
Loretta Cox
Janet Jeffs
Hildred Younie

Tenor

Harry Eden
Paul Hodges
Robert Lowrie
David Sutton

Bass

Chris Emlyn-Jones
Chris Franks
Colin Gordon
Michael Morton
Simon Street

The Cherwell Singers are always looking for new voices. If you would like to know more about us, please contact the Secretary: Glynne Butt, Abingdon 21929.