

1984

St Giles CL

A CELEBRATION OF SUMMER

(Poetic themes of the pastoral season and
the English countryside explored in music)

THE CHERWELL SINGERS

conducted by Jeremy Cox

with

Tim Robinson, Tenor : Clifton Graham, Piano

and the Vuillaume Quartet

Luke Roskams and Rachel Boswell, Violins

Virginia Bennett-Clark, Viola

Avril Ivin, 'Cello

Wednesday, 11th July at 8.00 pm

Tickets: £2.00

OAPs and children half price

Proceeds will be shared with the Rivermead
Rehabilitation Centre

PROGRAMME

The Summer is Coming

Herbert Howells

Tenor solo: On Wenlock Edge

R.Vaughan Williams

1. On Wenlock Edge
2. From far, from eve and morning
3. Is my team ploughing?
4. Oh, when I was in love with you
5. Bredon Hill
6. Clun

Brigg Fair

Percy Grainger

Two Unaccompanied Part Songs

Frederick Delius

(To be sung of a summer night on the water)

----- INTERVAL -----

Four Folk-song Arrangements

R.Vaughan Williams

1. The dark-eyed sailor
2. As I rose up one morning
3. The lover's ghost
4. Just as the tide was flowing

1. Prologue: Worship ye that lovers be this
May
2. Madrigal: Love is a sickness
3. Scherzo: Love is a pretty frenzy
4. Dirge: O Rose, thou art sick!
5. Aubade: Pack, clouds, away!
6. Nocturne: Music, when soft voices die
7. Finale: Pleasure it is

---oooOooo---

PROGRAMME NOTES (by Jeremy Cox)

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'. Howell's 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 buffetting 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 harmonics 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.

The traditional pastoral image of summer finally emerges in the concluding work, 'A Summer Serenade' by Geoffrey Bush. With the exception of the Finale, the texts employed are more about love and its pleasures, frustrations and ironies than about the summer season. As befits a Serenade, this is a joyous, attractive work with a robustly alfresco atmosphere. If its modernity is revealed in features such as teasingly irregular rhythms and occasionally piquant harmonies, its prevailing character is nevertheless relaxed and accessible. The setting of Blake's Dirge, 'O Rose, thou art sick' provides an effectively dense and sombre centrepiece to the seven movements, but thereafter the mood passes through nimble elation in the Aubade and tender tranquillity in the Nocturne to a truly rousing expression of joyous exultation in the Finale.