



C O N C E R T

MERTON COLLEGE CHAPEL

MONDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER, 1991 at 18.00-18.30 hrs

THE CHERWELL SINGERS

PROGRAMME

Thomas Tallis (c.1505-1585)

O Nata Lux

O nata lux de lumine,
Jesu redemptor saeculi
Dignare clemens supplicum
Laudes preces que sumere.
Qui carne quondam contegi
Dignatus es pro perditis.
Nos membra confer effici.
Tui beati corporis.

Peter Philips (c.1565-1635)

Ascendit Deus

Ascendit Deus in jubilatione, et Dominus in voce tubae,
alleluia. Dominus in coelo paravit sedem suam.
Alleluia, alleluia.

The Chapel Royal was the centre of excellence for English church music for many centuries, and the sponsor of Latin polyphony as practised before the Reformation due to the conservatism of Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603). The Royal Chapel and its complement of men and boy (treble) singers still exists today in almost exactly the form envisioned by the Tudor monarchs who founded it.

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O *Nata Lux* is one of the best known of all English Tudor anthems, and is a perfect example of the early English style with its rich but clear sonority and subtle use of the 'false relation' where two parts clash on a note, one singing it sharp, the other natural. This is the English sound most recognised throughout the world in Tallis' day, as it still is today. Peter Philips, from the next generation of composers, inherited this tradition, exporting it to the continent when he emigrated to the Netherlands where he could freely practise his Roman Catholic faith. Here the classic sound of two equal treble voices dominates an intricate imitative texture -- one part sings a motive and is answered at the same pitch by the other. As the music progresses you will hear the parts not simply answering each other but also urging each other to new heights. *Ascendit Deus* also employs a subtle use of word-painting, using a striking rising motive for the opening words: 'God is gone up' and then changing the texture to trumpet-like calls for 'with a merry noise, and the lord in the sound of the trumpet'.

* * * *

Thomas Vautour (c.1580-?)

Sweet Suffolk Owl

Sweet Suffolk Owl, so trimly dight
 With feathers like a lady bright
 Thou sing'st alone, sitting by night
 Te whit, te whoo, te whit, te whoo.
 Thy note, that forth so freely rolls
 With shrill command the mouse controls
 And sings a dirge for dying souls,
 Te whit, te whoo, te whit, te whoo.

John Bennet (c.1575-c. 1615)

All Creatures Now

All creatures now are merry minded,
 The shepherds' daughters playing,
 The Nymphs are fa-la-la-ing,
 Yon bugle was well winded.

See where she comes
 with flow'ry garlands crowned,
 Queen of all queens renowned,

At Oriana's presence each thing smileth,
 The flowers themselves discover,
 Birds over her do hover;
 Music the time beguileth.

Then sang the shepherds
 and Nymphs of Diana;
 Long live Fair Oriana.

Thomas Morley (1558-1603)

Sing We and Chant It

Sing we and chant it
While love doth grant it.
Fa la la.
Not long youth lasteth,
And old age hasteth,
Now is best leisure
To take our pleasure.
Fa la la.

All things invite us
Now to delight us.
Fa la la.
Hence, care, be packing!
No mirth be lacking!
Let spare no treasure
To live in pleasure
Fa la la.

John Farmer (c.1565-c.1605)

Fair Phyllis I Saw

Fair Phyllis I saw sitting all alone,
Feeding her flock near to the mountainside.
The shepherds knew not whither she was gone,
But after her lover Amyntas hied,
Up and down he wandered whilst she was missing;
When he found her, O, then they fell a-kissing.

Unlike the Victorians, the Elizabethans had a healthy, if somewhat raunchy, sense of humour, and their secular vocal music is full of innuendo, some of it less than subtle. This is not simply limited to the words, but also extends into the musical settings, which employed heady sections in dancing triple rhythms to contrast with the more straight-laced duple-time music. No madrigal programme is complete without at least one madrigal that uses the nonsense 'fa la la' refrain that is such a familiar part of this repertory.

Imported into England from the continent during the latter years of Queen Elizabeth I's reign in collections of "Italian Madrigalls Englished" -- Italian music with new English words added -- the Italianate madrigal style quickly took root. Thomas Morley was a skilled composer of church music, but also one of the leading composers of madrigals. An important group of madrigals was written by the finest composers of the time, in praise of the Queen, and these all end with the words, "Long Live Fair Oriana". Elizabeth was often praised in poetry and song by being personified as a goddess -- usually Diana the huntress, also named Oriana. The music sung tonight, by Morley and his contemporaries Vautor, Bennet and Farmer, includes one of these 'Oriana' madrigals, and represents the lighter, less lacrimose vein of madrigal-writing.

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Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

As Torrents in Summer

As torrents in summer,
Half dried in their channels,
Suddenly rise though the
Sky is still cloudless,
For rain has been falling
Far off at their fountains;

So hearts that are fainting
Grow full to o'erflowing,
And they that behold it
Marvel, and know not
That God at their fountains
Far off has been raining.

Henry Longfellow

Charles Stanford (1852-1924)

The Blue Bird

The lake lay blue below the hill,
O'er it, as I looked, there flew
Across the waters, cold and still,
A bird whose wings were palest blue.

The sky above was blue at last,
The sky beneath me blue in blue,
A moment, ere the bird had passed,
It caught his image as he flew.

Mary Coleridge

Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900)

The Long Day Closes

No star is o'er the lake,
Its pale watch keeping,
The moon is half awake,
Through gray mist creeping,
The last red leaves fall round
The porch of roses,
The clock hath ceased to sound
The long day closes.

Sit by the silent hearth
In calm endeavour,
To count the sounds of mirth,
Now dumb for ever.
Heed not how hope believes
And fate disposes:
Shadow is round the eaves,
The long day closes

The lighted windows dim
Are fading slowly.
The fire that was so trim
Now quivers lowly.
Go to the dreamless bed
Where grief reposes,
Thy book of toil is read,
The long day closes.

Henry Chorley

The last three pieces, like the earlier madrigals, represent the secular tradition of choral singing by the wealthy middle-classes at home, this time for Victorian England. They evolved in an era before the advent of radio, television and mass-produced recorded music, when entertainment was 'home-made' and all emerged from a tradition, now almost extinct, of Glee Clubs, or gentleman's singing clubs. Much of the strength of this music lies in the abundance of fine Romantic poetry that flourished in the Victorian era, and was so perfectly suited to musical setting.

The Long Day Closes was written by a composer more famous for his operettas, while Edward Elgar, although making his reputation with considerably more large-scale music wrote over a hundred of these small-scale works, many to words by his wife, and each a skillful masterpiece. He is probably equally famous now for his intimate repertory as he is for his orchestral music. Stanford also wrote many part-songs and sacred anthems, and his **Blue Bird** is probably the most famous of all Victorian part-songs, with its sublime treble solo soaring over a sustained chordal texture.