

7/93

# THE CHERWELL SINGERS

Director: Alasdair Jamieson

## PURCELL KING ARTHUR

**Janet Mc Mullin**

(Soprano I, Cupid, Nereid, Venus, Honour)

**Rosy Jamieson**

(Soprano II, Philadell)

**Alexander L'Estrange**

(Alto)

**Geoff Huntingford**

(Tenor, Cornus)

**Peter Brown**

(Bass, Grimbald, Cold Genius, Aeolus, Pan)

**Narrated by Stephen Dunstone**

### SUMMARY

Second Music	Overture
	Air
Overture	
ACT I	Recitative (Tenor & Bass) & Chorus, 'Woden first to thee' Recitative (Tenor), 'The white horse neigh'd & Duet (Countertenor & Tenor), 'To Woden thanks we render' Recitative (Soprano), 'The lot is cast' Chorus, 'Brave souls' Song (Countertenor) & Chorus, 'I call' Song (Tenor) & Chorus, 'Come if you dare'
ACT II, Scene 1	Song (Soprano) & Double Chorus, 'Hither this way' Song (Bass), 'Let not a moonborn elf' Double Chorus, 'Hither this way' Septet & Chorus, 'Come, follow me'
ACT II, Scene 2	Song (Tenor) & Chorus, 'How blest are shepherds' Duet (2 Sopranos), 'Shepherd, shepherd, leave decoying' Chorus, 'Come shepherds' & Hornpipe

- INTERVAL 15 MINUTES -

Second Act Tune	Air
ACT III	Prelude Recitative (Soprano), 'What ho!' Song (Bass), 'What power art thou' Song (Soprano), 'Thou doting fool' Song (Bass), 'Great love' Recitative (Soprano), 'No part of my dominion' Prelude Chorus, 'See, see, we assemble' & Dance Song (Soprano) & Chorus, 'Tis I that have warm'd ye' Duet (Soprano & Bass), 'Sound a parley'
Third Act Tune	Hornpipe
ACT IV	Duet (2 Sopranos), 'Two daughters' Passacaglia: Song (Countertenor) & Chorus, 'How happy the lover'; Duet (Soprano & Bass), Trios & Chorus, 'For love ev'ry creature'
Fourth Act Tune	Air
ACT V	Consort of Trumpets: Trumpet Tune Song (Bass), 'Ye blust'ring brethren' Symphony Duet (Soprano & Bass) & Chorus, 'Round thy coast' Trio (Countertenor, Tenor & Bass), 'For folded flocks' Song (Tenor) & Trio (Tenor & 2 Bases), 'Your hay it is mow'd' & Dance Song (soprano), 'Fairest isle' Warlike consort: Trumpet tune Song (Soprano) & Chorus, 'Saint George'
Fifth Act Tune	Chaconne

DRYDEN wrote the dramatic opera of *King Arthur* in 1684, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Restoration, which would take place the following year. Initially, it was to be preceded by an all-sung allegorical prologue praising the king as in the French operas of Lully. Later, however, the prologue was detached and inflated into an all-sung three-act opera, *Albion and Albanus*, which was ineptly set to music by the Master of the King's Musick, Louis Grabu. This was performed at the Duchess of Portsmouth's residence shortly before 1 January, 1685 and, according to Dryden's preface to *King Arthur*, received several other private performances, or at least rehearsals, at this time as well. Before it could be publicly performed, however, King Charles II died. The text fortunately already included sufficient glorification of his brother and successor, James II, but suitable references to Charles' ascent to heaven were added before the work was finally presented to the public at the beginning of June, 1685. It then failed dismally, only partly because of the upheaval caused by the rebellion of the Duke of Monmouth a few days later.

There was obviously no hope of a favourable reception for *King Arthur* itself after this, and the work was shelved until the success of *Dioclesian*, with music by Purcell, in 1690, showed Dryden that he had distinctly under-estimated English composers. Purcell's services were quickly secured, first to write the music for Dryden's play, *Amphitryon*, and then for a revised *King Arthur*.

The publication of the text of *King Arthur* was announced in the *London Gazette* for June 4/8, 1691. Dryden's remark in the preface: 'if it succeeds upon the stage, it is likely to be the chiefest entertainment of the ladies and gentlemen this summer', suggests that the preface was written before the first performance. It thus seems likely that production and publication were more or less simultaneous, as seems to have been the case with the other Purcell semi-operas. The text may well have been on sale at the theatre for perusal during the performance. The first performance of *King Arthur*, at the theatre in Dorset Gardens therefore probably took place in early June, 1691.

*King Arthur* was the only one of Purcell's professionally produced operas to have been designed as a 'semi-opera'; the others were all adaptations of earlier plays. Dryden made a real attempt to integrate the music into the drama, but since he subscribed to the dramatic conventions of the period which virtually confined music to allegorical or supernatural beings and their worshippers, or servants, shepherds and similar characters, the main action mostly occurs in the spoken sections, and even the two singing characters, Philidel and Grimbald, speak more than they sing.

The plot bears little resemblance to any of the popular romances and legends about Camelot, and modern audiences who expect to encounter Guinevere, Sir Lancelot and the Knights of the Round Table will be disappointed. Instead, the story concerns Arthur's quest for a unified Britain, while most of the action centres on Emmeline, the blind daughter of Conon, Duke of Cornwall. Though betrothed to Arthur, she has formerly been courted by Oswald, the Saxon King of Kent, who would settle the dispute honourably on the battlefield. After being defeated by the Britons, Oswald abducts Emmeline, and Arthur's attempts to free her occupy the rest of the plot. A narration summarizes the spoken portions of the plot in this performance.

Act I finds the Saxons sacrificing to their heathen Gods for a victory against the Britons. The pious and austere verse-anthems textures give way to a rollicking invitation to partake of some Dutch courage at Woden's hall. After the Briton's belligerent victory song ('Come if you dare') the chorus splits into two groups of spirits who attempt to pull Arthur and his soldiers in opposite directions (Act II 'Hither this way'). A pristine evocation of Arcadia ('How blest are shepherds') is answered mockingly by a duet for two sopranos ('Shepherd, shepherd, leave decoying') whose words include some mild *double entendres*.

Early critics of *King Arthur* pointed to the third act's Frost Scene as a particularly impressive achievement: the extraordinarily chromatic line sung by the emergent Cold Genius and the shivering chorus of cold people contrasts with the forthright warming tones of Cupid, the embodiment of Love's fire.

The centrepiece of Act IV is the g minor Passacaglia ('How happy the lover'). Dryden requested only a song and dance 'to a minuet' but Purcell responded with a set of 59 variations over a four-bar ground. Act V is a loosely structured masque which Merlin offers as a celebration of Arthur's victory and reconciliation with Oswald. The lyrics form a heterogeneous paean to British life reflected in music as varied as the earthy 'Your hay it is mowed' and the sublime 'Fairest isle'. A final instrumental Chaconne rounds the work off.

THE CHERWELL SINGERS  
Director: Alasdair Jamieson

SOPRANO: Jane Carlton-Smith, Julia Craig-McFeely, Sue Dillon, Jenny Jonas, Louise Locock, Zoe Tarrant, Joanna Tucker, Kipper Walker

ALTO: Liz Healing, Janet Jeffs, Rosemary Keavy, Claire Singleton, Sharon Washington

TENOR: Derek Fowler, Guy Peskett, David Sutton, John Tucker

BASS: Michael Bourdeaux, Richard Coleridge, Christopher Franks, Peter Jones,  
Paul Mayhook, Robert de Newtown

ORCHESTRA

VIOLIN I: Natalie Stopps, Jenny Thomas; VIOLIN II: Laura Clayton, Sarah Pritchard,  
Alison Williams; VIOLA: Hilary Haskell, Fiona McIntosh; 'CELLO: Patricia Saxon;

DOUBLE BASS: Fiona Hedges

RECORDER: Chris Britton, Catherine Greenwood; OBOE: Michael Stinton, Lucy Earle;

BASSOON: Ian McCubbin; TRUMPET: Catherine Greenwood

HARPSICHORD CONTINUO: Andrew Tillett

THE CHERWELL SINGERS is a small chamber choir with about 25 members specialising in a *capella* music of all periods. The choir was founded in 1978 to perform the extensive choral chamber repertory, and undertakes three or more major concerts each year as well as numerous smaller events and a full diary of private functions. Recent concerts have included Italian and English madrigals, Venetian polychoral motets, English Romantic songs and music by Tallis, Sheppard, Byrd, Poulenc, Messiaen, Berlioz, Elgar and Tippett. Major works recently performed include J. S. Bach *Magnificat*, Scarlatti *Stabat Mater*, Duruflé *Requiem*, Monteverdi *Vespers*, Britten *St Nicolas*, Handel *Coronation Anthems* and Langlais *Messe Solennelle*. Future concerts include a benefit performance in Merton College Chapel of Handel's *Dixit Dominus* on 19 November in aid of the Samaritans and a concert of Shakespeare songs with settings by Vaughan Williams and the Swiss composer Frank Martin.