

THE CHERWELL SINGERS
Conducted by Alasdair Jamieson
Organ
Alexander Mason

Kenneth Leighton and the English Choral Tradition

Leighton: *Mass for double choir*

And Music by
Leighton, Howells, Harris, Walton,
Naylor, Balfour Gardiner, Ireland

8.00pm
Saturday 2 July 1994

Exeter College Chapel
(By kind permission of the Rector and Chaplain)

THE CHERWELL SINGERS

Conducted by Alasdair Jamieson

Organ: Alexander Mason

KENNETH LEIGHTON (1929-1988)

LET ALL THE WORLD
LULLY, LULLA
DROP, DROP SLOW TEARS

Organ: PAEAN

HERBERT HOWELLS (1892-1985)

MAGNIFICAT AND NUNC DIMITTIS

158 LIKE AS THE HART

Organ: DE PROFUNDIS (PSALM PRELUDE SET 2 NO. 1)

10 OFAIRE IS THE HEAVEN
SET ME AS A SEAL
VOX DICENTIS: CLAMA

WILLIAM HARRIS (1883-1973)

WILLIAM WALTON (1902-1985)

EDWARD NAYLOR (1867-1934)

Interval - 20 minutes

EVENING HYMN
COME, HOLY GHOST
GREATER LOVE

HENRY BALFOUR GARDINER (1877-1950)

CEDRIC THORPE DAVIE (1913-1987)

JOHN IRELAND (1879-1962)

Organ: ADAGIO IN E

FRANK BRIDGE (1879-1941)

KENNETH LEIGHTON

MASS FOR DOUBLE CHOIR (OPUS 44)

Soprano: Julia Craig-McFeely Alto: Rosy Jamieson

Tenor: Paul Cann Bass: Angus Edwards

This evening's concert is dedicated to the memory of Kenneth Leighton, some of whose choral music will be performed; we have tried to put this music into the wider context of the English Choral Tradition and have included works by Howells—an influential figure for Leighton (“...one of my heroes...”) and Cedric Thorpe Davie—a friend and fellow professor at a Scottish university.

Leighton was born in Wakefield in 1929. He studied classics and music at Oxford and also composition with Petrassi in Rome. In 1956 he was appointed Lecturer in Music at Edinburgh University whither he would return as Reid Professor in 1970 after a short sojourn as a music lecturer and Fellow of Worcester College, Oxford. He died in 1988.

Leighton's piano and chamber music are distinguished by a penchant for lyrical melody, virtuosic solo writing and taut organization after Baroque models (e.g. *Fantasia on BACH*, *Fantasia contrappuntistica*). He was attracted to the 12-note system as a way to achieve thematic unity through intervallic cohesion; his music in this idiom was shaped by the ‘softer’ examples of Berg and Dallapiccola (to whom Edinburgh University awarded an honorary doctorate during Leighton's time as Reid Professor) rather than Schoenberg. The choral oeuvre, in contrast, is clearly diatonic in harmonic conception; a sense of key is always perceptible even when chordal aggregates stress the sharpened fourth, or are built up of superimposed perfect fourths. Although the aural effect of his choral music is often quite complex the constituent vocal parts are relatively straightforward to sing—Leighton was indeed a truly idiomatic choral composer.

The *Mass* opus 44 was written in 1964 for the doyen of Edinburgh organist-choirmasters Herrick Bunney and his University Singers. To the double choir format are added SATB soloists. Much use is made of textural contrast and division between male and female voices. The slow measured rhythmic tread of certain moments (e.g. ‘cuius sancto spirito’ from the *Gloria*) recalls passages from Vaughan Williams' *Mass in g minor* for similar vocal forces. The *Creed*—the only movement with organ accompaniment—is a relentless and granite-solid affirmation of faith; even though this is the longest text it is set in one unbroken span. The gently lilting thirds of the *Sanctus* offer an almost onomatopæic representation of a swinging censer, while an anguished *Agnus Dei* finally relaxes into peace with an alto soloist singing over quietly descending chords a third apart.

Let all the world in every corner sing was written for the church of St Matthew, Northampton in 1965. Together with the organ *Paeon* it represents the ebullient, spiky side of Leighton's writing. The choral piece is full of bold strokes—robustly spaced two-part writing, sudden plunges into new,

vibrant keys and a momentary lyrical episode at the words 'But above all the heart...'

Lully, lulla (the Coventry Carol) is a mellifluous setting for soprano solo and choir of anonymous 15th-century words. It was written in 1955 and is no.2 of *Three Carols* op.25. *Drop, drop slow tears* is the final section of *Crucifixus pro nobis*—an extended choral work written in 1961.

Herbert Howells, like Leighton, responded in a profoundly sensitive way to the nuances of sacred texts. His setting of the Evening Canticles written for King's College Cambridge is arguably one of the finest in the whole literature. We also sing his best known anthem: *Like as the hart*.

The demands of writing for many voice parts are met in masterly fashion in the pieces by Harris and Naylor. The anthems by Walton, Balfour Gardner and Ireland between them represent the high water mark in the English choral tradition. One of the last times this writer saw Cedric Thorpe Davie—the composer of *Come Holy Ghost*—was at a graduation ceremony at which an honorary degree from the University of St Andrews was conferred on the main protagonist of this evening's concert—Kenneth Leighton. AJ

THE CHERWELL SINGERS - Musical Director Alasdair Jamieson

**Soprano I - Julia Craig-McFeely,* Sarah Franks,* Louise Locock,*
Zoe Tarrant, Joanna Tucker**

Soprano II - Gol Caird, Jane Carlton-Smith, Sue Dillon, Kipper Chipperfield

Alto I - Rosemary Keavy, Clare Singleton, Sharon Washington

Alto II - Liz Healing, Janet Jeffs

Tenor I - Paul Cann,* Derek Fowler, David Sutton

Tenor II - Bill Johnston, Guy Peskett, Martin Price, John Tucker*

Bass I - Christopher Franks, Anthony Headlam, Paul Mayhook*

Bass II - Richard Coleridge, Stephen Dunstone, Peter Jones

(*Soloists)

The Cherwell Singers was founded in 1978 by a group of friends who wanted to perform the extensive choral chamber repertory to a high standard. The choir undertakes three or more major concerts each year, and has a full diary of private functions. Recent concerts of music by composers from 1500-1990 have included performances of Tallis *Lamentations*, J. S. Bach *Magnificat*, Scarlatti *Stabat Mater*, Duruflé *Requiem*, Monteverdi *Vespers*, Britten *St Nicolas*, and Langlais *Messe Solennelle* and music by White, Marenzio, Purcell, Elgar, Bononcini, Berlioz, Frank Martin, Pizzetti and Tippett. If you would like to engage the choir for a private function or would like further information, please contact the Secretary, Richard Coleridge on Oxford 62882, or the Conference Secretary, Christopher Franks on Oxford 273056.