

The Cherwell Singers

Director: Malcolm Pearce

with

Baritone: Oliver Hunt

Soprano: Clementine Franks

Organ: Myles Hartley

Saturday 4 December 2004, 8.00pm

St Michael at the Northgate

Cornmarket Street

Oxford

Tickets £10.00 (concessions £8.00).

PROGRAMME

Cantique de Jean Racine, Op.11 (1865)

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Words by Jean Racine from *Hymnes traduites de bréviare romain*:

O divine Word above, our hope and consolation, eternal light of the heavens and the earth: our voices greet the morning; look down, O Lord, and hear thy people's prayer!

Inspire us, Lord, we pray, with the power of thy Spirit, that hell may flee before thy mighty word. From slumber waken us, our weary souls reviving, that we may never forget thy laws!

Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on thy congregation now gathered here in the sight of thy throne; receive the hymns they offer to thy endless glory; renewed by thy gifts may they go forth in peace.

Adagio (Suite Modale, Op.43)

Flor Peeters (1903-1986)

Mass for double choir

Frank Martin (1890-1974)

Kyrie

Gloria

Credo

Sanctus—Benedictus

Agnus Dei

A short *Adagio* by the great Flemish organist and composer, Flor Peeters, sets the scene for the harmonic language of Frank Martin's remarkable setting of the Ordinary of the Mass. Martin was born in Switzerland, the son of a Calvinist minister, and composed this music between 1922 and 1926 as a private act of piety. Seeing it "as a matter between God and myself", the composer set the manuscript aside to hibernate through the hostile musical and political environment of the mid-twentieth century. Only in 1963 did he feel that the moment was right for the music to receive its first performance. Publication had to wait a further decade and the world at large has had access to this beautiful music for barely thirty years.

Although Martin was later to embrace the serial technique of Arnold Schoenberg the Mass is set in a world of modal diatonicism where harmonies are by turn lush and piquant, and melodies flow limpidly, often with a pentatonic feel. The full range of textures exploited can be observed in the opening *Kyrie*: meandering pastoral polyphony proceeds via a dense, dissonant exclamation to a homophonic texture that moves forward with greater urgency. The resources provided by the double choir (often with

subdivision of voices) are then exemplified by Martin's presentation of the melody in octaves – a quasi-orchestral concept – with rich supporting harmonies from the other parts.

The *Gloria*, set by most composers as an extrovert outburst of praise, begins unobtrusively and concludes in a similarly unconventional manner, the music evaporating almost into nothing. In the *Credo* a similar lightness of touch can be seen in the airy pentatonic counterpoint of *et resurrexit* and the lilting metre employed for *et in Spiritum Sanctum*. The *Sanctus* grows from gentle, bell-like chords to exultant antiphony between the two choirs in the *hosannas*. The *Benedictus* that follows conveys a jazzy coolness. It is in the concluding *Agnus Dei* that the roles of the two choirs are most clearly delineated: the steady tread of the second choir's chords providing an expressive accompaniment for the melody conveyed in the first choir.

— INTERVAL (20 minutes) —

Trois Pièces pour Grand Orgue
Requiem

Jehan Alain (1911-1940)
Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Variations sur un thème de Clément Jannequin

Requiem **I: Introit – Kyrie**
 II: Offertorium

Le Jardin Suspendu

Requiem **III: Sanctus**
 IV: Pie Jesu
 V: Agnus Dei

Litanies

Requiem **VI: Libera me;**
 VII: In Paradisum

Fauré's Requiem was begun in 1887, apparently "for pleasure", and given its first (liturgical) performance at a funeral the next year at the Madeleine, the Parisian church where Fauré was organist. In this earliest version there were only five movements and, although a small orchestra was present, the sonority of the organ was prominent throughout. The work was expanded in 1893 with the addition of the *Offertorium* and *Libera me* and in 1900 the present familiar version for full orchestra emerged. Since the composer's publisher probably requested this simply as a money-spinner, Fauré entrusted the task of orchestration to his favourite pupil Roger-Ducasse (who was, incidentally, a teacher of Jehan Alain).

Fauré's setting of the Requiem is notable for its emphasis upon the idea of rest and peace, eschewing the more dramatic depictions of the day of judgement found in, say, Verdi's famous setting. In fact, the only moment in which the terrors of judgment are mentioned is in the *Libera me*. This work is characterised by a succession of wonderful melodies, whose presentation is often entrusted either to a solo voice (the *Pie Jesu* and the *Libera me*) or to specific sections of the choir on their own, be it the tenors (in the opening *Requiem* movement and the *Agnus Dei*) or the sopranos (in the *Sanctus* and the concluding *In Paradisum*).

In this performance the movements of the Requiem are introduced by and interspersed with the music of a talented French organist whose life was tragically curtailed by the Second World War. Alain's output consists mainly of piano and organ music, the latter being influenced by cultures as diverse as India, the Middle East and the Catholic tradition of Gregorian Chant. The *Trois Pièces* are probably his most enduring work and display an originality every bit as striking as that of his great contemporary Olivier Messiaen. The theme upon which the *Variations* are based is, in fact, of anonymous authorship, the melody appearing in an Attaignant collection of 1529. *Le Jardin Suspendu*, described by the composer as a *Chaconne*, is music that floats serenely in mid-air, a metaphor, says the composer, for the unattainable haven for which the creative artist is perpetually striving. *Litanies* is undoubtedly Alain's most famous work; a ceaseless repetition of a plainsong-like phrase that depicts the urgent petitions of the Christian soul in distress. Alain, a despatch rider in the French forces, was heroically killed in action, and was awarded the Croix de Guerre posthumously. In his despatch bag was the manuscript of his magnum opus, the orchestral version of his *Trois Danses*, lost forever in the orchestral form, but happily surviving in the version for organ.

Forthcoming concerts:

April 9th 2005 at 8pm in Merton College Chapel

Rubbra *Inscape*, Finzi *Dies Natalis*, Bliss *Pastoral: Lie strewn the white flocks*. Jane Harrington (soprano), Christopher Britton (flute) and the Oxford Sinfonia

July 11th at 4pm in the Holywell Music Room

Love Sacred and Profane: selections from Palestrina, *Canticum Canticorum* and erotic madrigals from the Italian tradition.

Contact for the choir: Christopher Franks 01865 723056