

The Cherwell Singers

present

Henry Purcell

King Arthur

or

The British Worthy

Saturday, 27th June 2009

The University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford

Programme

Henry Purcell
(1659 - 1695)

King Arthur
(words by Dryden)

Act I

Act II

Interval

Act III

Act IV

Act V

This performance of Henry Purcell's *King Arthur* is being given in the 350th anniversary year of the composer's birth

James Brown conductor

Robyn Parton soprano

Nicholas Hewlett tenor

Greg Skidmore bass

Polly Smith Violin 1

Veronique Matarasso Violin 2

Jane Norman Viola

Gabriel Amherst Cello

David Ponsford Harpsichord

Alex Hodgkinson Organ

Henry Purcell was the greatest of a family of musicians. As a boy he sang in the choir of the Chapel Royal; at the age of 18 he was appointed Composer in Ordinary for the royal violins (*i.e.* orchestra), and at a mere 20 years he became organist of Westminster Abbey. His claim to greatness as a composer lies on the one hand in his ability to contrive distinguished music for all manner of occasions from the home to royal ceremony, and on the other in the originality with which he combined Italian and French styles with the native British tradition. He died young (aged 36), but managed in that brief time to become idolised in his own day; Dryden wrote of him: “we have at length found an Englishman equal with the best abroad”, and of his music for *King Arthur*: “he has nothing to fear but an ignorant, ill-judging audience”. In some ways, Handel was indebted to his example, but otherwise his influence has been more on twentieth-century composers such as Britten.

King Arthur was a play written by Dryden in 1691 (his last major work) with substantial scenes set to music as opera by Purcell. This hybrid form, unique to restoration England, is known as ‘semi-opera’. When written, the play was viewed as the main element, with the music as contrasting entertainment. The actors did not sing (being stars in their own right), and so the musical sections appear rather loosely related to the plot of the play. Dryden’s play has not worn well and makes for a long evening, and so it quickly became usual to perform the musical sections alone, whether in the opera house or in concert. There appears to be no political subtext to the plot of the play, as could sometimes be found at the time; but the masque of Act V raises such matters as the export of fish to the continent (to enjoy for the Friday fast!) and the new foreign King.

The musical text of *King Arthur* is rather confused. There is no complete surviving score, and none in Purcell’s hand. As well as the vocal sections, there were instrumental interludes. Some movements appear in collections which give no indication of where they fit in the play, and with varying orchestrations. There is music for some movements which is clearly not by Purcell, and one movement with words not by Dryden either. Tonight we are performing the usual modern selection of movements with the omission of two that are less convincing; and the comparatively small parts for trumpets, oboes and flutes are being played on the organ.

The ‘Worthies’ of the subtitle were a selection of nine men, three each pagan, Jewish, and Christian, who in the middle ages were believed to personify the ideals of chivalry. King Arthur was the only Briton among them.

Synopsis and Text

Chaconne First Music: Overture Second Music: Air

Act I

The Britons under King Arthur, and with the aid of the magician Merlin, have driven the invading Saxons under Oswald back to Kent. Arthur takes leave of his blind betrothed, Emmeline, as he prepares for the final battle, which will be fought on St George's day.

The Saxons prepare for battle by making animal and (volunteer) human sacrifices to their gods, Woden, Thor and Freya.

PRIEST

Woden, first to thee
A milk-white steed, in battle won,
We have sacrific'd.

CHORUS

We have sacrific'd.

PRIEST

Let our next oblation be
To Thor, thy thund'ring son,
Of such another.

CHORUS

We have sacrific'd.

PRIEST

A third (of Friesland breed was he)
To Woden's wife, and to Thor's mother;
And now we have aton'd all three.

CHORUS

We have sacrific'd.

PRIEST

The white horse neigh'd aloud.

PRIESTS & CHORUS

To Woden thanks we render,
To Woden we have vow'd,
To Woden, our defender.

PRIESTESS

The lot is cast, and Tanfan pleas'd;
Of mortal cares you shall be eas'd.

CHORUS

Brave souls, to be renown'd in story.
Honour prizing, death despising,
Fame acquiring by expiring,
Die and reap the fruit of glory.

PRIESTESS

I call you all
To Woden's Hall,
Your temples round
With ivy bound
In goblets crown'd,
And plenteous bowls of burnish'd gold,
Where ye shall laugh
And dance and quaff
The juice that makes the Britons bold.

CHORUS

To Woden's Hall all,
Where in plenteous bowls of burnish'd gold,
We shall laugh
And dance and quaff
The juice that makes the Britons bold.

The battle is joined, and the Britons triumph.

The Britons celebrate their victory.

WARRIOR & CHORUS

'Come if you dare,' our trumpets sound.
'Come if you dare,' the foes rebound.
We come, we come, we come, we come,
Says the double, double, double beat of
the thund'ring drum.

Now they charge on amain.
Now they rally again.
The Gods from above the mad labour behold,
And pity mankind that will perish for gold.

The fainting Saxons quit their ground,
Their trumpets languish in their sound,
They fly, they fly, they fly, they fly,
'Victoria, Victoria,' the bold Britons cry.

Now the victory's won,
To the plunder we run,
We return to our lasses like fortunate
traders,
Triumphant with spoils of the vanquish'd
invaders.

First Act Tune

Act II

The Britons chase the defeated Oswald; his magician Osmond sends the spirit Grimbald to mislead them into a marsh. But Merlin sends the spirit Philidel (who defected from Osmond on seeing the Britons' Christian cross) to rescue them.

PHILIDEL

Hither, this way, this way bend,
Trust not the malicious fiend.
Those are false deluding lights
Wafted far and near by sprites.
Trust 'em not, for they'll deceive ye,
And in bogs and marshes leave ye.

PHILIDEL'S SPIRITS

Hither, this way, this way bend.

GRIMBALD'S SPIRITS

This way, hither, this way bend.

PHILIDEL

If you step no longer thinking,
Down you fall, a furlong sinking.
'Tis a fiend who has annoy'd ye:
Name but Heav'n, and he'll avoid ye.

Hither, this way.

PHILIDEL'S SPIRITS

Hither, this way, this way bend.

GRIMBALD'S SPIRITS

This way, hither, this way bend.

PHILIDEL'S SPIRITS

Trust not the malicious fiend.

Hither, this way, *etc.*

GRIMBALD

Let not a moon-born elf mislead ye
From your prey and from your glory;
To fear, alas, he has betray'd ye;
Follow the flames that wave before ye,
Sometimes sev'n, and sometimes one.
Hurry, hurry, hurry, hurry on.
See, see the footsteps plain appearing.
That way Oswald chose for flying.
Firm is the turf and fit for bearing,
Where yonder pearly dews are lying.
Far he cannot hence be gone.
Hurry, hurry, hurry, hurry on.
PHILIDEL'S SPIRITS

Hither, this way, this way bend.
GRIMBALD' S SPIRITS
Hither, this way, this way bend.

PHILIDEL'S SPIRITS
Trust not that malicious fiend.
Hither, this way, *etc.*

Grimbald, defeated, vanishes. Philidel's spirits lead the Britons back towards their camp.

PHILIDEL, SPIRITS & CHORUS
Come, follow me, and me, and me.
And greensward all your way shall be.
No goblin or elf shall dare to offend ye.

We brethren of air
You heroes will bear
To the kind and the fair that attend ye.

In the British camp, Emmeline, while awaiting Arthur's return, is entertained by shepherds and shepherdesses.

SHEPHERD & CHORUS
How blest are shepherds, how happy their
lasses,
While drums and trumpets are sounding
alarms.
Over our lowly sheds all the storm passes
And when we die, 'tis in each other's arms
All the day on our herds and flocks
employing,
All the night on our flutes and in enjoying.
Bright nymphs of Britain with graces
attended,
Let not your days without pleasure expire.
Honor's but empty, and when youth is ended,
All men will praise you but none will desire.
Let not youth fly away without contenting;
Age will come time enough for your
repenting.

SHEPHERDESSES
Shepherd, shepherd, leave decoying:
Pipes are sweet on summer's day,
But a little after toying,
Women have the shot to pay.
Here are marriage-vows for signing:
Set their marks that cannot write.
After that, without repining,
Play, and welcome, day and night.

CHORUS
Come, shepherds, lead up a lively measure
The cares of wedlock are cares of pleasure:
But whether marriage bring joy or sorrow.
Make sure of this day and hang tomorrow

INTERVAL

Oswald stumbles on the British camp by chance and takes the opportunity to seize Emmeline, with whom he is also in love. Arthur demands her return, but Oswald refuses even when offered half the kingdom for her.

Second Act Tune: Air

Act III

The Britons attempt to rescue Emmeline. Arthur, with the help of Philidel, penetrates the enchanted wood round Oswald's castle. Philidel cures Emmeline's blindness, but they retreat before they can release her when the magician Osmond approaches. Osmond has imprisoned Oswald because he wants Emmeline for himself, but she freezes in horror at his revolting appearance.

Osmond tries vainly to win Emmeline's favour by showing her a masque depicting the power of love to overcome coldness.

CUPID

What ho! thou genius of this isle, what ho!
Liest thou asleep beneath those hills of snow?
Stretch out thy lazy limbs. Awake, awake!
And winter from thy furry mantle shake.

COLD GENIUS

What power art thou, who from below
Hast made me rise unwillingly and slow
From beds of everlasting snow?
See'st thou not how stiff and wondrous old,
Far unfit to bear the bitter cold,
I can scarcely move or draw my breath?
Let me, let me freeze again to death.

CUPID

Thou doting fool forbear, forbear!
What dost thou mean by freezing here?
At Love's appearing, All the sky clearing,
The stormy winds their fury spare.
Winter subduing, And Spring renewing,
My beams create a more glorious year.
Thou doting fool, forbear, forbear!
What dost thou mean by freezing here?

COLD GENIUS

Great Love, I know thee now:
Eldest of the gods art thou.
Heav'n and earth by thee were made.
Human nature is thy creature,
Ev'rywhere thou art obey'd.

CUPID

No part of my dominion shall he waste:
To spread my sway and sing my praise
E'en here I will a people raise
Of kind embracing lovers, and embrac'd.

CHORUS OF COLD PEOPLE

See, see, we assemble
Thy revels to hold:
Tho' quiv'ring with cold
We chatter and tremble.

CUPID

'Tis I, 'tis I, 'tis I that have warm'd ye.
In spite of cold weather
I've brought ye together.

'Tis I, 'tis I, 'tis I that have warm'd ye,

CHORUS

'Tis Love, 'tis Love,
'Tis Love that has warm'd us.
In spite of the weather
He brought us together.

'Tis Love, 'tis Love,
'Tis Love that has warm'd us.

CUPID & COLD GENIUS

Sound a parley, ye fair, and surrender,
Set yourselves and your lovers at ease.
He's a grateful offender
Who pleasure dare seize:
But the whining pretender
Is sure to displease.

Sound a parley, ye fair, and surrender.
Since the fruit of desire is possessing,
'Tis unmanly to sigh and complain.
When we kneel for redressing,
We move your disdain.

Love was made for a blessing
And not for a pain.

CHORUS

'Tis Love, 'tis Love, *etc.*

Third Act Tune: Hornpipe

Act IV

Arthur is passing through the enchanted wood. Warned of its dangers by Merlin, he succeeds in resisting the first two enchantments:

TWO SIRENS

Two daughters of this aged stream are we,
And both our sea-green locks have comb'd for ye.
Come bathe with us an hour or two;
Come naked in, for we are so.
What danger from a naked foe?
Come bathe with us, come bathe, and share
What pleasures in the floods appear?
We'll beat the waters till they bound
And circle round, and circle round.

The Passacaglia:

A SYLVAN

How happy the lover,
How easy his chain!
How sweet to discover
He sighs not in vain.

CHORUS

How happy the lover, etc.

Ritornello

A SYLVAN & A NYMPH

For love ev'ry creature
Is form'd by his nature.
No joys are above
The pleasures of love.

CHORUS

No joys are above.
The pleasures of love.

THREE NYMPHS

In vain are our graces,
In vain are your eyes.
In vain are our graces
If love you despise.
When age furrows faces,
'Tis too late to be wise.

THREE SYLVANS

Then use the sweet blessing
While now in possessing.

No joys are above
The pleasures of love.

THREE NYMPHS

No joys are above
The pleasures of love.

CHORUS

No joys are above
The pleasures of love.

Resisting temptation Arthur strikes a tree, and the spirit Grimbald appears to him in the form of Emmeline. Before they can embrace, Philidel intervenes to unmask the deception, and Arthur fells the tree while Philidel drags Grimbald away.

Fourth Act Tune: Air

Act V

The Britons take Oswald's castle. Osmond releases Oswald to fight a duel with Arthur, which Arthur wins.

Trumpet Tune

Arthur is reunited with Emmeline; Osmond is thrown into the dungeons.

Oswald joins the Britons to watch a masque put on by Merlin which celebrates a glorious future in which the Saxons and the Britons live together in a great and glorious Britain.

AEOLUS

Ye blust'ring brethren of the skies,
Whose breath has ruffled all the wat'ry plain,
Retire, and let Britannia rise
In triumph o'er the main.
Serene and calm, and void of fear,
The Queen of Islands must appear.

Symphony

NEREID, PAN & CHORUS

Round thy coast, fair nymph of Britain,
For thy guard our waters flow:
Proteus all his heard admitting
On thy green to graze below:
Foreign lands thy fish are tasting;
Learn from thee luxurious fasting.

COMUS & PEASANTS

Your hay, it is mow'd and your corn is reap'd,
Your barns will be full and your hovels
heap'd.
Come, boys, come,
Come, boys, come,
And merrily roar out our harvest home.

We've cheated the parson, we'll cheat him
again,
For why shou'd a blockhead have one in ten?
For prating so long, like a book-learn'd sot,
Till pudding and dumpling are burnt to the
pot.

We'll toss off our ale till we cannot stand;
And heigh for the honor of old England;

VENUS

Fairest isle, all isles excelling,
Seat of pleasure and of love;
Venus here will choose her dwelling,
And forsake her Cyprian grove.
Cupid from his fav'rite nation,
Care and envy will remove;
Jealousy that poisons passion,
And despair that dies for love.

SHE

You say, 'tis Love creates the pain,
Of which so sadly you complain,
And yet would fain engage my heart
In that uneasy cruel part;
But how, alas! Think you that
I can bear the wounds of which you die?

HE

'Tis not my passion makes my care,
But your indiff'rence gives despair:
The lusty sun begets no spring
Till gentle show'rs assistance bring;
So Love, that scorches and destroys,
Till kindness aids, can cause no joys.

SHE

Love has a thousand ways to please,
But more to rob us of our ease;
For waking nights and careful days,

Gentle murmurs, sweet complaining,
Sighs that blow the fire of love;
Soft repulses, Kind disdainings,
Shall be all the pains you prove.
Ev'ry swain shall pay his duty,
Grateful ev'ry nymph shall prove;
And as these excel in beauty,
Those shall be renown'd for love.

Some hours of pleasure he repays;
But absence soon, or jealous fears,
O'erflows the joy with floods of tears.

HE

But one soft moment makes amends
For all the torment that attends.

BOTH

Let us love, let us love and to happiness haste.
Age and wisdom come too fast.
Youth for loving was design'd.

HE

I'll be constant, you be kind.

SHE

You be constant, I'll be kind.

BOTH

Heav'n can give no greater blessing
Than faithful love and kind possessing.

Trumpet Tune

CHORUS

Our natives not alone appear
To court the martial prize;
But foreign kings adopted here
Their crowns at home despise.

Our Sov'reign high, in awful state,
His honors shall bestow;
And see his sceptred subjects wait
On his commands below.

Robyn Parton soprano

Robyn graduated in 2008 from Worcester College, Oxford where she was a choral scholar and begins postgraduate study this September at the Royal College of Music with Sally Burgess. She has performed with British Youth Opera, New Chamber Opera and Bampton Classical Opera and is a current member of the Monteverdi Choir Apprenticeship scheme. She has completed a year's training on the ENO/Baylis Opera works programme.

Nicholas Hewlett tenor

Nicholas was a choral scholar at King's College London whilst singing with Southwark Cathedral Choir before moving to All Saints Margaret Street, London where he sang for five years. He has sung with the highly acclaimed Oxford quartet "Liedertafel" as well as a soloist locally for Chipping Norton and Summertown Choral Societies and the North Cotswold Chamber Choir. Nicholas is Head of Geography and Housemaster at Magdalen College School.

Greg Skidmore bass

Born in Canada, Greg graduated in 2005 from Royal Holloway College, University of London. He has sung with the choirs of Wells and Gloucester Cathedrals and is currently a lay clerk at Christ Church Cathedral. He has sung with I Fagiolini, Tenebrae, The Gabrieli Consort, Ex Cathedra, Capella Nova and Chapelle du Roi. He is currently engaged in doctoral research in musicology at Oxford University.

James Brown conductor

James was Organ Scholar of Girton College, Cambridge and upon graduating studied organ at the Conservatoire de Musique, Geneva with Lionel Rogg. After two years working as an organist in Texas James returned to England where he is currently Organist of the University Church, Oxford and a lay clerk in New College Choir. Whilst living in Switzerland, James appeared in a fully staged production of King Arthur at La Comedie, Geneva, and he is pleased to have the chance to be involved with the music again.

The Cherwell Singers

Soprano

Claire Appleton
Angelyn Bethel
Clare Scott-Dempster
Rachel Smith
Beatrix Stewart
Lucy Watson

Tenor

Philip Endean
Paul King
Guy Peskett
David Sutton

Alto

Virginia Allport
Katherine Butler
Kipper Chipperfield
Clare Jarvis
Janet McKnight
Jo McLean
Sally Prime
Sarah Verney Caird

Bass

Neil Herington
Paul Hodges
Iain McLean
Simeon Mitchell
Pelham Olive

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www.cherwellsingers.org