

The Cherwell Singers

present

A Programme of
Sacred Works by

Benjamin Britten

Saturday, 5th December 2009

The University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford

Programme

Te Deum in C
A Hymn of St Columba

Prelude and Fugue on a Theme of Vittoria (organ)

Antiphon
Festival Te Deum

Interval

A Hymn to the Virgin
A Boy was Born (chorale)

Corpus Christi Carol

A Ceremony of Carols

Procession
Wolcum Yole!
There is no Rose
That yongë child
Balulalow
As dew in Aprille
This little Babe
Interlude (harp)
In Freezing Winter Night
Spring Carol
Deo Gracias
Recession

James Brown conductor
Robyn Parton soprano
Steven Grahl organ
Vicky Lester harp

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) is generally considered to have brought greatness back to British music after more than a century in which it had been lacking, picking up in some respects where Purcell had left off. His musical talent emerged in early childhood, and he is one of the few composers to have works from their teenage years regularly performed.

Childhood was very important to Britten, and he spoke of liking to think of a part of himself always remaining 13 years old. He was a compulsive and competitive sportsman, perhaps driven by the determination to keep his boyhood alive, and at times some of this energy overflows into his music. He wrote much music for or including children's voices – there are parts for children in most of his operas, for instance – and he preferred the raw sound of their voices to the purified form often found in cathedrals or chapels.

Britten's upbringing was religious, but he was not a church-goer after he came to question the church's authority in the 1930s under the influence of W H Auden. He did, however, retain a belief in the moral teachings of Christ, even when he no longer accepted his divinity. This goes some way towards explaining why although he wrote a considerable number of works based on religious texts, few of them are suitable for regular church use, and those were mainly written for special occasions.

Tonight's concert starts with music that was written for use in church services, or is suitable for such use. The **Te Deum in C** (1933) was written just at the end of his time at the Royal College of Music for St Mark's, North Audley St, London, and uses the bell-like figure heard in the organ pedals at the beginning as a unifying device throughout the work. The piece does not move off the chord of C major until the third page, while still building up dramatic tension. A **Hymn of St Columba** (1962) sets words attributed to a sixth-century saint. The horrors of judgement and the angst of waiting fearfully for deliverance at the Second Coming are conveyed by a rumbling bass line in the organ pedals (the Second Coming is an Advent theme, and so particularly appropriate for this time of year). The **Prelude and Fugue on a Theme of Vittoria** (1946) was written for the name-day of St Matthew's, Northampton, and is the only piece of solo organ music that Britten wrote. In spite of this, it is idiomatically written for the instrument, and was purposely written to be within the capabilities of the average parish church organist. The theme – a fragment of nine notes – forms the basis of a pedal cadenza in the prelude. It is also the theme of the fugue, which has

more the form of an ostinato than that of a formal fugue such as those of Bach. **Antiphon** (1956) is a setting of words by George Herbert which depict a conversation between men and angels, in which each comment on lines that they sing together; the angels are depicted by a treble solo (or three trebles), and the men by the lower parts of the chorus. The **Festival Te Deum** (1945) was written for the centenary festival of St Mark's, Swindon. It shares with its predecessor a simplicity in the setting of the words, and avoidance, for the most part, of counterpoint; but it has gained a new flexibility of rhythm, and a striking degree of independence between the voices and the organ.

In the second part of the concert we move towards Christmas. **A Hymn to the Virgin** (1930) is the earliest work in the concert, and was one of the pieces which gained Britten admission to the Royal College of Music when he was just 16 years old. The fourteenth-century macaronic (*i.e.* alternating English and Latin) text is set by dividing the choir into two, with a semi-chorus singing the Latin lines. Not long after, Britten wrote **A Boy was Born** (1933), a large set of variations for chorus showing some influence from Berg, whose opera *Wozzeck* Britten had just heard with the result that he wanted to study with him (he was, however, prevented from doing so). The first movement, which is being performed tonight, is a chorale setting in a modal vein. The fifth variation combines *In the Bleak Midwinter* with the *Corpus Christi Carol*, and many years later, Britten extracted from it the **Corpus Christi Carol** (1962) as a setting for solo treble and piano or organ. The tune is based on a mediæval theme, adapted by Britten to suit the fifteenth-century words.

The Ceremony of Carols was mainly written in 1942 while Britten was returning from America to England, and five of the poems come from a book, *The English Galaxy of Shorter Poems*, that he bought in Nova Scotia on the way. It is written for three treble parts, though the first performance (before it reached its final form) was in fact given by a choir of women's voices. The use of a harp was probably suggested by a request he had received for a harp concerto – and indeed, the sonority of the harp rather than an organ is a particularly striking touch. In its use of plainsong to frame a work made up of early poetry, this work also foreshadows Britten's later church parables (*Curlew River*, *etc.*). The settings are largely homophonic and dance-like, although counterpoint is used for effect in some movements. This is most notable in *This Little Babe*, in which the war between good and evil is illustrated using an irregular melody, in canon, over a rhythmically relentless accompaniment.

Te Deum (St Ambrose and St Augustine, 339)

We praise thee, O God, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.
All the earth doth worship thee, the Father everlasting.
To thee all Angels cry aloud, the Heavens, and all the Powers therein.
To thee Cherubin and Seraphin continually do cry,
Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Sabaoth;
Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty of thy glory.

The glorious company of the Apostles praise thee.
The goodly fellowship of the Prophets praise thee.
The noble army of Martyrs praise thee.
The holy Church throughout all the world doth acknowledge thee;
The Father of an infinite Majesty;
Thine honourable, true, and only Son;
Also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter.

Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ.
Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.
When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man,
 thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb.
When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death,
 thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.
Thou sittest at the right hand of God in the glory of the Father.
We believe that thou shalt come to be our Judge.
We therefore pray thee, help thy servants,
 whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood.
Make them to be numbered with thy Saints in glory everlasting.

O Lord, save thy people and bless thine heritage.
Govern them and lift them up for ever.
Day by day we magnify thee;
and we worship thy Name ever world without end.
Vouchsafe, O Lord to keep us this day without sin.
O Lord, have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us.
O Lord, let thy mercy lighten upon us, as our trust is in thee.
O Lord, in thee have I trusted; let me never be confounded.

A Hymn of St Columba (521-597, trans: John Andrews)

Regis regum rectissimi	<i>King of kings and of lords most high,</i>
prope est dies Domini,	<i>Comes his day of judgement nigh:</i>
dies irae et vindictae,	<i>Day of wrath and vengeance stark,</i>
tenebrarum et nebulae,	<i>Day of shadows and cloudy dark,</i>
Regis regum rectissimi.	<i>King of kings and of lords most high.</i>
Diesque mirabilium	<i>Thunder shall rend that day apart,</i>
tonitruorum fortium,	<i>Wonder amaze each fearful heart.</i>
dies quoque angustiae,	<i>Anguish and pain and deep distress</i>

maeroris ac tristitiae.
Regis regum rectissimi.

In quo cessabit mulierum
amor et desiderium,
nominumque contentio
mundi huius et cupido,
Regis regum rectissimi.

*Shall mark that day of bitterness.
King of kings and of lords most high.*

*That day the pangs of lust will cease,
Man's questing heart shall be at peace;
Then shall the great no more contend
And worldly fame be at an end.
King of kings and of lords most high.*

Antiphon (George Herbert, 1593-1633)

Praised be the God of love, (*Men:*) Here below, (*Angels:*) And here above:
Who hath dealt his mercies so, (*Angels:*) To his friend, (*Men:*) And to his foe;
That both grace and glorie tend (*Angels:*) Us of old, (*Men:*) And us in th'end.
The great shepherd of the fold (*Angels:*) Us did make, (*Men:*) For us was sold.
He our foes in pieces brake; (*Angels:*) Him we touch; (*Men:*) And him we take.
Wherefore since that he is such, (*Angels:*) We adore, (*Men:*) And we do crouch.
Lord, thy praises should be more. (*Men:*) We have none, (*Angels:*) And we no store.
Praised be the God alone, Who hath made of two folds one.

A Hymn to the Virgin, Anon, 13th century

Of one that is so fair and bright	Velut maris stella,	<i>Like the star of the sea,</i>
Brighter than the day is light,	Parens et puella:	<i>Mother and maiden:</i>
I cry to thee, thou see to me,		
Lady, pray thy Son for me	Tam pia,	<i>So tender,</i>
That I may come to thee.	Maria!	
All this world was forlorn	Eva peccatrice,	<i>Eve having been a sinner,</i>
Till our Lord was y-born	De te genetrix.	<i>Of you, his mother.</i>
With <i>ave</i> it went away		
Darkest night, and comes the day	Salutis;	<i>Of salvation;</i>
The well springeth out of thee.	Virtutis.	<i>Of virtue.</i>
Lady, flow'r of ev'rything,	Rosa sine spina,	<i>Thornless rose,</i>
Thou bare Jesu, Heaven's King,	Gratia divina:	<i>By divine grace:</i>
Of all thou bear'st the prize,		
Lady, queen of paradise	Electa:	<i>Chosen:</i>
Maid mild, mother <i>es Effecta</i>	Effecta.	<i>You are fulfilled.</i>

A Boy was Born (German, 16th century, trans: Percy Dearmer)

A Boy was born in Bethlehem;
Rejoice for that, Jerusalem! Alleluya.
He let himself a servant be,
That all mankind he might set free: Alleluya.
Then praise the Word of God who came
To dwell within a human frame: Alleluya.

Corpus Christi Carol (Anon, 15th century)

He bare him up, he bare him down,
He bare him into an orchard brown.

Lully lullay, lully lullay,

The falcon hath borne my make [=mate, love] away.

In that orchard there was an hall
That was hanged with purple and pall,
And in that hall there was a bed.
It was hanged with gold so red.

Lully etc

In that bed there lieth a knight,
His woundes bleeding, day and night.
By that bedside kneeleth a may,
And she weepeth both night and day.

Lully etc

And by that bedside there standeth a stone,
Corpus Christi written thereon.

A Ceremony of Carols

1. Procession (Antiphon to the Magnificat on Christmas Day)

Hodie Christus natus est:

Today Christ is born;

hodie Salvator apparuit:

today the Savior has appeared.

hodie in terra canunt angeli:

Today the angels sing on earth;

laetantur archangeli:

the archangels rejoice.

hodie exsultant justi dicentes:

Today the righteous exult, saying:

gloria in excelsis Deo. Alleluia!

Glory to God on high! Alleluia!

2. Wolcum Yole! (Anon, 14th century)

Wolcum be thou hevenè king,

Wolcum Yole!

Wolcum, born in one morning,

Wolcum for whom wesall sing!

Wolcum be ye Stevene and Jon,

Wolcum innocentes every one,

Wolcum Thomas marter one.

Wolcum be ye good Newe Yere,

Wolcum, Twelfthe Day both in fere,

Wolcum, seintes lefe and dere,

Wolcum Yole!

Candelmesse, Quene of bliss,

Wolcum bothe to more and lesse.

Wolcum be ye that are here,
Wolcum, wolcum, make good cheer.
Wolcum alle another yere.

Wolcum Yole! Wolcum!

3. **There is no Rose** (Anon, 14th century)

There is no rose of such vertu		
As is the rose that bare Jesu.	Alleluia.	
For in this rose contained was		
Heaven and earth in litel space,	Res miranda.	<i>Marvellous thing.</i>
By that rose we may well see		
There be one God in persons three,	Pares forma.	<i>Equal in nature.</i>
The aungels sungen the shepherds to		
<i>Gloria in excelsis Deo,</i>	Gaudeamus.	<i>Let us rejoice.</i>
Leave we all this werldly merth		
And follow we this joyous birth,	Transeamus.	<i>Let us pass over.</i>

4a. **That yongë child** (Anon, 14th century)

That yongë child when it gan weep
With song she lulled him asleep:
That was so sweet a melody
It passèd allè minstrelsy.
The nightingalè sang also:
Her song is hoarse and nought thereto:
Whoso attendeth to her song
and leaveth the first then doth he wrong.

4b. **Balulalow** (James, John and Robert Wedderburn, 1548, 1561)

O my deare hert, young Jesu sweit,
Prepare thy creddil in my spreit,
And I sall rock thee to my hert,
And never mair from thee depart.

But I sall praise thee evermoir
with sanges sweit unto thy gloir;
The knees of my hert sall I bow,
And sing that richt Balulalow.

5. **As dew in Aprille** (Anon, c.1400)

I sing of a maiden that is makèless:
King of all kings to her son she ches.
He came al so stille, there his moder was,
As dew in Aprille that falleth on the grass.
He came al so stille to his moder's bour,
As dew in Aprille that falleth on the flour.

He came al so stille, there his moder lay,
As dew in Aprille that falleth on the spray.
Moder and mayden was never none but she:
Well may such a lady Goddes moder be.

6. This little Babe (Robert Southwell, 1561?-1595)

This little Babe so few days old,
Is come to rifle Satan's fold;
All hell doth at his presence quake,
Though he himself for cold do shake;
For in this weak unarmèd wise
The gates of hell he will surprise.
With tears he fights and wins the field,
His naked breast stands for a shield.
His battering shot are babish cries,
His arrows looks of weeping eyes,
His martial ensigns Cold and Need,
And feeble Flesh his warrior's steed.
His camp is pitchèd in a stall,
His bulwark but a broken wall;
The crib his trench, haystalks his stakes;
Of shepherds he his muster makes;
And thus, as sure his foe to wound,
The angels' trumps alarum sound.
My soul with Christ join thou in fight;
Stick to the tents that he hath pight.
Within his crib is surest ward;
This little Babe will be thy guard.
If thou wilt foil thy foes with joy,
Then flit not from this heavenly Boy.

7. Interlude (Harp Solo)

8. In Freezing Winter Night (Robert Southwell, 1561?-1595)

Behold, a silly tender babe,
In freezing winter night,
In homely manger trembling lies,
Alas, a piteous sight!
The inns are full; no man will yield
This little pilgrim bed.
But forced he is with silly beasts
In crib to shroud his head.

This stable is a Prince's court,
This crib his chair of State;
The beasts are parcel of his pomp,
The wooden dish his plate.

The persons in that poor attire
His royal liveries wear;
The Prince himself is come from heav'n;
This pomp is prizèd there.

With joy approach, O Christian wight,
Do homage to thy King,
And highly praise his humble pomp,
which he from Heav'n doth bring.

9. **Spring Carol** (William Cornish, 14??-1523)

Pleasure it is to hear iwis, the Birdes sing,
The deer in the dale, the sheep in the vale, the corn springing.

God's purveyance, for sustenance it is for man;
Then we always to give him praise, and thank him than.

10. **Deo Gracias** (Anon, 15th century)

Deo gracias!

Thanks be to God!

Adam lay i-bounden, bounden in a bond
Four thousand winter thought he not to long. (*Deo gracias!*)
And all was for an appil, an appil that he tok,
As clerkès finden written in their book. (*Deo gracias!*)

Ne had the appil takè ben, the appil takè ben,
Ne haddè never our lady a ben hevenè quene.
Blessed be the time that appil takè was.
Therefore we moun singen *Deo gracias!*

11. **Recession** (Antiphon to the Magnificat on Christmas Day)

Hodie Christus natus est:
hodie Salvator apparuit:
hodie in terra canunt angeli:
laetantur archangeli:
hodie exsultant justi dicentes:
gloria in excelsis Deo. Alleluia!

*Today Christ is born;
today the Savior has appeared.
Today the angels sing on earth;
the archangels rejoice.
Today the righteous exult, saying:
Glory to God on high! Alleluia!*

Robyn Parton soprano

Robyn graduated in 2008 from Worcester College, Oxford where she was a choral scholar and began 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.

Steven Grahl organ

Steven combines the post of Assistant Organist at New College, Oxford with that of Organist & Director of Music at St Marylebone Parish Church, London and the Principal Conductorship of the Guildford Chamber Choir. A prize-winning graduate of Magdalen College, Oxford (where he was Organ Scholar) and the Royal Academy of Music, Steven gained the Limpus (highest mark) and Dixon (improvisation) prizes in his FRCO examination, and is also a holder of the Worshipful Company of Musicians' Silver Medallion.

Vicky Lester harp

Vicky is a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music where she studied as a scholar to attain a Master's degree in performance with distinction. Accumulating numerous prizes and awards throughout her education, Vicky is currently living and working in London, enjoying a rich and varied career as a free-lance musician. She is in demand as a soloist, giving numerous solo recitals nationwide as well as making appearances as a concerto soloist with orchestras across the country. As an orchestral harpist, she has played with some of the country's finest professional orchestras, and she has recorded for a number of film scores. Vicky has also made several television appearances, including a BBC Promenade Concert in 2005 and the Princess Diana Memorial Concert in 2007, and she has also performed in *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (Stoppard/Previn) at the Royal National Theatre.

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. James has conducted the Cherwell Singers since 2007.

The Cherwell Singers

Soprano

Claire Appleton
Sue Bignal
Julia Craig-McFeely
Salima Hyde
Clare Scott-Dempster
Rachel Smith
Beatrix Stewart
Marie Thebaud-Sorger
Lucy Watson

Tenor

Paul King
Guy Peskett
Nicholas Pritchard
David Sutton

Alto

Jenny Ayres
Katherine Butler
Kipper Chipperfield
Helen Maidlow
Janet McKnight
Jo McLean
Sally Prime

Bass

Neil Herington
Paul Hodges
Simon Jones
Iain McLean
Tim Wainwright

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