

The Cherwell Singers

present

Jean Gilles

Messe des Morts

Henry Purcell

Coronation Anthems

Funeral Sentences

James Brown

conductor

Saturday, 19th November 2011

University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford

Programme

Henry Purcell

I was Glad

Henry Purcell

My Heart is Inditing

Henry Purcell

Funeral Sentences

Man that is born of a woman
In the midst of life we are in death
Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts

Interval

Jean Gilles

Messe des Morts

Introit
Kyrie
Graduel
Offertoire
Sanctus & Benedictus
Agnus Dei
Post communion

Soprano – Esther Brazil
Counter-tenor – Benjamin Williamson
Tenor – Guy Cutting
Bass – Alexander Learmonth

Violin 1 – Julia Kuhn
Violin 2 – Fiona Duncan
Viola – Heather Birt
Cello – Gabriel Amherst
Organ – Steven Grahl

Introduction

This evening the Cherwell Singers present a programme of sacred Baroque music from England and France by the composers Henry Purcell and Jean Gilles. All of the music in this concert was performed at events of major royal importance. We begin with the two coronation anthems written by Purcell for James II in 1685, 'I was glad' and 'My heart is inditing'. From the beginning of one reign we then move to the close of another with Purcell's Funeral Music which incorporates music sung at the funeral of Queen Mary II in 1695. After the interval we move across the channel to France to hear the seldom performed 'Messe des morts' of Gilles which has its own royal connections having been performed at the funerals of Louis XV and Stanislaw of Poland. Not only is the music in the concert linked by its royal connections - both composers featured were writing in the last decades of the seventeenth century, they were both boy choristers who went on to become Directors of Music at those institutions where they had sung and they both died prematurely in their late thirties.

James Brown (Director)

Notes

Henry Purcell

Henry Purcell (1659-1695) was born the year before the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 at the start of a strong revival of English music after the staid, even repressive, years of the Commonwealth, a revival actively encouraged by Charles II through the Chapel Royal. Purcell's prolific output as a composer provides ample evidence of this. Having been a boy chorister of the Chapel Royal, he was appointed 'composer for the king's violins' in 1677, organist of Westminster Abbey in 1679 and of the Chapel Royal in 1682, and 'keeper of the king's wind and keyboard instruments' in 1683. By the time of his early death he was already acknowledged as the

foremost English composer of his time, having written a wide range of music both secular and sacred: chamber music for violin and harpsichord, incidental songs, anthems for church services, vocal and choral works for royal birthdays and ceremonial occasions, and music for the theatre, both incidental music for stage plays and dramatic operas.

The Restoration was a great impetus for musical development in England. The days of the relatively insular English traditions of instrumental and vocal music were over, and it became fashionable to incorporate French and Italian elements into the English tradition. Purcell wrote in the baroque idiom of the time, heavily influenced by French and Italian styles: ornate melodies; many independent lines working simultaneously; regular rhythms; and regular changes of harmony.

In church music some of the main changes now introduced were to the style and structure of the anthems. 'Full' anthems, written for full four-part choir and organ, were joined in the repertoire by 'verse' anthems, in which solo voices hold a dialogue with the choir, four-part or eight-part, and overture, interlude and accompaniment are provided by a small string orchestra with organ continuo.

Coronation Anthems

The introit **I was glad** with its text taken from Psalm 122 was written by the 26 year old Henry Purcell for the coronation of James II in 1685. The event is exceptionally well documented, thanks to Francis Sandford whose *History of the Coronation of James II* is an exhaustively detailed and sumptuously illustrated account published two years afterwards. There were no fewer than nine anthems performed at the coronation of 1685, composed by William Turner, John Blow and his pupil, Purcell.

After the coronation procession had reached the West door of the Abbey, the choir moved forward alone, entering just ahead of the King and Queen and singing the introit *I was glad*. For much of its length the piece is bold and direct in its setting: the music moves in block chords to put across the text clearly, but also to make coordination with the procession easier! But rather than it sounding restrained rhythmically, the music is kept interesting by some fascinating key changes and harmonic surprises: for instance at the words *O Pray for the peace of Jerusalem* and again at *Peace be within thy*

walls. Just before the end, however - by which time the choir would have arrived safely in its gallery and be able to watch a conductor - Purcell finally unleashes his array of choral finery, and launches into a Gloria full of dazzling contrapuntal ingenuity with the final phrase world without end ringing out like peels of celebratory bells.

I was glad when they said unto me : We will go into the house of the Lord.
For thither the tribes go up, even the tribes of the Lord : to testify unto
Israel, to give thanks unto the Name of the Lord.
For there is the seat of judgement : even the seat of the house of David.
O pray for the peace of Jerusalem : they shall prosper that love thee.
Peace be within thy walls : and plenteousness within thy palaces.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end.
Amen.

My Heart is Inditing is a notable example of the vigour and liveliness of a verse anthem which retains the depth and dignity of a full anthem. It was composed for the coronation of James II in 1685 and was sung during the crowning of the Queen, Mary of Modena. Written for soloists, eight-part choir, string orchestra and organ, it is in seven movements, and occupies almost the whole of each opening of the large score book into which Purcell transcribed many of his sacred compositions. This piece shows that he was well-versed in the native polyphonic choral tradition as well as newer continental styles. However, most of his anthems are, like this one, in the verse form and have instrumental symphonies - we can credit Charles II for this as he insisted on having instrumental accompaniment in verse anthems.

The text is taken from Psalms 45 and 147 and the book of Isaiah:

My heart is inditing of a good matter, I speak of the things which I have
made unto the King.
At his right hand shall stand the Queen all glorious within, her clothing is
of wrought gold.
She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework; the virgins
that follow her shall bear her company.
With joy and gladness shall they be brought, and shall enter into the
King's palace.
Hearken, O daughter, consider, incline thine ear;
forget also thine own people and thy father's house.
Instead of fathers thou shalt have children
whom thou mayest make princes in all lands.

Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem, praise thy God O Sion;
For kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing
mothers. Alleluja.

Funeral Sentences

The **Funeral Sentences** have achieved status in recent years because of the profundity of emotion they evoke in their totality and in the beauty of their separate parts. This is unquestionably powerful music, set to texts of remarkable eloquence from the burial office in the Book of Common Prayer. However, it is not easy to verify their inclusion or position in the funeral of Queen Mary with which they are traditionally associated. It does seem clear though that a few months after the Queen's funeral Purcell's settings were performed at his own funeral, and in the same location, Westminster Abbey. Several versions of each of the Sentences exist dating from early to the late days of Purcell's career.

The *Funeral Sentences* presented tonight comprise the latest settings of each of the three texts. For Queen Mary's funeral in 1695, Purcell reset the last sentence (*Thou knowest, Lord*) in the simpler homophonic form that we are performing tonight.

Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flow'r; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and ne'er continueth in one stay.

In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek for succour, but of thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased?
Yet, O Lord most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.

Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts; shut not thy merciful ears unto our prayer; but spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty. O holy and most merciful Saviour, thou most worthy Judge eternal, suffer us not, at our last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from thee.
Amen.

Jean Gilles

Little is known of the all too short career of **Jean Gilles** (1668-1705). He wrote nothing but sacred music and spent all his life in the south of France. He began his musical life at the cathedral of Saint-Sauveur in Aix-en-Provence as assistant to the maître de chapelle, Guillaume Poitevin, to whose post he later succeeded. In 1695, he was summoned to Agde and later to Avignon for a short stay. Finally, he settled in Toulouse in 1697 where he was to hold the post of maître de chapelle at the cathedral of Saint-Etienne until his untimely death. Gilles was only 37 and it is reasonable to suppose that had he not been struck down so young, he could well have gone on to secure an important appointment at the court of Versailles. In 1752, in his *Lettres sur les hommes célèbres du règne de Louis XV* (Letters of famous men during the reign of Louis XV), Pierre-Louis d'Aquin, son of the harpsichordist Louis-Claude Daquin, wrote: 'Victim of death when he was in the prime of life [Gilles] causes us to regret his loss through those pieces of his which remain to us. Endowed with genius of exceptional facility, he might even have replaced the great Lalande.'

Messe des Morts

The **Messe des Morts** (Requiem) by Jean Gilles is one of the great pieces of funereal music written in the Baroque era. There are various stories of its genesis, but the most likely is that Gilles composed it on commission for the joint funeral of two Toulouse city leaders who had died within days of each other; even though the music was well received during rehearsal, the men's sons backed out of the commission, refusing to pay for it. Gilles's response was to withdraw the piece unperformed, and it remained among his personal papers until his own death only a few years later.

As it worked out, the Requiem was given its first public performance at its composer's funeral. It was, however, posthumously successful, being often performed throughout the 18th Century for the official funerals of the great and famous. It was heard, for instance, in Paris in the church of the Oratory on two occasions during the memorial services for Rameau, who had died in 1764; and also at Versailles in the royal and parish church of Notre Dame in 1774 during the service of prayer for the rest of the soul of Louis XV; and it was also used for the funeral of the King of Poland. The setting

featured in the repertoire of the Concert Spirituel from 1750 onwards where it was always welcomed, according to the *Mercure de France*, ‘with satisfaction in spite of its being from an earlier time and of the brilliance of the works which have been written since.’

The composer’s manuscript disappeared during the French Revolution, with only some later arrangements surviving. The version made for Rameau’s funeral increased the size of the orchestra and also added timpani and carillon to simulate the peal of church bells, and another later edition went further, adding horns, clarinets and bassoons. However, recent scholarship has restored the work to its original intimate form.

Paul Hodges

Introit

Grant them eternal rest, O Lord, and may everlasting light shine upon them.

Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion, and homage will be paid to you in Jerusalem.

Hear my prayer; to you shall all flesh come.

Grant them eternal rest, O Lord, and may everlasting light shine upon them.

Kyrie

Lord have mercy; Christ have mercy; Lord have mercy.

Graduel

Grant them eternal rest, O Lord, and may everlasting light shine upon them.

The just will be remembered for eternity; they do not fear misfortune.

Offertoire

Lord Jesus Christ, King of glory,

free the souls of all the faithful departed from infernal punishment and the deep pit.

Free them from the mouth of the lion;

do not let Tartarus swallow them, nor let them fall into darkness;

but may your standard-bearer, Saint Michael, lead them into the holy light, as you promised to Abraham and his descendants.

O Lord, we offer you sacrifices and prayers in praise;
accept them on behalf of the souls whom we remember today.
Make them pass over from death to life,
as you promised to Abraham and his descendants.

Sanctus & Benedictus

Holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your
glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

Agnus Dei

Lamb of God, you who take away the sins of the world,
grant them eternal rest.

Post communion

May everlasting light shine upon them, O Lord, with your saints forever,
for you are merciful.

Grant them eternal rest, O Lord, and may everlasting light shine upon
them.

Esther Brazil - Soprano

Esther made her first major appearance at seventeen, performing the U.S. national anthem at numerous games during the 2003 Rugby World Cup in Sydney, and has gone from strength to strength ever since as both a soloist and a chamber musician. She took up a choral scholarship at The Queen's College, Oxford, where she was a regular recitalist, singing with Schola Cantorum and other ensembles. She recently graduated with an MA (distinction) from the Royal Academy of Music.

While in Washington, DC during 2008-9, she was hailed by the Washington Post for her 'soaring, radiant sound'. Since her return to the UK in 2009, she has understudied and performed with the New Chamber Opera. Most recently, she has toured Europe with the Monteverdi choir.

Ben Williamson - Countertenor

Ben recently completed his training at the Royal College of Music Opera School. He was the winner of the 2009 English Song Competition. Ben was formerly a Choral Scholar at King's College, Cambridge, and Head Chorister at St Margaret's, Westminster. He was a Retrospect Ensemble Young Artist in 2010, and is co-founder and vocal consultant of Sloane Square Choral Society.

Ben has appeared in many Handel operas, under conductors such as Laurence Cummings, with groups such as English Touring Opera, and in festivals such as Buxton Festival and the London Handel Festival. Ben's Wigmore Hall debut was in Purcell's The Fairy Queen, and he has also sung Bernstein's Chichester Psalms with the choir of New College, Oxford under Edward Higginbottom. Ben is currently working with Glyndebourne on Tour.

Guy Cutting - Tenor

As a chorister with New College, Oxford, Guy gained extensive experience, performing throughout Europe and as far away as Japan. Having gained a place to read Music at New College in 2009, he is now a third year choral scholar. As a permanent member of both New College Choir and The

Blenheim Singers, he regularly tours worldwide. In master classes, the late Robert Tear described him as a 'rare talent'.

In 2010, he recorded Mozart's Requiem as tenor soloist with New College, Oxford, a disc of Couperin as 'haute-contre' with Edward Higginbottom, and as soloist on Merton College, Oxford's debut CD. Recent solo performances include Monteverdi in St John's Smith Square; Bach and Handel works in Oxford; the title role in Handel's Jephtha, and Britten's Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings with the Oxford String Ensemble. His future solo engagements include Coleridge-Taylor's Hiawatha's Feast, and masses by Bach and Haydn.

Alexander Learmonth - Bass

Alexander began his musical career as a choral scholar in the choir of New College, Oxford, where he recorded, broadcast and toured extensively with the college's world-famous chapel choir. Earlier this year he completed the Advanced Performers Studio's Intensive Opera Course.

His oratorio repertoire has included Mendelssohn's Elijah in the title role, Purcell's Ode to St Cecilia, Handel's Messiah, Bach's B Minor Mass, Brahms's and Duruflé's Requiems, and singing both arias and Christus in Bach's St John Passion. Opera appearances have included works by Mozart, Puccini, Sullivan, Rossini, Purcell and Britten, sometimes in the title role. He is a regular recitalist, and his recent performances have included Fauré, Schumann, Brahms and Britten songs. He also sings with a number of professional choirs, including the choir St Paul's Cathedral, London, and was the soloist on Consortium's critically acclaimed recording of Choral Works by Max Reger,

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, with whom he tours regularly. James currently studies the organ with Stephen Farr.

James has conducted the Cherwell Singers since 2007.

The Cherwell Singers

Soprano

Sue Brame
Lucy Matheson
Carme Mont
Clare Moorhouse
Clare Scott-Dempster
Rebecca Tudor
Judith Ward
Lucy Watson

Tenor

Philip Booth
Jeremy Bryans
Guy Peskett
Matthias Range
David Sutton

Alto

Virginia Allport
Rachel Bryans
Katherine Butler
Theodora Dickinson
Gillian Hargreaves
Jo McLean
Lizzie Newton
Sally Prime

Bass

Dominic Hargreaves
Neil Herington
Paul Hodges
Simon Jones
Iain McLean
Simeon Mitchell
Tim Wainwright

Next concert:

‘Aspects of Christ’

A musical exploration of the person of Christ

Sunday, 25th March, 2012 at 7.30pm
Exeter College Chapel

Please visit our web site to learn more about the choir, and listen to some of our recordings online. Use the web form to register yourself on our email list, to ensure you receive notification and full details of future concerts.

www.cherwellsingers.org