

The Cherwell Singers

present

Lux aeterna

A Celebration of Light

James Brown

conductor

Steven Grahl

organ

Saturday, 28th November 2015

Chapel of Exeter College, Oxford

Programme

Light out of darkness	Edward Elgar (1857-1934)
Holy is the true light	William H Harris (1883-1973)
O nata lux	Guy Forbes (1973-)
Lux aurumque	Eric Whitacre (1970-)
Fiat lux <i>organ solo</i>	Théodore Dubois (1837-1924)
Hail gladdening light	Craig Sellar Lang (1891-1971)
O thou the central orb	Charles Wood (1866-1926)

Interval

Lux aeterna	Morten Lauridsen (1943-)
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- I Introitus
- II In te, Domine, speravi
- III O nata lux
- IV Veni, Sancte Spiritus
- V Agnus Dei – Lux aeterna

Steven Grahl	Organ
James Brown	Conductor

LUX AETERNA

A celebration of light

On the eve of Advent Sunday the Cherwell Singers present their winter concert on the theme of the Christian symbolism of light.

Light is used by the Church as a symbol for what Jesus Christ does and is. In the physical world light has the property of revealing things or showing us where we are going, and so Jesus is seen as the revealer of truth or light by showing things as they really are.

At Advent Christians prepare for the coming of light with the birth of Christ “the light of the world”. It is appropriate therefore that we include in the concert settings of such Advent texts as *Hail gladdening light* and *O nata lux de lumine*. Our major work in the programme however also references another Christian festival in November, that of All Souls, when the church remembers the dead. In *Lux aeterna*, written in 1997 by the American composer Morten Lauridsen, words are used from the Requiem mass as well as other texts which use the image of light as a symbol of God’s power. Lauridsen is influenced by Gregorian chant and other early techniques of composition to nevertheless create a personal and rich contemporary 25 minute work. We complement it with late “Romantic” works from this side of the ocean by composers such as Elgar and Harris, as well with works by other contemporary American composers, Eric Whitacre and Guy Forbes.

Steven Grahl, organist of Peterborough Cathedral, will play the popular and festive *Fiat lux* by Theodore Dubois on the suitably French-inspired organ of Exeter College Chapel. We hope you will enjoy this concert on the eve of the beginning of Advent as we celebrate the coming of “Light out of Darkness”.

James Brown

Notes

In 1896, **Edward Elgar** was on the verge of greatness. His oratorio, *The Light of Life*, from which the chorus ***Light out of Darkness*** is taken was intended to be the prelude to the trilogy of New Testament oratorios of which only *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom* were written. The libretto was assembled by Rev. Edward Capel-Cure from St John's Gospel and his own words – which were criticised at the time for “insufficient reverence”.

The oratorio tells the story of Jesus curing a blind man of his blindness. *Light out of Darkness* is sung immediately before he anoints the man's eyes with clay. The accompaniment begins grandly in Elgar's noblimente style; Elgar himself said of it: “I thought a fugue would be expected of me. The British public would hardly tolerate oratorios without a fugue. So I tried to give them one. Not a ‘barn door’ fugue but one with an independent accompaniment. There's a bit of canon, too, and, in short, I hope there's enough counterpoint to give the real British religious respectability!”

William H Harris spent 16 years in Oxford as organist at New College and then Christ Church before being appointed to the Chapel Royal at Windsor. He was best known in his life as a choral trainer, but he also wrote a number of anthems such as *Faire is the Heaven* which have established themselves as well-loved items in the choral repertoire. ***Holy is the True Light*** was written in memory of the wife of another organist of Christ Church, Evelyn Mary Ley.

The text, taken from the Salisbury Diurnal, emphasizes the solace of faith in times of conflict, and was also used by Howells for the ending of his *Hymnus Paradisi*. The simple texture of the music contrasts close and wide spacing of chords, opening out in the middle and closing up towards the end, and showing a fine command of the way in which voices can melt away in a resonant building.

Guy Forbes wrote the following note on his setting of ***O nata lux***:

“When I decided to set the *O nata lux* text to music, I focused on the idea of ‘light born of light’ rather than something more akin to the ‘mystery of birth’. The opening material of the piece is in a sense a depiction of light breaking upon the world in a vibrant, visible way. The following section has the melodic material divided between several parts. The idea here is that although we come together to pray, we make these requests as individuals.

The picture, if you will, is of a group standing before God each individually making their request, but all echoing the prayers of the others.”

Eric Whitacre wrote of *Lux aurumque*: “After deciding upon the poem by Edward Esch (I was immediately struck by its genuine, elegant simplicity), I had it translated into the Latin by the celebrated American poet Charles Anthony Silvestri. A simple approach was essential to the success of the work, and I waited patiently for the tight harmonies to shimmer and glow.”

This work was the first that Whitacre conducted for his “Virtual Choir” recordings made on the Internet through social media.

Théodore Dubois was choirmaster at several Paris churches, and for a time Director of the Paris Conservatoire. He wrote music in various genres, most of which has disappeared from the repertoire – although a few years ago the Cherwell Singers performed his oratorio *Les sept paroles du Christ*. His reputation now rests mainly on the composers he taught, and a few pieces for the organ such as the scherzo, *Fiat lux* (*Let there be Light*), which we hear this evening.

The British organist and music teacher **Craig Sellar Lang** was born in New Zealand but educated in England. His many books on organ technique were influential and widely used. He is perhaps best known for his boisterous *Tuba Tune* for organ, but wrote a range of choral music as well. This evening’s setting of *Hail Gladdening Light* was written for performance by congregation and choir – one imagines the chapel of the school where he taught as the setting.

Hail Gladdening Light was translated by the Oxford churchman and scholar John Keble from the Greek hymn, *Phos Hilaron*, the earliest Christian hymn recorded outside the Bible that is still in use today. In Jerusalem in the fourth century a lamp was kept perpetually burning in the empty tomb of Christ, its glow a symbol of the living light of Jesus. In a tradition known as the lighting of the lamps, a candle lit from the lamp was brought forth from the tomb, its flame calling the church to celebrate the Risen Lord; the hymn *Phos Hilaron* was sung to accompany this ceremony.

Charles Wood was an Irish composer and teacher, whose pupils included Ralph Vaughan Williams and Herbert Howells. He was later Professor of Music at Cambridge University. He collaborated with the priest and poet

G R Woodward in the revival and popularisation of renaissance tunes, most notably in three collections of carols which they co-edited.

Wood wrote many service settings and anthems which remain popular to this day, and *O thou the central Orb* is one of the best known of these. The words by H R Bramley were adapted by the author from an earlier sonnet of his to fit the music of an anthem by Orlando Gibbons; Wood was taken by the words, with their emphasis on God as the source of light, and set them in the adapted form.

Morten Lauridsen has been described as “the only American composer in history who can be called a mystic, whose probing, serene work contains an elusive and indefinable ingredient which leaves the impression that all the questions have been answered.” Currently considered America’s greatest contemporary composer of choral music, he has become one of the most performed living composers in the United States.

Lauridsen’s masterwork, *Lux aeterna* (Light Eternal), was written shortly after his well-known motet *O magnum mysterium*. It has the feeling of being a “non-liturgical requiem”, as the opening and closing movements are taken from the traditional Catholic Mass for the Dead, while the texts of the inner three movements are also drawn from sacred Latin sources. At the close of the final movement, the composer adds a joyful *Alleluia* and a seven-fold *Amen*.

Each of the five movements references Light in its own way, the opening and closing movements not dissimilarly to the *Requiem* of Fauré. The three central movements also contain their own unique references to Light, including one of the most celebrative moments in the work which uses the words, “O Lux beatissima” (O Light most blessed). The texts for the middle three movements have a Trinitarian theme as well: words from the *Te Deum* for the Father; *O nata lux* for the Son, and *Veni Sancte Spiritus* for the Holy Spirit.

Lauridsen has said his intention for the work was that it be an “intimate work of quiet serenity,” using texts which express “hope, reassurance, faith and illumination in all of its manifestations.” He went on: “It was a great deal of pleasure to write. I wrote it as my mother was in the process of dying, so it was a way of dealing with that situation, as so many artists do, in an artistic way.”

Words

Light out of darkness Thou hast brought! Within the shadow of Thy cross
Now burns a light, and we are taught The truer truths of human loss.

Wast Thou a sinner? Thou hast borne The sinner's sentence and his shame;
Thy side wast pierced, Thy forehead torn, Thy sad heart broken by our blame.

But so a beacon light Thou sent To signal through our night of grief;
How love upon His mission went Crowned with sorrow's sharp-set wreath.

Enough it was we needed Thee, Our misery alone did pray,
And Mercy answered eagerly, And trod for us steep Calvary's way.

So let us answer sorrow's cry! The past is dead: search not its grave
For hidden faults! The remedy Is ours to seek, to find and save.

Rev. Edward Capel-Cure (1860-1949)

Holy is the true light, and passing wonderful,
Lending radiance to them that endured in the heat of the conflict:
From Christ they inherit a home of unfailing splendour,
Wherein they rejoice with gladness evermore.
Alleluia.

tr. from the Salisbury Diurnal by Dr G H Palmer (1842-1933)

O nata lux de lumine,
Jesu redemptor saeculi,
dignare clemens supplicum
laudes preces que sumere.
Qui carne quondam contegi
dignatus es pro perditis.
Nos membra confer effici,
tui beati corporis.

Latin hymn

*O born light of light,
Jesus, redeemer of the world,
mercifully deem worthy and accept
the praises and prayers of your supplicants.
Thou who once deigned to be clothed in flesh
for the sake of the lost ones,
grant us to be made members
of your holy body.*

Light,
warm and heavy as pure gold
and the angels sing softly
to the new-born baby.

Edward Esch (1970-)

Lux,
calida gravisque pura velut aurum
et canunt angeli molliter
modo natum.

*tr. Charles Anthony Silvestri,
at the request of Eric Whitacre*

Hail, gladdening Light, of His pure glory poured,
Who is th'Immortal Father, Heavenly, Blest;
Holiest of Holies, Jesus Christ our Lord!

Now are we come to the sun's hour of rest;
The lights of evening round us shine,
We hymn the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit divine.

Worthiest art Thou at all times to be sung,
With undefilèd tongue,
Son of our God, Giver of life, Alone;
Therefore in all the world Thy glories, All things own.

tr. from the Greek by John Keble (1792-1866)

O Thou, the central orb of righteous love,
Pure beam of the most High, eternal Light
Of this our wintry world, Thy radiance bright
Awakes new joy in faith, hope soars above.

Come, quickly come, and let Thy glory shine,
Gilding our darksome heaven with rays Divine.

Thy saints with holy lustre round Thee move,
As stars about Thy throne, set in the height
Of God's ordaining counsel, as Thy sight
Gives measured grace to each, Thy power to prove.

Let Thy bright beams disperse the gloom of sin,
Our nature all shall feel eternal day
In fellowship with Thee, transforming day
To souls erewhile unclean, now pure within. Amen.

Henry Ramsden Bramley (1833-1917)

Lux Aeterna

(words taken from the Requiem Mass and other Latin hymns)

I. INTROITUS

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine:
et lux perpetua luceat eis.
Te decet hymnus Deus in Zion,
et tibi redetur votum
in Jerusalem:
exaudi orationem meam,
ad te omnis caro veniet.
Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine:
et lux perpetua luceat eis.

*Rest eternal grant to them, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon them.
A hymn befits thee, O God in Zion,
and to thee a vow shall be fulfilled
in Jerusalem:
Hear my prayer,
for unto thee all flesh shall come.
Rest eternal grant to them, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon them.*

II. IN TE, DOMINE, SPERAVI

Tu ad liberandum suscepturus hominem
non horruisti Virginis uterum.
Tu devicto mortis aculeo,
aperuisti credentibus regna coelorum.

Exortum est in tenebris lumen rectis.

Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri.

Fiat misericordia tua, Domine, super nos
Quem admodum speravimus in te.
In te Domine, speravi:
non confundar in aeternum.

*To deliver us, you became human,
and did not disdain the Virgin's womb.
Having blunted the sting of death,
You opened the kingdom of heaven to all
believers.*

*A light has risen in the darkness for the
upright.
Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy
upon us.*

*Let thy mercy be upon us, O Lord,
as we have trusted in thee.
In thee, O Lord, I have trusted:
let me never be confounded.*

III. O NATA LUX

O nata lux de lumine,
Jesu redemptor saeculi,
dignare clemens supplicum
laudes preces que sumere.

Qui carne quondam contegi
dignatus es pro perditis.
Nos membra confer effici,
tui beati corporis.

*O born light of light,
Jesus, redeemer of the world,
mercifully deem worthy and accept
the praises and prayers of your supplicants.*

*Thou who once deigned to be clothed in flesh
for the sake of the lost ones,
grant us to be made members
of your holy body.*

IV. VENI, SANCTE SPIRITUS

Veni, Sancte Spiritus,
Et emitte coelitus
Lucis tuae radium.

Veni, pater pauperum,
Veni, dator munerum,
Veni, lumen cordium.

Consolator optime.
Dulcis hospes animae,
Dulce refrigerium.

*Come, Holy Spirit,
Send forth from heaven
The ray of thy light.*

*Come, Father of the poor,
Come, giver of gifts,
Come, light of hearts.*

*Thou best of Consolers,
Sweet guest of the soul,
In grief, the consolation.*

In labore requies,
In aestu temperies,
In fletu solatium.

O lux beatissima,
Reple cordis intima
Tuorum fidelium.

Sine tuo numine,
Nihil est in homine,
Nihil est innoxium.

Lava quod est sordidum,
Riga quod est aridum,
Sana quod est saucium.

Flecte quod est rigidum,
Fove quod est frigidum,
Rege quod est devium.

Da tuis fidelibus,
In te confidentibus,
Sacrum septenarium.

Da virtutis meritum,
Da salutis exitum,
Da perenne gaudium.

V. AGNUS DEI – LUX AETERNA

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
dona eis requiem.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
dona eis requiem.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
dona eis requiem sempiternam.

Lux aeterna luceat eis, Domine:
Cum sanctis tuis in aeternum:
quia pius es.

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.

Alleluia. Amen.

*Sweet refreshment.
In labor, thou art rest,
In heat, the tempering,*

*O Light most blessed,
Fill the inmost heart
Of all thy faithful.*

*Without your grace,
There is nothing in us,
Nothing that is not harmful.*

*Cleanse what is sordid,
Moisten what is arid,
Heal what is hurt.*

*Flex what is rigid,
Fire what is frigid,
Correct what goes astray.*

*Grant to thy faithful,
Those trusting in thee,
Thy sacred seven-fold gifts.*

*Grant the reward of virtue,
Grant the deliverance of salvation,
Grant everlasting joy.*

*Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of
the world, grant them rest.*

*Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of
the world, grant them rest.*

*Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of
the world, grant them rest everlasting.*

*May light eternal shine upon them, O
Lord, in the company of thy Saints for
ever and ever; for thou art merciful.
Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon them.*

Alleluia. Amen.

Biographies

Steven Grahl organ

Steven Grahl took up the post of Director of Music at Peterborough Cathedral in September 2014. Prior to this, he spent seven years as Assistant Organist at New College, Oxford, an appointment which he combined with the position of Organist & Director of Music at St Marylebone Parish Church, London. Steven was appointed Principal Conductor of the Guildford Chamber Choir in 2006.

A prize-winning graduate of Magdalen College, Oxford, 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. In 2010, Steven was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music (ARAM), an award offered to past students of the Academy who have distinguished themselves in the music profession and made a significant contribution to it in their particular field. He is currently a Junior Fellow in Choral Direction at Birmingham Conservatoire, and until recently held the post of Chairman of the Association of Assistant Cathedral Organists. Steven was an interpretation finalist in the International Organ Competitions at St Albans (UK) in 2011, and in Dudelange (Luxembourg) in 2013.

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 as well as participating in broadcasts and recordings.

He is also a classical pianist for the cruise lines Swan Hellenic and Fred Olesen, and his cruises in 2016 will include destinations from Bermuda to St Petersburg, the latter accompanying the cellist Patrick Johnson from the Southbank Sinfonia.

James teaches organ at Abingdon School and New College School and performs regularly with various choirs and choral societies.

James has conducted the Cherwell Singers since 2007.

The Cherwell Singers

Soprano

Becky Dowson
Rhiannon Stubbs
Stephanie Sumner-Jones
Judith Ward
Lucy Watson
Hannah Wight

Tenor

Jeremy Bryans
Jack Lovell
Guy Peskett
David Read
Mike Smith
David Sutton

Alto

Virginia Allport
Rachel Bryans
Katherine Butler
Elizabeth Kreager
Anna Orlowska
Clare Oxby
Joanna Poulton

Bass

Dominic Hargreaves
Paul Hodges
Pierre Illien
Simon Jones
Jonathan Mapley
Simeon Mitchell
Tim Wainwright

The Cherwell Singers is looking to recruit voice members in all parts.
If you are interested in joining us please contact James Brown at:

director@cherwellsingers.org

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