

The Cherwell Singers

present

Witnesses to War

Music by those who fought, fell
and lived through the Great War

Gareth John

baritone

Ben Bloor

organ & piano

James Brown

conductor

Saturday, 19th November 2016

St Margaret's Church, Oxford

Programme

Let us now praise famous men

Ralph Vaughan Williams

For lo, I raise up

Charles Villiers Stanford

Never Weather-Beaten Sail

Charles Hubert H. Parry

(Baritone solo)

By a Bier-Side

Ivor Gurney

To Daffodils

E. J. Moeran

They that go down to the sea in ships

Herbert Sumsion

Hymn and Gloria (*from* A Short Requiem)

Walford Davies

Interval

Magnificat in A

William Denis Browne

(Baritone solo)

On the Idle Hill of Summer

George Butterworth

(Baritone solo)

Silent Noon

Ernest Bristow Farrar

(Organ Solo)

For the Fallen (*from* The Spirit of England)

Edward Elgar

For the Fallen

Mark Blatchly

Nunc Dimittis in F

George Dyson

Gareth John
Ben Bloor
James Brown

baritone
organ & piano
conductor

Witnesses to War

Music by those who fought, fell and lived through the Great War

November 18th 1916 at last saw the end of the bloodiest battle of the Great War, indeed maybe of any war. More than a million men lost their lives in the infamous Battle of the Somme, one of the many battles of that terrible conflict.

One hundred years almost to the day after the end of that battle, the Cherwell Singers honour the memory of those who fought and those who fell in the Somme and the other battles of the Great War, with a programme of music by composers who wore uniform and fought in that war. We also include pieces by three leading composers of the day who, though too old to fight, wrote pieces directly inspired by that conflict.

Especially poignant in our concert is a song by George Butterworth, who fell at the Somme, and a setting of the *Magnificat* by the promising young composer William Denis Browne, killed during the Gallipoli campaign the previous year. Neither of their bodies was ever recovered.

Joining the Cherwell Singers tonight is baritone Gareth John, winner of the Kathleen Ferrier prize, and he and the choir are being accompanied by the organist of the London Oratory Church, Ben Bloor.

We thank you for joining us at St Margaret's Church for this tribute concert to the fallen of the Somme and other battles of the Great War, and hope that it will help all of us to remember those who gave so much on our behalf one hundred years ago.

James Brown

Notes

We quite rightly hear a lot about the 'war poets' of World War I, but less well known are the 'war composers'. Almost a whole generation of young composers volunteered to fight in the Great War, many of whom did not survive or were permanently affected by that conflict. In many cases we can only judge these men on their pre-war material, much of which dwells in the epoch of the Edwardian 'land of lost content' of pastoral England, under which is an underlying uncertainty which sometimes appears to foreshadow what was to come; George Butterworth, Ernest Farrar, Denis Browne and others come into this category. Also, some survivors such as E. J. Moeran or Ivor Gurney never quite recovered from physical or mental injuries which would eventually claim them. Others commemorated the war or their contemporaries in their post-war compositions, although many wanted to forget about their war experiences.

If there is one figure connecting nearly all of the English composers of WWI it is **Ralph Vaughan Williams** (1872-1958). He seems to have known almost all of them, and was a close personal friend of George Butterworth in particular. A little older than many of the other musicians who fought in WWI, he was already considered a leading British composer, not to mention his roles in the English Folk Song Revival and hymnology.

The outbreak of the war on 4th August led Vaughan Williams to abandon all composition for the duration of the conflict, and he enlisted as a Private in the Royal Army Medical Corps. He was old enough to have been excused service, but the medical corps was often chosen by older men who wanted to serve. Later he was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Royal Garrison Artillery; his deafness in later life is usually attributed to the ear-shattering noise of the big guns.

This simple but characteristic anthem was written just a few years after the war, and its sentiments make an appropriate opening for our concert.

Let us now praise famous men (from Ecclesiasticus, chapter 44)

Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us.
Such as did bear rule in their kingdoms, men renowned for their power,
Leaders of the people by their counsels, and by their knowledge
Such as found out musical tunes, and recited verses in writing:
All these were honoured in their generation, and were the glory of their times.
And some there be, which have no memorial;
Who are perished, as though they had never been.
Their bodies are buried in peace; but their name liveth for evermore.

Sir Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924) taught many of the other composers in this concert, and had the unhappy experience of seeing many of them going to the front, some to be injured or die. His son also was posted to the Somme, but was invalided out with appendicitis.

Stanford's initial reaction to the war was to write his most dramatic and forceful anthem. Through his chosen text he sought to express his sense of horror at the war, of its needless destruction, and of future deliverance.

For Lo I raise up (from Habakkuk, chapters 1-2)

For lo I raise up that bitter and hasty nation, which march through the breadth of the earth, to possess the dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful, their judgement and their dignity proceed from themselves. Their horses also are swifter than leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves; and their horsemen spread themselves, yea, their horsemen come from far. They fly as an eagle that hasteth to devour, they come all of them for violence; their faces are set as the east wind, and they gather captives as the sand. Yea, he scoffeth at kings, and princes are a derision unto him; for he heapeth up dust and taketh it. Then shall he sweep by as a wind that shall pass over, and shall pass, and be guilty, even he whose might is his God.

Art not Thou from everlasting O Lord my God, mine Holy One? We shall not die; O Lord, Thou hast ordained him for judgement, and Thou, O Rock, hast established him for correction.

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and look forth to see what He will say to me, and what I shall answer concerning my complaint.

And the Lord answered me and said: The vision is yet for the appointed time, and it hasteth toward the end, and shall not lie. Though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come. For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of The Lord as the waters cover the sea. But the Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him.

Sir Charles Hubert Hastings Parry (1848-1918) studied in Oxford, and subsequently became Professor of Music there. In spite of his birth (he was a baronet), he had rather radical politics, which later commentators have often overlooked. Parry held German music and its traditions to be the pinnacle of music, and was a friend of German culture in general. He was, accordingly, certain that Britain and Germany would never go to war against each other, and was in despair when WWI broke out. During the war he watched a life's work of progress and education being wiped away as the male population, particularly the new fertile generation of composing talent, dwindled.

The piece we sing tonight is from his *Songs of Farewell* - composed during the war (though not specifically referring to it) and first performed in Oxford.

Never Weather-Beaten Sail (Thomas Campion, 1567-1620)

Never weather-beaten sail more willing bent to shore,
Never tired pilgrim's limbs affected slumber more,
Than my wearied sprite now longs to fly out of my troubled breast:
O come quickly, sweetest Lord, and take my soul to rest.

Ever blooming are the joys of Heaven's high Paradise,
Cold age deafs not there our ears nor vapour dims our eyes:
Glory there the sun outshines; whose beams the blessed only see:
O come quickly, glorious Lord, and raise my sprite to Thee!

Ivor 'Bertie' Gurney (1890-1937) was an artist equally and unusually competent as both a poet and composer. A prolific composer, he wrote over 330 songs; but his music in other genres remains little known.

It is as a War Poet that he is probably best known today. However, he considered himself to be a composer first and only turned to verse through the difficulty of composing at the Front. Indeed, he is noteworthy as being one of a handful of composers to write music while in the trenches, which gives pieces such as *By a Bier-Side* a special extra-musical atmosphere.

Gurney served in the Gloucestershire Regiment, but was not killed in the war, being invalided out following a gas attack in 1917. Later he was declared insane and committed to an asylum until his death – however, his insanity was hinted at before the war rather than being a certain consequence of it.

By a Bier-Side (John Masefield, 1878-1967)

This is a sacred city, built of marvellous earth.
Life was lived nobly there to give such Beauty birth.
Beauty was in this brain and in this eager hand.
Death is so blind and dumb, death does not understand.

Death drifts the brain with dust and soils the young limbs' glory.
Death makes justice a dream and strength a traveller's story.
Death drives the lovely soul to wander under the sky.
Death opens unknown doors. It is most grand to die.

Ernest John 'Jack' Moeran (1894-1950) survived the First World War, but the brain haemorrhage of which he died is sometimes attributed to a head wound he had suffered while serving with the Norfolk Regiment. Like many of his comrades his experience of WWI was largely unspoken during his life. Moeran was one of the finest post-WWI British composers, the depth and lyricism of his output perhaps placing him at odds with later trends in music. His music has a timeless quality; while obviously of the 20th century, he took the sound of the English folk music revival to its apex.

This song, from *Songs of Springtime*, was chosen because we can picture the short-lived daffodils as representing the young lives lost in war.

To Daffodils (Robert Herrick, 1591-1674)

Fair daffodils, we weep to see You haste away so soon;
As yet the early-rising sun Has not attained his noon.
Stay, stay,
Until the hasting day has run But to the evensong;
And, having prayed together, we Will go with you along.

We have short time to stay, as you, We have as short a spring;
As quick a growth to meet decay, As you or anything.
We die,
As your hours do, and dry Away, Like to the summer's rain;
Or as the pearls of morning's dew, Ne'er to be found again.

Herbert Sumsion (1899-1995) was beginning his training as a cathedral organist at Gloucester Cathedral at the outbreak of war, but had not started to compose seriously. From 1917 to 1919 he served in the Queen's Westminster Rifles and spent time in the Flanders trenches. Later he studied at the Royal College of Music. His compositions are mainly, though not entirely, for church use.

The anthem we perform tonight was not written with war in mind, but brings the Navy to mind during this anniversary year of the Battle of Jutland in May 1916.

They that go down to the sea in ships...(Psalm 107 vv 23-30)

They that go down to the sea in ships: and occupy their business in great waters;
These men see the works of the Lord: and his wonders in the deep.
For at His word the stormy wind ariseth: which lifteth up the waves thereof.
They are carried up to the heav'n, and down again to the deep:
their soul melteth away because of the trouble.
They reel to and fro and stagger like a drunken man: and are at their wits' end.
So when they cry unto the Lord in their trouble: He deliv'reth them out of their distress.
For He maketh the storm to cease: so that the waves thereof are still.
Then are they glad because they are at rest:
and so He bringeth them unto the haven where they would be.

Sir Henry Walford Davies KCVO OBE (1869–1941) was a major English composer, conductor and educator. Although a performing musician and composer, he served with the Royal Air Force during the First World War, during which time he composed the well-known *Royal Air Force March Past* (which Dyson helped to complete from his draft). His *Short Requiem* was composed in 1915 ‘In Sacred Memory of all those who have fallen in the war’.

Later, Davies became musical adviser to the nascent British Broadcasting Corporation, and gained great popularity for his explanatory talks on music. He also held the title of Master of the King’s Music.

Hymn and Gloria Patri from *A Short Requiem* (Rev Fr Campbell, c.1913)

Mors ultra non erit

No more to sigh, No more to weep, The faithful dead in JESUS sleep:
Unfading let their mem’ry bloom, While rest their bodies in the tomb;
Nor will the Lord their love distrust That strews its garlands o’er their dust.

Though in the grave their clay is cold They have not left the Christian fold;
Still we are sharers of their joy, Companions of their blest employ;
And Thee in them O Lord most high And them in Thee we magnify.

An Angel sings that they are blest; Yea, saith the Spirit, sweet their rest;
In bow’rs of Paradise they meet, Secure beneath their Saviour’s feet,
Nor fear the trump that soon shall all Before the throne of judgment call.

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.

The name of **William Denis Browne** (1888-1915) accompanied Rupert Brooke on the ill-fated WWI expedition to the Dardanelles in February 1915 in which Brooke died. Browne’s own death six weeks later was somewhat less picturesque; he was wounded several times, but died of septicaemia from an insect bite while on the way to Gallipoli.

On his instructions few of his works were retained, hidden from view until the war was over. They suggest that he was perhaps the most forward-looking of the War composers, and whereas many of his fellow pre-war composers were writing in the Edwardian, Germanic style, Browne’s finest songs still feel fresh, inventive, and above all different, with unexpected harmonies and interesting changes of meter. This *Magnificat* is from his student days; it is not known why he truncated the *Gloria*.

Magnificat in A (from Luke, chapter 1)

My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden. For behold, from henceforth, all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath magnified me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him, throughout all generations. He hath showed strength with his arm, He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek. He hath filled the hungry with good things, And the rich he hath sent empty away. He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel, as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed, for ever.

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, Amen.

George Butterworth, MC (1885-1916) studied at Oxford. He is probably the best-known of the war composers, held up as emblematic of the lost talent of his generation. A keen folk dancer and cricketer, Butterworth and his music seem the very model of a particular type of Englishman. Relentlessly self-critical, Butterworth regrettably destroyed the majority of his compositions before leaving for the Front; but several of his works remain in the repertoire. He was shot in the head by a sniper at the Somme.

Gerald Finzi wrote in 1922 that Butterworth's music 'sums up our countryside as very little else has ever done'. Indeed the silver thread of the first English folksong revival is woven throughout his music, the clarity of his melodies and folksong modality still sounding fresh to the ear. Later works such as his rhapsody *A Shropshire Lad* and some unfinished fragments display a darker, more uncertain tone.

On the idle hill of summer (A. E. Houseman, 1859-1936)

On the idle hill of summer,
Sleepy with the flow of streams,
Far I hear the steady drummer
Drumming like a noise in dreams.

East and west on fields forgotten
Bleach the bones of comrades slain,
Lovely lads and dead and rotten;
None that go return again.

Far and near and low and louder
On the roads of earth go by,
Dear to friends and food for powder,
Soldiers marching, all to die.

Far the calling bugles hollo,
High the screaming fife replies,
Gay the files of scarlet follow:
Woman bore me, I will rise.

The death of **Ernest Bristow Farrar** (1885-1918) inspired significant works by Frank Bridge and by Gerald Finzi, whose first composition teacher he was - the melancholic tone of Finzi's works is often attributed to the loss of his friend and teacher.

During Farrar's life, he was considered an up-and-coming composer, and most of his works were published, many remaining in the repertoire to this day. He studied under Stanford, and was equally adept at writing miniatures and longer forms.

He enlisted in the Grenadier Guards in 1915 and was later commissioned as Second Lieutenant, 3rd Battalion Devonshire Regiment. He died at the Battle of Épehy.

Silent Noon (D. G. Rossetti, 1828-1882)

Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass, -
The finger-points look through like rosy blooms:
Your eyes smile peace. The pasture gleams and glooms
'Neath billowing clouds that scatter and amass.
All round our nest, far as the eye can pass,
Are golden kingcup fields with silver edge
Where the cow-parsley skirts the hawthorn hedge.
'Tis visible silence, still as the hour glass.

Deep in the sunsearched growths the dragon-fly
Hangs like a blue thread loosened from the sky: -
So this winged hour is dropt to us from above.
Oh! clasp we to our hearts, for deathless dower,
This close-companioned inarticulate hour
When twofold silence was the song of love.

Like George Butterworth, the poet Laurence Binyon studied at Trinity College, Oxford. He wrote a number of poems on the theme of war early on during the conflict, and although they were not written with music in mind, several composers made settings of them. The one that has survived is that of **Edward Elgar** (1857-1934). Although Elgar had written most of the works he is remembered for by the time the war started, he was moved by Binyon's poems to set three of them during the war as his last major choral work, *The Spirit of England*. This work requires a large orchestra; but tonight we hear an arrangement for organ of the last movement, *For the Fallen*.

For the Fallen contains a verse which is familiar to this day, as it is read during the annual service of remembrance on November 11th. While he was organ scholar at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, **Mark Blatchly** (1960-) set a selection of verses from the poem for the choristers of St Paul's Cathedral to sing at the British Legion Festival of Remembrance in 1980, ending it with a repetition of the most familiar words. He is now organist at St Edmundsbury Cathedral.

For the Fallen (Laurence Binyon, 1869-1943)

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,
England mourns for her dead across the sea.
Flesh of her flesh they were, Spirit of her spirit,
Fallen in the cause of the free.

They went with songs to the battle; They were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds; Uncounted,
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We will remember them.

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;
They sit no more at familiar tables at home;
They have no lot in our labour of the daytime,
They sleep beyond England's foam.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We will remember them.

George Dyson (1883-1964) joined the Royal Fusiliers at the outbreak of war, and during this time wrote a widely used training pamphlet on the use of grenades. After being invalided home with shell-shock in 1916 and recovering, he joined the Royal Air Force where he completed the *RAF March Past* drafted by Walford Davies. Later he became Director of the Royal College of Music.

As well as a number of major orchestral and choral works, Dyson composed some fifty works for the liturgy of the Church of England. The F major service is particularly noted for its solos, and about half of the *Nunc dimittis* is for a solo bass.

Nunc Dimittis in F (from Luke, chapter 2)

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people. To be a light to lighten the gentiles, and to be the glory of thy people, Israel.

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.

Biographies

Gareth John baritone

Winner of the 2013 Kathleen Ferrier Award, baritone Gareth Brynmor John held a choral scholarship at St John's College, Cambridge, before taking a place at London's Royal Academy of Music. In his final year, he won the Royal Academy of Music Patrons' Award and was awarded the Silver Medal by the Worshipful Company of Musicians.

In opera, Gareth has performed the title role in *Eugene Onegin*, Claudio in *Béatrice et Bénédicte* (with Sir Colin Davis), the Ferryman in *Curlew River*, and Sprecher in *Die Zauberflöte*. Other roles include Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte*, Sid in *Albert Herring*, Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Escamillo in *Carmen*, and Il Conte in *Le nozze di Figaro*.

Gareth has performed with a number of the UK's leading orchestras and ensembles including The Philharmonia, the London Mozart Players, The Brandenburg Sinfonia, and Charivari Agréable. Recent concert highlights include Vaughan Williams's *Five Mystical Songs* and *Sea Symphony*; Orff's *Carmina Burana*, and Britten's *War Requiem*.

Gareth has a strong interest in song repertoire and performs in the Songsmiths Series at St John's Smith Square. His debut Wigmore recital with Matthew Fletcher featured songs by Ravel, Brahms, Schubert and Vaughan Williams's *Songs of Travel*. Other performances include Britten's *Songs and Proverbs of William Blake* at the Wigmore Hall, Brahms's op. 71 and Wolf's *Italienisches Liederbuch*. Gareth has recorded the Schoenberg arrangement of Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* with Trevor Pinnock for Linn Records.

Ben Bloor organ & piano

Ben Bloor began his musical education as a chorister in Derby Cathedral where later he became the organ scholar. In 2010, he achieved the prestigious organ scholarship at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, where he resided and worked for the year, playing (on occasion for royalty) and teaching the young choristers.

Recently, Ben graduated with a First Class Honours degree in Music from the University of Oxford, where he was also organ scholar at New College. With New College Choir, he toured extensively, took part in several recording projects and played for live broadcasts on BBC Radio 3. Thereafter, Ben spent a year as the organ scholar at Westminster Cathedral and subsequently as the Assistant Sub-Organist at Rochester Cathedral, where he also taught piano and organ at the King's School.

Ben was the winner of the 2012 Northern Ireland International Organ Competition, and holds the Limpus prize for highest marks in the 2013 FRCO examinations. In 2014, he was awarded the Silver Medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians for his contribution to organ-playing.

Currently Ben is pursuing a freelance career as a musician in London, combining this with the posts of Organist of the Brompton Oratory, and School Organist at Westminster School.

James Brown conductor

James Brown is a pianist and organist based in Oxford whose work takes him all over the world. A former organ scholar of Girton College, Cambridge University, he did further organ study at the Geneva Conservatoire of Music with Lionel Rogg.

He is currently Organist of the historic University Church of Oxford, and combines this with work as a classical pianist for the Fred Olsen and Swan Hellenic cruise lines. With the latter he appears as accompanist to opera singers and classical instrumentalists for formal concerts on board, and in 2016 travels to destinations varying from Bermuda to St Petersburg. Musicians he has played with include the singers Sarah Connolly, Rodney Clarke and Ed Lyon as well as the trumpeter Crispian Steele-Perkins.

As an organist he has given recitals in the UK, USA, Belgium and Switzerland and appeared on BBC television and radio as well as on several CD recordings.

He also sings as a tenor lay clerk in the internationally acclaimed boys and men choir of New College, Oxford.

James has conducted the Cherwell Singers since 2007.

The Cherwell Singers

Soprano

Cicely Arthur
Janet Johnson
Vanessa Moir
Claire Scott-Dempster
Rhiannon Stubbs
Stephanie Sumner-Jones
Lucy Watson

Tenor

Simon Fisher
Guy Peskett
David Read
David Sutton

Alto

Virginia Allport
Francesca Donnellan
Elizabeth Kreager
Anna Orłowska
Joanna Poulton
Elinor Screen

Bass

Paul Hodges
Pierre Illien
Jack Lovell
Iain Maclean
Jonathan Mapley
Simeon Mitchell
Tim Wainwright

The Cherwell Singers is looking to recruit sopranos and tenors.
If you are interested in joining us please contact James Brown at:

director@cherwellsingers.org

Next Concert

Poulenc: *Sept Répons des Ténèbres*

Dubois: *Les Sept Paroles du Christ*

Exeter College chapel, Oxford

7:30pm, 25 March 2017

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