

40th anniversary year 1977- 2017

The Cherwell Singers

present

Poulenc

Sept répons des ténèbres

Dubois

The Seven Last Words of Christ

Elinor Jane Moran	soprano
Andrew Bennett	tenor
Daniel Tate	bass
Carleton Etherington	organ
James Brown	conductor

Saturday, 25th March 2017

Exeter College Chapel, Oxford

Programme

The Seven Last Words of Christ

Théodore Dubois

Introduction:	<i>O all ye that pass by</i>
First word:	<i>Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do</i>
Second word:	<i>Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise</i>
Third word:	<i>Woman, behold thy son!</i>
Fourth word:	<i>My God, why hast thou forsaken me?</i>
Fifth word:	<i>I thirst!</i>
Sixth word:	<i>Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit</i>
Seventh word:	<i>It is finished!</i>

Interval

Sept répons des ténèbres

Francis Poulenc

Maundy Thursday:	I	<i>Una hora non potuistis vigilare mecum</i>
	II	<i>Judas, marcator pessimus</i>
Good Friday:	III	<i>Jesum tradidit</i>
	IV	<i>Caligaverunt oculi mei</i>
	V	<i>Tenebrae factae sunt</i>
Holy Saturday:	VI	<i>Sepulto Domino</i>
	VII	<i>Ecce quomodo moritur justus</i>

Elinor Jane Moran	soprano
Andrew Bennett	tenor
Daniel Tate	bass
Tomos Xerri	harp
Robert MacLennan	timpani
Carleton Etherington	organ
James Brown	conductor

Francis Poulenc Théodore Dubois

Sept répons des ténèbres Seven Last Words of Christ

The story of the events of the death of Christ are the most intense and dramatic parts of the Christian story, and many composers have responded to them with some of their finest music. Our Lenten concert this year links two substantial but seldom performed settings by two French composers, separated by a century, but united in their dramatic and powerful settings of this chilling episode.

Francis Poulenc died before he ever heard his *Sept répons des ténèbres* first performed. Written in 1961, this last choral work on Latin texts from the Responsories for Holy Week was commissioned by Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic, and first performed in 1963. It has been noted for its dark and extremely sombre character, expressing a wide range of emotion, facing the crucifixion in sorrow and distress.

The number seven also appears in the collection of short phrases uttered by Jesus at his crucifixion immediately before he died, and gathered from the four gospels. *The Seven Last Words of Christ* by Théodore Dubois was written in 1867, and although most of his music has disappeared from view, this work is being given a second performance by the Cherwell Singers who last performed it here in this chapel in 2008.

Both these works were originally scored for full orchestra and chorus, but with a small choir they are nonetheless effective with organ, with the harp and timpani providing some extra colour from their orchestral parts.

We hope you are moved by these contrasting but complementary settings of the events of the Passion.

James Brown

Notes

Musical settings of the passion narrative and meditations on it have been composed regularly throughout musical history. One of the commonest texts to be set is the *Stabat mater dolorosa*, but the *Seven Last Words* have been used only rarely, most notably by Haydn. The late nineteenth century produced a number of such works with an exaggerated religiosity, including Liszt's *Via crucis*, Stainer's *The Crucifixion*, Maunder's *Olivet to Calvary*, and Dubois' *Seven Last Words of Christ*. These works have tended to stay at home, becoming well-loved by amateur choirs in their countries of origin (and in the case of the Dubois, also in Canada and the USA).

Théodore Dubois (1837-1924) was a distinguished teacher and organist; he was head of the Paris Conservatoire from 1896 to 1905, and his books on theory are still in some use. In 1861 he was awarded the prestigious Prix de Rome for composition, but in 1905 he was forced to resign from the Conservatoire after his refusal to award the same prize to Ravel created a substantial public outcry. His own output is distinguished by quantity rather than quality – he was overshadowed in composition by his contemporaries such as Gounod, Fauré and Saint-Saëns. Only a few organ works and the oratorio *The Seven Last Words of Christ* survive in use today.

The Seven Last Words of Christ has eight movements: an introduction followed by a movement for each word of Christ from the cross. Dubois used other phrases from the gospels and elsewhere in the bible, together with traditional texts from the Roman Catholic Holy Week liturgies as meditations on the scriptural account. The introduction is the antiphon *O vos omnes* traditionally sung at Tenebrae services; following the third word, two verses taken from the 13th-century sequence *Stabat mater* are sung; after the fourth word he uses the liturgical text *Omnes amici mei*; and he concludes with a hymn-like setting of the medieval antiphon *Adoramus te, Christe*, much like a chorale at the end of an 18th century cantata.

Dubois' setting is somewhat four-square, but with considerable drama. There are some echoes of his contemporaries such as Fauré and Verdi. The work was originally written with orchestral accompaniment, but is frequently performed with organ, harp and timpani, as tonight.

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) wrote his *Sept répons des ténèbres* to a commission for the inaugural season of New York's new Philharmonic Hall. It was his last major work, and he died without hearing it performed.

Although it is was praised from the first performance, and is generally considered a masterpiece, it has never gained the popularity of his other big choral works such as the *Gloria*, possibly because it is by far the most avant-garde of his sacred compositions, the most emotionally demanding, and the most interesting musically. However, it is a fitting end to Poulenc's production of what is now seen as one of the greatest bodies of sacred music by any major twentieth-century composer. Poulenc gave his own assessment of the work to his friend Pierre Bernac: 'I have finished *Les Ténèbres*. I think it is beautiful. With the *Gloria* and the *Stabat Mater*, I think I have three good religious works. May they spare me a few days in purgatory, if I narrowly avoid going to hell.'

Whereas Dubois took the text that he set from a wide range of sources, even to the point of combining parts of different sources in a single sentence, Poulenc took the words for his *Sept répons des ténèbres* from the office of Tenebrae (a special form of Matins and Lauds used in the last days of Holy Week), selecting seven of the twenty-seven responsories that form part of the Catholic form of the service. The selected extracts are mainly narrative in nature, though disconnected rather than continuous, but the fourth and last movements are commentary, just as Bach used arias as commentary in his Passions. The narrative movements are from the viewpoint of an observer, except the first, which uses the words of Christ himself.

As you would expect, Poulenc's music does not have any of the romantic religiosity of Dubois' either. Although Poulenc did not subscribe to the twelve-tone system or to other ways of reducing the importance of tonality, he did develop an often discordant style in which, however, the discords do not always have the function of being disturbing (although naturally he uses them that way when necessary) but rather are used to thicken and enrich the sound while not destroying its fundamental tonality. Another aspect of Poulenc's style in this work is his tendency to emphasise parts of the text by frequent identical, or little changed, repetitions of short phrases. Both these tendencies can also be found in his earlier work written for this part of the church year, the *Quatre motets pour un temps de penitence*, though in a less extreme manner.

Poulenc tried always to give, as he wrote: 'an impression of fervour, and above all of humility ... essentially direct and, if I dare say it, familiar ...' Stravinsky once wrote to Poulenc, 'You are truly *good*, and that is what I find again and again in your music.'

Théodore Dubois - *The Seven Last Words of Christ*

- Introduction: O vos omnes qui transitis per viam, attendite, et videte si est dolor sicut dolor meus. Posuit me Dominus desolatam, tota die mœrore confectam; ne vocetis me Noëmi, sed vocate me Mara.
- First word: *Pater, dimitte illis, non enim sicut, quid faciunt*
Et dicebant omnes: Reus est mortis; tolle, tolle, crucifige eum. Sanguis ejus super nos et super filios nostros! Crucifixerunt Jesum et latrones, unum a dextris et alterum a sinistris.
- Second word: *Hodie mecum eris in Paradiso, amen, amen, dico tibi*
Domine, memento mei cum veneris in regnum tuum.
- Third word: *Mulier, ecce filius tuus*
Stabat Mater dolorosa
Juxta Crucem lacrymosa,
Dum pendebat Filius.
Quis est homo, qui non fleret,
Christi Matrem si videret
In tanto supplicio?
- Fourth word: *Deus meus, ut quid dereliquisti me?*
Omnes amici mei dereliquerunt me; prævaluerunt insidiantes mihi; tradidit me quem diligebam. Vineam meam electam, ego te plantavi; quomodo conversa es in amaritudine ut me crucifigeres?
- Fifth word: *Sitio!*
Judæi prætereuntes blasphemabant eum, moventes capita sua et dicentes:
Vah! Qui destruis templum Dei, si tu es Christus, Filius Dei, descende nunc de cruce, ut videamus et credamus tibi. Si tu es rex Judeorum, salvum te fac.
- Sixth word: *Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum*
Pater meus es tu, Deus meus, susceptor salutis meæ.
- Seventh word: Et clamans Jesu voce magna dixit: *Consummatum est!*
Et inclinato capite, tradidit spiritum. Erat autem fere hora sexta; obscuratus est sol, et tenebræ factæ sunt in universam terram; velum templi scissum est; omnis terra tremuit; petræ scissæ et monumenta aperta sunt.
- Prayer: Adoramus te, Christe, et benedicimus tibi.
Quia per sanctam Crucem tuam redemisti mundum.

Words from the Gospels, the Psalms, Lamentations, early hymns, and the office of Tenebræ.

Introduction: All ye who pass by, behold and see if there be any sorrow like my sorrow.
The Lord hath dealt bitterly with me; call me not Naomi, call me Mara.

First word: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*
The people cried out: away with him, crucify him! His blood be on us, and on our children! And they did crucify Jesus, and with him two thieves; one at his right hand, and the other at his left.

Second word: *Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise*
Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

Third word: *Woman, behold thy son!*
At the Cross her station keeping,
stood the mournful Mother weeping,
close to Jesus to the last.
Is there one who would not weep,
whelmed in miseries so deep,
Christ's dear Mother to behold?

Fourth word: *My God, why hast thou forsaken me?*
All my friends have forsaken me, and my enemies prevail; one that I loved betrayed me. My chosen vine, that I planted, how is it that you have turned to bitterness, so that you would crucify me?

Fifth word: *I thirst!*
And the Jews that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying:
Thou that destroyest the temple, if Thou be Christ, the Son of God, come down from the cross that we may see and believe. If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.

Sixth word: *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit*
For Thou art my God and my Father; Thou art my Saviour.

Seventh word: And Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying: *It is finished!*
and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. And it was about the sixth hour; and the sun was darkened, and there was darkness over all the earth. And the veil of the temple was rent, and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened.

Prayer: We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee:
because by thy holy cross thou hast redeemed the world.

Francis Poulenc - *Sept répons des ténèbres*

Maundy Thursday:

- I Una hora non potuistis vigilare mecum, qui exhortabamini mori pro me?
Vel! Judam non videtis, quomodo no dormit, sed festinate trader me Judæis?
Quid dormitis? surgite, et orate, ne intretis in tentationem.
- II Judas Mercator pessimis osculo petiit Dominum:
ille ut agnus innocens non negavit Judæ osculum:
Denariorum numero Christum Judæis tradidit.
Melius illi erat, si natus non fuisset.

Good Friday:

- III Jesum tradidit impius summis principibus sacerdotum, et senioribus populi:
Petrus autem sequebatur eum a longe, ut videret finem.
Adduxerunt autem eum ad Caiapham principem sacerdotum,
ubi scribæ et pharisæi convenerant.
- IV Caligaverunt oculi mei a fletu meo:
quia elongatus est a me, qui consolabatur me:
Videte, omnes populi, si est dolor similis sicut dolor meus.
O vos omnes, qui transitis per viam, attendite et videte.
- V Tenebræ factæ sunt, dum crucifixissent Jesum Judæi:
et circa horam nonam exclamavit Jesus voce magna:
Deus meus, ut quid me dereliquisti?
Et inclinato capite, emisit spiritum.
Exclamans Jesus voce magna, ait:
Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum.

Holy Saturday:

- VI Sepulto Domino, signatum est monumentum,
volvantes lapidem ad ostium monumenti:
Ponentes milites, qui custodirent ilium.
- VII Ecce quomodo moritur justus, et nemo percipit corde:
et viri justī tolluntur, et nemo considerat:
a facie iniquitatis sublatu est justus:
Et erit in pace memoria ejus.
Tamquam agnus coram tondente se obmutuit, et non aperuit os suum:
de angustia, et de judicio sublatu est.

Words from the office of Tenebræ for the days indicated.

Maundy Thursday:

- I Could ye not watch one hour with me, ye that were willing to die with me?
Look!* do you not see Judas, how he sleeps not, but hastens to betray me to the Jews?
Why do you sleep? Arise and pray, lest ye fall into temptation.
- II The wicked merchant Judas sought our Lord with a kiss.
He, like an innocent lamb, refused not the kiss of Judas.
For a few coins he delivered Christ to the Jews.
It had been better for him if he had never been born.

Good Friday:

- III The wicked man betrayed Jesus to the chief priests and elders of the people;
but Peter followed him afar off, to see the end.
And they led him to Caiaphas, the chief priest,
where the scribes and Pharisees were assembled.
- IV My eyes became dim with my weeping:
for he is far from me that consoled me.
See, all ye people, if there be sorrow like my sorrow.
O all ye that pass by this way, take heed and see.
- V There was darkness when the Jews crucified Jesus;
and about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice:
My God, why hast thou forsaken me?
And bowing down his head, he gave up the ghost.
Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said:
Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.

Holy Saturday:

- VI When the Lord was buried, they sealed up the tomb,
rolling a stone before the entrance to the sepulchre:
placing soldiers to guard him.
- VII Behold how the just man dies, and no one takes it to heart;
and just men are taken away, and no one cares about it:
the just man has been taken away from the face of iniquity:
and his memory shall be in peace.
He was as mute as a lamb before the shearer, and he opened not his mouth:
from anguish and from judgement he was taken away.

* *This is a paraphrase to fit Poulenc's unexpected use of 'Vel' as an exclamation.*

Biographies

Elinor Jane Moran soprano

Elinor studied voice at Chetham's School Of Music and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where she won the Worshipful Company of Horners' Becker Scholarship and the Tracey Chadwell Memorial Prize for Contemporary Song.

Her oratorio experience includes Mozart *Requiem & Coronation Mass*, Tippett *A Child for our Time*, Verdi *Requiem*, Vaughan Williams *Sea Symphony*, Orff *Carmina Burana*, Handel *Messiah & Joshua*, Haydn *Creation, The Seasons & Nelson Mass*, Schumann *Requiem*, Rossini *Petite Messe Solenne*, Brahms *Requiem*, Mendelssohn *Elijah*.

Recent operatic roles include Casilda *The Gondoliers*, Josephine *HMS Pinafore* and Mabel *Pirates of Penzance* with the National Gilbert and Sullivan Opera Company on National Tour. Elinor was a soloist on a Sony's 'The Best of Gilbert and Sullivan' which reached the top of the Classical Chart. Other operatic roles include Mimi *La Boheme*, Violetta *La Traviata*, Rosina *The Barber Of Seville*, Anna *Don Giovanni*, Michaela *Carmen*, Susanna *The Marriage of Figaro*, Rowan *The Little Sweep*, Rusalka/Voran *May Night* (at Garsington Opera). Elinor has been the recipient of a Garsington Opera Award.

Elinor is in demand as a vocal workshop leader and animateur and sometimes director. She regularly works in learning and in 2012 she performed a dance role in Danny Boyle's Olympic Opening Ceremony.

Andrew Bennett tenor

Born in Yorkshire, Andrew Bennett studied Chemistry at the University of Edinburgh and singing with Amand Hekkers in Glasgow. During this time he sang in the choir of St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh, making numerous broadcasts on BBC Radio and Television, Classic FM, and other international stations. Whilst in Scotland, Andrew appeared with Ludus Baroque and the Dunedin Consort. After a time as a freelance singer in London, Andrew became a Lay Clerk in the Choir of New College, Oxford. When not busy with the choir in Oxford or performing with them elsewhere on tour, he frequently sings in London, and is a deputy at many notable London churches and at St Paul's Cathedral. In addition to choral singing he enjoys performing as a soloist and recent engagements have included Monteverdi *Vespers*, Mozart *Requiem*, and Handel's *Alexander's Feast*.

Andrew also enjoys working as an organist and conductor, and in Oxford is organist of Champion Hall, a Permanent Private Hall of the University run by the Society of Jesus.

Outside of his musical pursuits Andrew has a keen interest in late medieval history in England and the Wars of the Roses in particular.

Daniel Tate Baritone

Daniel currently enjoys an active career in Oxford and London as a professional singer and director. Whilst studying for both Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Music at Durham University, he developed a strong reputation in the North East as a violinist before converting to singing, performing widely as a soloist and in ensemble.

Since moving to Oxford he has sung professionally with New College and Christ Church Cathedral Choir, and many distinguished choirs in London including Westminster Cathedral, St Bride's Fleet Street, Chapels Royal at Hampton Court and Tower of London, and Ex Cathedra - with whom he has performed *Carmina Burana* at the London Coliseum with Birmingham Royal Ballet.

As a soloist he has performed in oratorio and concert, and his most recent opera appearance was earlier this month as Smirnov in *The Bear*, Walton. With New Chamber Opera he played the Pope in Philip Glass's *Galileo Galilei* in 2013, and with Durham Opera Ensemble played Gallanthis in Vaughan Williams's *The Poisoned Kiss*, and Father in *Hansel and Gretel*, Humperdinck. Daniel is also reprising his role as Christus in Bach's *St John Passion* this season with New College Choir, including a performance next week in New York, USA. He also teaches singing and music theory at leading schools in Oxford, and himself studies singing with Robert Dean at Guildhall, London.

Carleton Etherington organ

Carleton Etherington is Organist and Director of Music at Tewkesbury Abbey, where he presides over the famous Milton and Grove organs. His duties include the direction of the Abbey Choir which sings the weekend services and major festivals, and accompanying the Schola Cantorum, which sings the weekday Choral Evensongs. He recently celebrated twenty years in this post.

Educated at Chetham's School of Music, Manchester and London's Royal Academy of Music - where his organ teachers were Dr Peter Hurford and David Sanger - Carleton held posts at St Bride's Fleet Street and Leeds Parish Church before moving to Gloucestershire. A graduate of London University and a holder of the Academy's Recital Diploma he was subsequently awarded Associateship of the Academy.

A first prize winner in two prestigious organ playing competitions - Paisley (1992) and the RCO Performer of the Year (1993) - Carleton has performed throughout the UK and in France, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Australia and the USA. He has broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and 4 many times and has been featured on Radio 2's *The Organist Entertains*. His various CD recordings, both as soloist and accompanist, have received widespread acclaim from the critics.

Amongst his other musical activities Carleton is Musical Director and Conductor of two thriving choral societies (Pershore and Cirencester) and is Organ Tutor at Dean Close School, Cheltenham. A former Council Member of the Royal College of Organists and a Past Chairman of the Gloucestershire Organists' Association, he was recently bestowed with an Honorary Fellowship from the Guild of Church Musicians in recognition of his work in the profession.

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 travelled 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

Janet Johnson
Vanessa Moir
Elinor Screen
Rhiannon Stubbs
Stephanie Sumner-Jones
Gayle Walker

Alto

Virginia Allport
Jenny Ayres
Katherine Butler
Francesca Donellan
Elizabeth Kreager
Lizzy Newton
Anna Orlowska

Tenor

Forrest Brennen
Guy Peskett
David Read
David Sutton

Bass

Steve Allen
Paul Hodges
Jack Lovell
Iain Maclean
Jonathan Mapley
Malcolm Pearce

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

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.

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