

40th Anniversary Concert 1977- 2017

The Cherwell Singers

present

Elgar

The Music Makers

and other works

Helen Johnson	mezzo-soprano
Timothy Wakerell	organ
Tomos Xerri	harp
James Brown	conductor, piano

Sunday, 2nd July 2017

Harris Manchester College Chapel, Oxford

Programme

Elgar

The Spirit of the Lord

from: The Apostles

Sea Pictures

In Haven

Where Corals lie

Sabbath morning at Sea

(Mezzo-soprano and piano)

Salut d'Amour

(Harp solo)

My Love Dwelt in a Northern Land

Interval

The Music Makers

Helen Johnson	mezzo-soprano
Timothy Wakerell	organ
Tomos Xerri	harp
Christopher Fletcher-Campbell	timpani
James Brown	conductor, piano

*The Cherwell Singers is very grateful to Helen Johnson
for singing in place of Emma Watkinson who is unavailable*

Cherwell Singers – 40 Years

The Cherwell Singers is an Oxford-based, mixed-voice chamber choir, founded in 1977 by an ex-chorister of Christ Church cathedral. We sing all types of music from the late Middle Ages to the present day - including mainstays of the choral repertoire and lesser-known, even obscure, works. We sing *a capella*, or with instrumental or orchestral accompaniment, and alongside the serious parts of our repertoire we include lighter material such as madrigals or jazz. We place a high value on musicianship, aiming to perform to a consistently high standard.

The choir has had many conductors over the years. James Brown, who with this concert reaches ten years as our conductor, has conducted us for more concerts than any other; but many well-known Oxford musicians have worked with us, such as Edward Higginbottom, and the current Director of Music of St Paul's Cathedral, London, Andrew Carwood, directed us in many concerts over a period of twelve years. A comprehensive list of our concerts and their conductors can be found on our web site.

As well as set-piece concerts, the choir also sings to collect money for charity around Christmas time, and is available to sing for private events such as weddings or dinners. The Cherwell Singers is a registered charity.

Sir Edward Elgar

Edward Elgar was born in 1857 near Worcester. His family was musical (his father kept a music shop and was a keen amateur violinist) and he began violin lessons at the age of seven. By the age of sixteen he was a proficient enough player to support himself as a freelance violinist and teacher. But his true ambition was to become a composer. After his marriage to Caroline Alice Roberts in 1889, Elgar attempted to establish himself as a composer in London, but he failed and the Elgars returned to Malvern two years later.

Elgar kept abreast of contemporary developments on the Continent, not least through visits to Bayreuth and Munich in 1892 and 1893, and began an ambitious series of oratorios that won him growing recognition in the 1890s. But it was his *Enigma Variations*, performed in London in 1899, that marked his breakthrough as a composer of national importance.

Notes & Words

The Spirit of the Lord is often performed alone as an anthem, but it is in fact the prologue of Elgar's second great oratorio, *The Apostles*. This was written after *The Dream of Gerontius*, but its greater austerity has kept it from becoming as popular; a pity, because the choral writing is more developed than in the earlier work. The prologue, *The Spirit of the Lord*, starts with a short and solemn prelude introducing the main theme of the oratorio. The chorus enters and further themes are heard, including a new version of the principal theme with new harmonies and a sequence of chords representing "Christ the Man of Sorrows" – which is an example of a Wagnerian type of *leitmotif* such as Elgar used quite frequently.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because He hath anointed me to
preach the gospel to the poor;
He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted,
to preach deliverance to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to preach the acceptable year of the Lord;
to give unto them that mourn
a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning,
the garment of praise
for the spirit of heaviness;
That they might be called trees of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord that He might be glorified.

For as the earth bringeth forth her bud,
and as the garden causeth the
things that are sown in it to spring forth;
So the Lord God will cause
righteousness and praise to
spring forth before all nations.

Isaiah 61 vv. 1–3, 11

Written immediately after the *Enigma Variations*, Elgar's *Sea Pictures* were initially written for Soprano and Piano, and immediately transposed and orchestrated for Dame Clara Butt. For the first performance, in Norwich, Clara Butt appeared in a mermaid outfit and without a corset ("guiltless of all confinement" was the contemporary description), and for

the first London performance, Elgar accompanied her on the piano. The songs have suffered from rather stuffy academic and critical commentary centring on the lack of profundity of their poems. Actually, however, in the era when Mahler was integrating the banal and the sublime in his *Second* and *Third Symphonies*, and not too long before Berg would be setting lyrics from picture postcards in his *Altenberg Lieder*, these exquisite miniatures of Elgar are quite cutting-edge, ushering in a new aesthetic more inclusive of what we'd now call pop culture.

The essence of these songs' marine imagery is the overwhelming attraction of oblivion. A fitting metaphor for an island nation, the shoreline represents the boundary between the finite and the infinite, the careworn and the carefree, routine and escape. Elgar is extremely deft at bringing together the contemporary pastoral tradition, the Elizabethan view of the unison of love and death, the sentimental ballad, and the "goodbye to all that" nostalgia of the times.

The cycle is a marvel of interwoven musical thought. One simple rising and falling motif is the sole building block for the five numbers (of which we hear three this evening). The ocean is peaceful and storm-tossed by turns in the Alice Elgar and the Browning, but perhaps the most remarkable is the heart-wrenching "Where Corals Lie". The voice of the sea lures the poet to "the land where corals lie" - the sea floor. The accompaniment is subtle and playful, and conceals the menace of the implied drowning.

In Haven (Capri) (Caroline Alice Elgar, 1848-1920)

Closely let me hold thy hand,	Closely cling, for waves beat fast,
Storms are sweeping sea and land;	Foam-flakes cloud the hurrying blast;
Love alone will stand.	Love alone will last.

Kiss my lips, and softly say:
Joy, sea-swept, may fade to-day;
Love alone will stay.

Where Corals Lie (Richard Garnett, 1835-1906)

The deeps have music soft and low	By mount and mead, by lawn and rill,
When winds awake the airy spray.	When night is deep, and moon is high,
It lures me, lures me on to go	That music seeks and finds me still,
And see the land where corals lie.	And tells me where the corals lie.

Yes, press my eyelids close, 'tis well,
But far the rapid fancies fly
The rolling worlds of wave and shell,
And all the lands where corals lie.

Thy lips are like a sunset glow,
Thy smile is like a morning sky,
Yet leave me, leave me, let me go
And see the land where corals lie.

Sabbath Morning at Sea (Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 1806-1861)

The ship went on with solemn face;
To meet the darkness on the deep,
The solemn ship went onward.
I bowed down weary in the place;
For parting tears and present sleep
Had weighed mine eyelids downward.

The new sight, the new wondrous sight!
The waters around me, turbulent,
The skies, impassive o'er me,
Calm in a moonless, sunless light,
As glorified by even the intent
Of holding the day glory!

Love me, sweet friends, this Sabbath day.
The sea sings round me while ye roll
Afar the hymn, unaltered,
And kneel, where once I knelt to pray,
And bless me deeper in your soul
Because your voice has faltered.

And though this sabbath comes to me
Without the stolèd minister,
And chanting congregation,
God's Spirit shall give comfort. He
Who brooded soft on waters drear,
Creator on creation.

He shall assist me to look higher,
Where keep the saints, with harp and song
An endless sabbath morning,
And, on that sea commixed with fire,
Oft drop their eyelids raised too long
To the full Godhead's burning.

Elgar wrote *Salut d'Amour* in July 1888, when he was romantically involved with Caroline Alice Roberts, and he called it *Liebesgruss* ('Love's Greeting') because of Miss Roberts' fluency in German. On their engagement she presented him with a poem *The Wind at Dawn* which he set to music, and when he returned home from a holiday shortly after, he gave her *Salut d'Amour* as an engagement present.

The dedication was in French: "à Carice". Carice was a combination of his wife's names: Caroline Alice, and was the name to be given to their daughter born two years later.

Elgar originally wrote the piece for violin and piano, but it has been arranged for a wide range of instruments and ensembles.

My Love Dwelt in a Northern Land was Elgar's first published part-song, dating from 1890. When it first appeared, it was said to be "crude, ill-written for the voice, laid out without knowledge of the capabilities of the human voice &c &c!", as Elgar told his friend Jaeger many years later. Yet it is a fine song, despite the conventional setting. One might note in passing that Lang's poem, entitled *Romance*, has the theme - popular in Victorian times and frequently used by Elgar - of youthful love, often unfulfilled and/or brought to an end by premature death.

The poem itself may be an adaptation of a far older Scottish poem. Lang was very unhappy about Elgar's using it, presumably because of the many changes he made – omitting the fifth line of the first two verses, adding the third verse, changing a number of other words, changing the love from female to male, and making the love's heart "colder than the clay" instead of the poet's.

My love dwelt in a Northern land
A dim tower in a forest green
Was his, and far away the sand,
And gray wash of the waves was seen,
The woven forest boughs between.

And through the Northern summer night
The sunset slowly died away,
And herds of strange deer, silver white,
Came gleaming through the forest gray,
And fled like ghosts before the day.

And oft, that month, we watch'd the moon
Wax great and white o'er wood and lawn,
And wane, with waning of the June,
Till, like a brand for battle drawn,
She fell, and flamed in a wild dawn.

I know not if the forest green
Still girdles round that castle gray,
I know not if, the boughs between,
The white deer vanish ere the day.
The grass above my love is green,
His heart is colder than the clay.

Andrew Lang (1844-1912)

Elgar once described himself as a "dreamy child", and dreams were a common theme in his music, exemplified by his *Dream Children*, "Dreaming" from the *Nursery Suite*, *Sea Pictures* and *The Dream of Gerontius*. So it is no surprise that Elgar should have been drawn to the text of an *Ode*, *The Music Makers*, written in 1873 by Arthur O'Shaughnessy (1844-1881), with its opening: "We are the music makers and we are the dreamers of dreams." The idea of the artist as dreamer, apart from the world yet inspiring every generation, was an ideal Elgar could share. The words seem as much written for his artistic creed as *The Dream of Gerontius* was for his religious creed. The conductor of the first performance exhorted his performers: "Sing and play as though you were in dreamland, and all will be well."

The poem's vision is of the role of the creative artist in inspiring the history and future of Mankind; yet Elgar's music often appears to undermine the poem's hope for the future. Acutely aware of the potential of creative artists to be the "movers and shakers of the world", Elgar had a deep sense of the artist's loneliness, dwelling "in our dreaming and singing, a little apart from ye". In his own words, "the atmosphere of the music is mainly sad, yet there are moments of enthusiasm and bursts of joy occasionally approaching frenzy: moods which the creative artist suffers in creating or in contemplation of the unending influence of his creation. Yes, suffers – this is the only word I dare use."

Elgar identified so closely with the motivation of the poem that he declared "in the *Ode* I have shewn myself". As a composer who readily used motives in his works, it is completely natural that in this piece about the nature of the creative artist he should use self-quotation. But this is never meant to be self-conscious; Elgar wrote to Ernest Newman, who was writing notes for the first performance: "Please do not insist on the extent of the quotations; they form a very small part of the work".

The self-quotation is, however, hugely significant and integral to the tapestry of the *The Music Makers*. We can note that the pervasive use of the *Enigma* theme represents Elgar himself (following the natural rhythm and shape of the name Edward Elgar). In his own words: "I have used the theme because it expressed when written (in 1898) my sense of the loneliness of the artist as described in the first six lines of the *Ode* and, to me, it still embodies that sense". Some other quotes have obvious motivations – *Sea Pictures* when the sea is mentioned, for instance. Other works of his own we hear are *Gerontius*, *The Apostles*, the *Violin Concerto*, and both *First* and *Second Symphonies*. When the poem mentions "Empire" Elgar works into the accompaniment both *Rule Britannia* and the *Marseillaise*.

Much criticism has been levelled at the quality of the poem by O'Shaughnessy, an antiquities employee of the British Museum, but Elgar lifts it from being a self-conscious, word-sounding utterance, and endows it with that very quality of wistful idealism for which it seems to be striving. (Elgar's is in fact not the only setting of the *Ode*; Kodaly also wrote a setting for Merton College in 1964.)

The first choral entry presents what Elgar describes as "a sort of artist's theme", which is to return several times to mark the structural framework of the piece.

We are the music makers
And we are the dreamers of dreams
Wandering by lone sea breakers,
And sitting by desolate streams; -
World-losers and world-forsakers,
On whom the pale moon gleams:
Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world forever, it seems.

With wonderful deathless ditties
We build up the world's great cities,
And out of a fabulous story
We fashion an empire's glory:
One man with a dream, at pleasure,
Shall go forth and conquer a crown;
And three with a new song's measure
Can trample a kingdom down.

A strong one-bar phrase insistently repeated in the accompaniment builds Nineveh city until the falling tower of Babel cascades down. The return of the artist's theme wistfully concludes the first section of the poem. This is Elgar in his most Parry-esque style.

We, in the ages lying
In the buried past of the earth,
Built Nineveh with our sighing,
And Babel itself in our mirth;
And o'erthrew them with prophesying
To the old of the new world's worth;
For each age is a dream that is dying,
Or one that is coming to birth.

After the fourth stanza Elgar introduces the solitary voice of the alto soloist, his characteristic choice of solo sonority (he composed this solo part for Muriel Foster, the Angel in the 1902 Düsseldorf performance of *The Dream of Gerontius*). He wrote of this section: "Here I have quoted the *Nimrod* variation as a tribute to my friend [deceased] A J Jaeger: by this I do not mean to convey that his was the only soul on which light had broken or that his was the only word that wrought flame on another man's heart."

A breath of our inspiration
Is the life of each generation;
A wondrous thing of our dreaming
Unearthly, impossible seeming -
The soldier, the king, and the peasant
Are working together in one,
Till our dream shall become their present,
And their work in the world be done.

They had no vision amazing
Of the goodly house they are raising;
They had no divine foreshowing
Of the land to which they are going:
But on one man's soul it hath broken,
A light that doth not depart;
And his look, or a word he hath spoken,
Wrought flame in another man's heart.

The excitement of the sixth verse leads back to the artist's dreaming. In the last two stanzas Elgar brings back phrases from earlier in the poem (such as: "the movers and the shakers of the world").

And therefore to-day is thrilling
With a past day's late fulfilling;
And the multitudes are enlisted
In the faith that their fathers resisted
And, scorning the dream of tomorrow,
Are bringing to pass, as they may,
In the world, for its joy or its sorrow,
The dream that was scorned yesterday.

But we, with our dreaming and singing,
Ceaseless and sorrowless we!
The glory about us clinging
Of the glorious futures we see,
Our souls with high music ringing:
O men! it must ever be
That we dwell, in our dreaming and singing,
A little apart from ye.

In the last lines the *Enigma* theme is joined by the theme from the *Violin Concerto* which Elgar wanted engraved on his tombstone.

For we are afar with the dawning
And the suns that are not yet high,
And out of the infinite morning
Intrepid you hear us cry -
How, spite of your human scorning,
Once more God's future draws nigh,
And already goes forth the warning
That ye of the past must die.

Great hail! we cry to the comers
From the dazzling unknown shore;
Bring us hither your sun and your summers;
And renew our world as of yore;
You shall teach us your song's new numbers,
And things that we dreamed not before:
Yea, in spite of a dreamer who slumbers,
And a singer who sings no more.

When Elgar finished the vocal score, he felt desolate. Wandering alone over Hampstead Heath, he experienced the "usual awful day which inevitably occurs when I have completed a work". But he had composed a great work, still capable of inspiring music makers and listeners a century later.

Biographies

Helen Johnson mezzo-soprano

British Mezzo Helen Johnson trained with Johanna Peters before taking her Post-Graduate Advanced Diploma at Trinity College of Music studying with Hazel Woods. In 2007 she was a Finalist in the Wagner Society Bayreuth Bursary Competition.

Helen has sung the roles of: Azucena *Il Trovatore* (Dorset Opera); Annina *La Traviata* directed by Jonathan Miller (Dorset Opera); Madame Larina *Eugene Onegin* (Stanley Hall); Bianca *The Rape of Lucretia*, Marcellina *Marriage of Figaro* (Opera East); Jezibaba *Rusalka* (Iford).

With English Touring Opera Helen has sung: Lady Angela *Patience*; Genevieve *Pelleas et Melisande*; Kolusina *Jenůfa*; Filipyevna *Eugene Onegin*; Feklusha *Katya Kabanova*; Clotilde *Norma*; and covered the roles of: Rodrigo *Pia de' Tolomei*; Giovanna Seymour *Anna Bolena*; Kabanicha *Katya Kabanova*; and Frugola *Il Tabarro*.

Helen has sung as an Extra Chorister with Opera North, English National Opera and WNO.

Tomos Xerri harp

Tomos was born and raised in Wales, studying at the Junior course of the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama and at Eton College, where he was awarded a Major Music Scholarship. He was then awarded scholarships for his undergraduate and Master's degrees at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance, where he studied with Gabriella Dall'Olio and won the John Marson Prize for an outstanding musician.

He currently enjoys a busy freelance career in London, with recent solo performances at the Wigmore Hall, St John's Smith Square, the 1901 Arts Club and St Martin-in-the-Fields. He has been selected for the Philharmonia Orchestra Instrumental Fellowship Programme 2017-18, working closely with the orchestra and receiving mentorship with the orchestra principals.

Tomos is a keen chamber musician, and is also very passionate about contemporary music; he recently performed 11 world premieres as part of The Riot Ensemble, and has commissioned new works for the harp.

Timothy Wakerell organ

Timothy Wakerell has held the post of Assistant Organist at New College, Oxford since September 2014 where he accompanies the Chapel Choir in services, broadcasts and concerts. Prior to this he was Sub-Organist of St Paul's Cathedral between 2008 and 2014 and played for important services such as the Funeral of Baroness Thatcher and the Diamond Jubilee Service. A prize-winning graduate of the Royal College of Music, Timothy also won Second Prize at the 2011 Carl Nielsen International Organ Competition in Odense, Denmark.

He has performed throughout the UK and abroad; recent venues include the Marienkirche, Berlin, St Augustin, Paris and St Paul's Cathedral. In 2014 Timothy completed the premiere recording of the 2012 William Drake Organ in the OBE Chapel of St Paul's Cathedral (Priory Records) which features works by J.S. Bach, Buxtehude, Saint-Saëns and Sweelinck.

James Brown conductor

James Brown was organ scholar of Girton College, Cambridge before doing further study of organ with Lionel Rogg at the Geneva Conservatoire, Switzerland. After two years as Guest Artist in Residence at the First United Methodist Church, Lubbock, Texas, USA, he returned to England where he was Organist of Dean Close School.

In 2006 James moved to Oxford where he is Organist of the historic University Church, and teaches organ at Abingdon and New College Schools as well as pursuing freelance work as an organist and pianist. James has given recitals in the UK, USA, Belgium and Switzerland, and appeared on both BBC radio and television. He is a tenor lay clerk in the choir of New College and a classical pianist for the Fred Olsen cruise line.

James has conducted the Cherwell Singers since 2007.

The Cherwell Singers

Soprano

Cicely Arthur
Helen Duncan
Janet Johnson
Rhiannon Lovell
Vanessa Moir
Elinor Screen
Gayle Walker
Judith Ward
Lucy Watson

Tenor

Andrew Bennett
Simon Fisher
David Read
David Sutton

Alto

Virginia Allport
Katherine Butler
Francesca Donnellan
Elizabeth Kreager
Lizzy Newton
Anna Orlowska
Sally Prime

Bass

Steve Allen
Paul Hodges
Jack Lovell
Jonathan Mapley
Simeon Mitchell

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.

www.cherwellsingers.org