

Minehead Choral Society
Saturday, 25th November 2017 7.30pm Avenue Methodist

Programme:

Puccini Messa di Gloria	1. Kyrie	
	2. Gloria	Gloria in excelsis Deo Gratias agimus tibi Qui tollis peccata Mundi Quoniam tu solus sanctus. Cum sancto spiritu
	3. Credo	Credo in unum Deo Et incarnatus de spiritu sancto. Crucifixus etiam pro nobis. Et resurrexit Et unam sanctam. Et vitam venturi saeculi
	4. Sanctus et Benedictus	Sanctus Benedictus
	5. Agnus Dei	

INTERVAL

1. Bizet	Habanera (Carmen)	Soprano, SATB
2. Mozart	Non piu Andrai (Marriage of Figaro)	Bass
3. Verdi	Triumphal Scene (Aida)	SATB, TTBB
4. <i>Tenor Solo</i>		Tenor
5. Puccini	Humming Chorus (Madame Butterfly)	ST
6. Verdi	Anvil Chorus (Il Trovatore)	SATB
7. <i>Soprano Solo</i> <i>(Die Fledermaus)??</i>		Soprano Strauss Laughing Song
8. Donizetti	Chorus of Wedding Guests (Lucia)	Tenor, SATB
9. Wagner	Bridal Chorus (Lohengrin)	SATB
10. Bizet	Votre Toast (Carmen)	Bass
11. Verdi	Chorus of Hebrew Slaves (Nabucco)	SATB
12. Verdi	Brindisi (La Traviata)	Soprano, Tenor, SATB

Programme Notes

Welcome to a night of Puccini and Operatic indulgence. Our first half is the beautiful and lyrical "Messa di Gloria" by Puccini and then, after the Interval, we indulge ourselves shamelessly with our favourite opera choruses and arias.

This selection is taken from a collection of choruses assembled and arranged by John Rutter, a very familiar composer to the society. He has translated the original language of the libretto, however I am very proud to say that the society members will be performing all of tonight's works other than in their original language. One of the hardest aspects of tonight's performance is moving from one language to another and I would like to say a huge thank you to our singers for their commitment to mastering the languages, and their friends for helping them – the mutterings around Minehead have been most effective!

I am delighted to welcome our fabulous friends and soloists, soprano **Krystal Mcmillan**, tenor **Stuart Laing** and bass **Jamie Rock**. Together with joining in the choruses, they will share with us their favourite arias. We also welcome our friends from the **Taunton Sinfonietta**,
Marcus Capel, November 2017

Messa di Gloria - Giacomo Puccini (1858 - 1924)

Puccini is justly celebrated as one of the greatest opera composers, renowned particularly for *La Bohème*, *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly*. He was the fourth generation of a family of church musicians from Lucca in northern Italy, and held the position of town organist and maestro di capella at the cathedral of San Paolino. He studied at the nearby Institute Musicale and in 1876 walked twenty miles from Lucca to Pisa and back to hear a performance of Verdi's *Aida*. It was this experience that finally decided him to pursue a career in the theatre rather than the church, pursuing dramatic opera rather than liturgical music. For his graduation exercise for the Pacini Institute, Puccini composed a simple mass to be performed on the eve of the Feast of San Paolino, in July, 1880. Entitled simply *Messa a quattro voci*, the first performance was a great success, praised by critics and public alike, but Puccini filed it away and it was not heard again in his lifetime, possibly as he intended it to be a farewell to his association with sacred music.

In 1951 Father Dante del Fiorentino, an émigré Italian priest living in New York who had known Puccini when he was a young curate, was visiting Lucca to collect material for a biography of the composer. He came upon a copy of the mass and on his return home organised the first American performance of it in Chicago in 1952, seventy-two years after its premiere in Lucca. Since its publication in 1951 it has been universally known as the *Messa di Gloria* and has become a firmly established part of the choral repertoire. It comprises the usual mass sections: Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus and Benedictus, and Agnus Dei and is an uncomplicated work. Its style is direct and unashamedly operatic, and it is clearly influenced by Puccini's hero, Verdi. As a liturgical work written in an overtly operatic style its most obvious antecedents are Rossini's *Petite Messe Solonelle* (1863) and Verdi's *Requiem* (1874). It is a remarkably assured work for an eighteen-year-old, full of colour, vitality and musical surprises such as the many sudden key changes.

The work's operatic credentials are not immediately revealed. The Kyrie begins with a luminous string introduction leading to a lyrical 'Kyrie eleison'. The music becomes more forceful halfway through the 'Christe eleison' before returning to the peaceful opening mood. The Gloria takes up nearly half the entire mass, hence the title by which the work has become known. It could easily be performed as a complete work in its own right, and abounds in rhythmic energy, soaring melodies and arresting dramatic gestures. Here Puccini's operatic instincts are fully expressed. There are several sections, starting with a joyous opening theme that defines the movement. A dramatic tenor solo at 'Gratias agimus' is followed by a reprise of the 'Gloria in excelsis' theme, and then for 'Qui tollis' a truly Verdian melody is introduced by the chorus basses. 'Cum sancto spiritu', as custom decreed, is set to an exuberant fugue, the final section of which combines the fugue subject with the opening 'Gloria' theme, building to a compelling climax. Like the Gloria, the Credo is divided into several sections. It begins with strong, unison choral phrases answered by rising orchestral interpolations. A beautiful section for tenor solo and unaccompanied chorus ensues at 'et incarnatus est'. After an extended bass solo for 'Crucifixus' the music explodes into life for the energetic 'et resurrexit'. The solemn tones of 'et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum' usher in the concluding section of the Credo - a surprisingly light and dance-like 'et vitam venturi'. The Sanctus is short and simple. The stately opening is followed by a brisk 'Pleni sunt coeli' and 'Hosanna'. The Benedictus is given over to the baritone soloist, the chorus then returning with a brief 'Hosanna'. The Agnus Dei is also straightforward. A lilting melody for the tenor soloist is answered by the chorus with 'miserere nobis'. This pattern is repeated with the baritone soloist and finally with both soloists, until the Mass comes to an untroubled close with an innocent triplet phrase.

1. Habanera (Carmen), Georges Bizet (1838-1875)

Bizet was in many respects a tragic figure: A true prodigy, studying at the Paris Conservatoire at age 9; a pianist whom Liszt declared his own equal; friend of Gounod, Fauré, Saint-Saëns, Dubois, Massenet, and Offenbach, among others; enormously productive-- at least eight operas or dramatic works, overtures, a symphony, some 50 songs, a score of piano works, and countless transcriptions of other composers' orchestral works for piano; and dead at age 36, exactly three months after the premiere of his greatest opera—probably the best-known opera in the world, *Carmen*, set in a city and country he never visited (Seville, Spain).

Carmen was based on an 1845 novelette by Prosper Mérimée, and the libretto was the work of Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, the latter a cousin of Bizet's wife. Bizet based his *Habanera*—the name identifies a dance supposed to originate in Havana, Cuba— on what he thought to be a folk song; it actually was written by Iradier, a Spanish composer. In the opening scene, Bizet has the gypsy Carmen, on break from her job at the cigarette factory, sing it to taunt the soldier Don Jose, just arrived for his guard duty. Her sultry song comparing love to a beautiful bird is punctuated by the chorus—almost as a Greek chorus-- with the refrain —Prends garde a toi!! (—Young man, take care!!) While setting the stage for the story of the good soldier driven mad with desire, Carmen's torch song also sets an eternal standard for sexiness and abandon.

2. Non piu Andrai (Marriage of Figaro), Mozart

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3. Triumphal March (Aida), Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Set in the ancient Egypt of the pharaohs and with a masterly combination of grand set-pieces, including the spectacle of its swaggering *Triumphal March*, and intimate scenes, *Aida* tells the story of the Ethiopian slave girl who finds that her lover and her father are on the opposite sides of warring nations. A love rival to her princess employer, she chooses to be buried alive with her lover Radames, rather than endure life without him. Commissioned for the opening of the Suez Canal, Verdi's *Aida* has been a staple of the repertory ever since its 1871 Egyptian premiere and is probably the greatest music ever written to celebrate an artificial waterway.

4. Tenor Aria

Lensky's Aria (Eugene Onegin), Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

The action of the opera unfolds over many years. Tatyana, a young bookish woman, having fallen in love with the worldly Onegin, writes him a passionate letter, which would have been considered scandalous in Russian society at the time. In the following scene, the Chorus of Peasant girls sing while they gather berries in the garden. Tatyana and Onegin meet and he rejects her advances. Years later, with Tatyana now a sophisticated married woman, when they meet again, Onegin fails to recognise her at first, but eventually falls in love with her. This time it is his turn to have his advances rejected as she steadfastly refuses to betray her husband. This beautiful aria is taken from Act 2, where Lensky sings of his love for his fiancé, Olga, Tatyana's sister, as he waits for a reluctant duel with Onegin, his friend, having fallen out at Tatyana's name-day party.

5. Humming Chorus (Madame Butterfly), Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)

Madama Butterfly was written in 1903 while Puccini was recovering from injuries suffered in an auto accident; the libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa was based on a 1900 play by the American David Belasco, alleged to have been based on a real event. The opera was a failure at its 1904 premiere at La Scala in Milan, but was revised and caught public fancy within the year, becoming one of Puccini's most admired works.

The —**Humming Chorus** ends the second act of the opera; it serves as a lullaby for Suzuki, the servant of the geisha Cio-Cio-San (—*Butterfly*), and for *Butterfly*'s toddler, as the three wait through the night for the return of the American Lieutenant Pinkerton— *Butterfly*'s husband, whom she has not seen in three years, and father of her child. *Butterfly* does not sleep,

and the audience by this time knows that Pinkerton has brought an American wife, which will lead to Butterfly's suicide. Once again the music is the calm before the storm.

6. Anvil Chorus (Il Trovatore), Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Our first half closes with this famous, rousing chorus from *Il Trovatore* (The Troubadour), from Verdi's middle period, produced in 1853. The Anvil Chorus from *Il Trovatore*, is probably the best known part of the opera. The setting is a gypsy camp in the mountains of Biscay. The rhythm is that of hammer strokes on anvils. The men begin: "Look! The vast sky is casting off its somber robe of night, just as a widow puts by at last her dark veil of mourning. To work -- take up the hammer! What can make a gypsy merry like his gypsy sweetheart?"

7. Soprano Aria

Laughing Song (Die Fledermaus), Johann Strauss (1825–1899)

Having heard the famous overture at the start of this half of the concert, we now have this famous aria. Die Fledermaus is based on a French comedy featuring particularly Parisian goings-on at an intimate supper party, it was adapted for Strauss with a typically Viennese ball as its centrepiece. At the ball Gabriel von Eisenstein, posing as the 'Marquis Renard', has been flirting outrageously with the young ladies at the party. His wife's maid Adele, posing as an actress named Olga, is spotted by von Eisenstein who remarks on her likeness to some lady-in-waiting he knows. She mockingly inquires if a lady-in-waiting ever possessed her figure, profile and dress. This is the popular Laughing Song.

8. Chorus of Wedding Guests (Lucia di Lammermoor), Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848)

In 1835, when Lucia premiered in Naples, Donizetti was the rising star of Italian opera. The libretto is by Salvatore Cammarano based on Sir Walter Scott's novel, —The Bride of Lammermoor, with the story set in Scotland in the late 1600's. Lucia is the sister of Enrico Ashton, Lord of Lammermoor; she is secretly in love with a rival peer, Edgardo, master of nearby Ravenswood. Enrico learns of the romance and resolves to break it up by marrying his sister to wealthy Lord Bucklaw. The plot almost succeeds; Edgardo is banished, and Lucia signs the wedding contract. This chorus has the wedding guests celebrating in the hall of Lammermoor Castle; the bridegroom sings his pledge to be one of them, then goes upstairs to join his bride while the celebration continues. The guests sing the jubilant chorus —**Per te d'immenso giubilo** ("For you an immense joy") to celebrate the nuptials. This happy scene terminates when the priest Raimondo tells the horrified guests that Lucia has killed her husband and gone mad. The famous 'mad scene' follows, Lucia dies, and Edgardo, on learning this, kills himself to be with her in death.

9. Bridal Chorus (Lohengrin), Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

Weddings seem to always attract trouble in opera, and this chorus, ironically used frequently in modern wedding ceremonies, is no exception. The happy couple, Elsa and Lohengrin, are being escorted into their bridal chamber immediately following their nuptials which represents the most joyous period of their ill-fated marriage.

10. Votre Toast (Carmen) Georges Bizet (1838-1875)

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11. Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves (Nabucco), Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) This is arguably Verdi's most famous melody and was adapted by the Italians as a song of patriotism shortly after its premier at La Scala opera house in Milan. The words are a paraphrase of Psalm 137 when the Israelites lament the loss of their homeland as part of the story of the Jews living in Babylonian exile in 586 B.C.

16. Libiamo, (Brindisi) from La Traviata, by Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Our evening closes with this wonderful song, allowing our 2 soloists, the orchestra and the choir a final chance to sing and play together. Brindisi is a term for a toasting or drinking song. In this case, the toast is offered by young Alfredo to his hostess, Violetta, to whom he has just been introduced; privately, he thereafter confesses he has had a crush on her for over a year. The jolly mood of the party contrasts with what is to become a less-than-idyllic romance, as the audience soon begins to sense. The 1853 libretto by Francesco Piave is based on a story by Alexandre Dumas, and the locale is outside Paris in about 1840; but even in Verdi's time, liberties were often taken with the era.