

## Minehead Choral Society Spring Concert 2018

1. John Jacobson "In Flanders Fields" (poem by John McCrae) 3mins  
2. Elgar "Spirit of England" (poem by Laurence Binyon) 30mins

### INTERVAL

3. Karl Jenkins "Armed Man"
- |                               |                            |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. The Armed Man              | <i>Chorus</i>              |
| 2. Call to Prayers            | <i>solo</i>                |
| 3. Kyrie                      | <i>Sop. Solo + chorus</i>  |
| 4. Save me From Bloody Men    | <i>Tenor/Bass A</i>        |
| 5. Sanctus                    | <i>Chorus</i>              |
| 6. Hymn Before Action         | <i>Chorus</i>              |
| 7. Charge                     | <i>Chorus</i>              |
| 8. Angry Flames               | <i>SATB solos + Chorus</i> |
| 9. Torches                    | <i>Chorus</i>              |
| 10. Agnus Dei                 | <i>Chorus</i>              |
| 11. Now the Guns Have stopped | <i>Sop. Solo</i>           |
| 12. Benedictus                | <i>Chorus</i>              |
| 13. Better is Peace           | <i>SATB solos + Chorus</i> |

### **In Flanders Fields**, John Jacobson

A beautifully simple setting of this haunting poem that sets the scene for our evening of remembering World War 1, one hundred years after its end.

### **The Spirit Of England, op 80** – Edward Elgar (1857 – 1934)

A cantata for soprano, full choir and orchestra.

Dedicated to: "The memory of our Glorious Men, with a special thought for the Worcester's"

Laurence Binyon, the noted war poet, worked in the Department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum. The head of department, Sir Sidney Colvin, was a good friend of Elgar. When, late in 1914, Binyon published his collection of war poems, *The Winnowing Fan*, Colvin suggested to Elgar that he should compose a war requiem which captured the spirit of Binyon's poems. Elgar was deeply affected by the suffering caused by the First World War and readily accepted Colvin's idea, selecting three of Binyon's poems - *The Fourth of August*, *To Women* and *For the Fallen* - to set to music.

However, Elgar felt a lingering debt of gratitude to the German nation for championing his early works, most notably *The Dream of Gerontius*, and he found it hard to set some of the harsher words in *The Fourth of August*. This led to the second and third parts being completed and premiered in May 1916 when the first part was still some way from completion. Eventually Elgar found the resolve to continue, taking the work through to completion one year later. The first complete performance was in Birmingham on 4th October 1917, conducted by Appleby Matthews, a notable local musician who, three years later founded the orchestra that was to become the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.

Although *The Spirit of England* has never gained the popularity or status of the major choral works that preceded it, in musical terms, though considerably shorter, it is their equal. In addition to his normal practice of drawing on sketches jotted down some years earlier, Elgar also included

quotations and parodies of phrases from *The Dream of Gerontius*. Written at a time when the nation might have expected some rousing patriotic tunes in the mould of the *Pomp and Circumstance* marches, Elgar demonstrated remarkable restraint, capturing well the sadness and desolation of war without becoming maudlin. It is an underrated piece, a precursor of the introspective chamber works that soon followed.

### **Karl Jenkins *The Armed Man – A Mass for Peace***

To mark the millennium, Britain's Royal Armouries commissioned the composition of a mass which would reflect on war and peace in a multi-cultural, global society. The current Master of the Royal Armouries collected and edited the text for the composition, using lyrics from classic poets, biblical verses, and traditional mass, as well as from Muslim, Hindu, and Japanese sources. It was written while the horror of Kosovo unfolded and Karl Jenkins dedicated it to the victims of that tragedy. Poignantly the recording was released in the week of 9/11.

The mass begins with a marching army and the beat of military drums, the orchestra gradually building to the choir's entrance, singing the 15th century "The Armed Man" (*L'Homme Armé*), a song written between 1450 and 1463 at the court of Charles the bold of Burgundy. By the end of the 16th century, nearly 40 masses had been written using the song in some way. The song is a strong call to arms and establishes the darkness to follow.

After the scene is set, the style and pace changes and we are prepared for reflection by the traditional Muslim "Call To Prayers" (*Adhaan*).

The following "Kyrie" begins with a barely-audible orchestral introduction, the simple soprano solo, tonight sung by **xx**, is strengthened by the joining chorus, which stately requests divine blessings in the Christian tradition. The *Christe Eleison* section quotes Palestrina's setting of *L'Homme Armé*, before returning to the beautifully simple melody for the Kyrie.

This ecclesiastic contemplation is invaded by the dark sounds of "Save Me From The Bloody Men". This clever composition starts out sounding like a traditional Gregorian chant for male voices, perfectly in line with the religious songs preceding it. The nastiness, however, is in the final phrase where a sudden drumbeat and some ominous notes give a sense of doom to the titular phrase. The voices sound not so much afraid as they sound angry.

"Sanctus" is more upbeat, but retains the dignity of its context, managing to sound menacing and reflective; a sign of things to come. It is followed by the ominous "Hymn Before Action" which - using words by Rudyard Kipling - establishes the mindset needed for battle. The song both establishes a motivation for the fight and encourages the soldiers to sacrifice themselves for the greater good. The powerful imagery of the words combines well with the sweeping English melody, reminiscent of the style of musical theatre anthems or motion picture scores.

War is now inevitable. The beat picks up, literally, in "Charge!" which - using text from several sources - establishes the start of the battle with powerful vocals, trumpets, and drums. (All three of which are also mentioned in the song's lyrics.) The motivations and encouragements of the previous song are thematically repeated and near the end of the song we hear the abstract screams of the battle unfold. After the uncontrolled cacophony of destruction is the eerie silence of the

battlefield after battle, followed by the burial of the dead. ( Please note there will be a 30 second silence before the last post.)

At the centre of the work is an excerpt from a poem about the horrors of the atom bomb attack on Hiroshima. "Angry Flames" starts with the sound of a lone trumpet followed by the ringing of a bell, a slow melody, and then the quiet, sad solo vocals, sometimes supported by the chorus. The lyrics - translated from the Japanese and clearly reflecting the violence of the nuclear explosions of 1945 - powerfully describe the horrors left behind by battle as a city lies in flames.

The mournful mood is continued in the ninth song "Torches" which - using words from The Mahabharata - describes the sad fate of the victims of war. The melody, the instrumentation, and the singing in this song are all quite subdued as if fearful of disturbing the dead. Only the final word of this song, torches, is sung loud and angrily. This is a powerful composition in its imagery and execution, its relevance to modern life compelling considering it was written two and a half thousand years ago.

From the horrors of mass destruction the work turns to remember that each human life is sacred and unique. The "Agnus Dei" asks for divine peace, reminding us of Christ's ultimate sacrifice. This most beautiful of melodies combines with traditional Latin invocations of a mass, creating a stunning, powerful choral piece.

Using a lyric by the current Master of the Royal Armouries himself, "Now The Guns Have Stopped" is a haunting solo sung by **xx**; a carefully crafted song of mourning and loneliness sung by a weary battle survivor, struggling with the feelings of loss and guilt that so many survivors of the First World War felt when they came home but their friends did not.

The "Benedictus" heals those wounds in its slow and stately affirmation of faith. It starts out as a quiet instrumental; the choir follows, sounding as if singing from a great hall or church in the distance. Once the orchestra's horn section chimes in, the chorus becomes a powerful song of praise with a strong melody, leading us to the final, positive climax of the work.

The concluding track, "Better is Peace", begins where we started with Lancelot and Guinevere's declaration that peace is better than war. Jenkins uses the original Armed Man melody with Malory's desire for peace to show how the call for peace negates the call to arms by appropriating its melody. Using joyful instrumentation, cheerful choral vocals, and encouraging words by Tennyson, this song truly establishes a new beginning, with high hopes and good wishes. "Ring out the thousand wars of old, ring in the thousand years of peace." The mass ends with the affirmation from the Book of Revelations that change is possible; that sorrow, pain and death can be overcome.

After experiencing The Armed Man as a whole, the listener is left with a sense of awe. We have been taken through a broad range of emotions and Jenkins has not shunned the more horrific aspects of war and suffering - all the better to make the argument against it.

This song cycle is meant to be experienced as a whole: the composition and execution of these songs creates a wonderful overall experience, yet it is difficult to separate out a song and have it stand on its own. Each song is part of the larger story, each song makes sense as part of the overall composition, and by itself each song seems to be missing its context.

The powerful imagery of this song cycle cannot easily be separated from world events. Jenkins notes this as he dedicates the work to the victims of the Kosovo tragedy. This composition rings true for present events and the incorporation of both Christian and Muslim texts and melodies provide a powerful commentary on the disagreements between followers of these and other faiths.

### **1. The Fourth Of August** (Laurence Binyon)

Now in thy splendour go before us,  
Spirit of England, ardent eyed,  
Enkindle this dear earth that bore us,  
In the hour of peril purified

The cares we hugged drop out of vision,  
Our hears with deeper thoughts dilate.  
We step from days of sour division  
Into the grandeur of our fate.

For us the glorious dead have striven,  
They battled that we might be free.  
We to their living cause are given;  
We arm for men that are to be.

Among the nations nobliest chartered,  
England recalls her heritage,  
In her is that which is not bartered,  
Which force can neither quell nor cage.

For her immortal stars are burning;  
With her, the hope that's never done,  
The seed that's in the Spring's returning,  
The very flower that seeks the sun.

She fights the fraud that feeds desire on  
Lies, in lust to enslave or kill,  
The barren creed of blood and iron,  
Vampire of Europe's wasted will....

Endure, O Earth! and thou, awaken,  
Purged by this dreadful winnowing-fan,  
O wronged, untameable, unshaken  
Soul of divinely suffering man.

### **2. To Women** (Laurence Binyon)

Your hearts are lifted up, your hearts  
That have foreknown the utter price.  
Your hearts burn upward like a flame  
Of splendour and of sacrifice.

For you, you too, to battle go,  
Not with the marching drums and cheers  
But in the watch of solitude  
And through the boundless night of fears.

Swift, swifter than those hawks of war,  
Those threatening wings that pulse the air,  
Far as the vanward ranks are set,  
You are gone before them, you are there!

And not a shot comes blind with death,  
And not a stab of steel is pressed  
Home, but invisibly it tore  
And entered first a woman's breast.

Amid the thunder of the guns,  
The lightning's of the lance and sword,  
Your hope, your dread, your throbbing pride.  
Your infinite passion is outpoured.

From hearts that are as one high heart,  
Withholding naught from doom and bale  
Burningly offered up, - to bleed,  
To bear, to break, but not to fail!

### **3. For The Fallen** (Laurence Binyon)

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.

Solemn the drums thrill: Death august and royal  
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres.  
There is music in the midst of desolation  
And a glory that shines upon our tears.

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 fought, they were terrible, nought could tame them,  
Hunger, nor legions, nor shattering cannonade.  
They laughed, they sang their melodies of England,  
They fell open-eyed and unafraid.

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 laughing comrades again;  
They sit no more at familiar tables of home;  
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;  
They sleep beyond England's foam.

But where our desires are and our hopes profound,  
Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,  
To the innermost heart of their own land they are known  
As the stars are known to the Night;

As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,  
Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain,  
As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,  
To the end, to the end, they remain.