

Minehead Choral Society -Spring Concert 30th March 2019

Messiah and Choral Favourites

Introduction:

Good evening! I am delighted to be back tonight directing the choral society. Having recovered from my injuries last year, I am indebted to the wonderful committee for picking up the pieces and especially to Gordon Niccolls for starting off our rehearsals this year.

Our concert tonight is a fun grouping of favourite choral classics, together with the Easter appropriate sections of the Messiah. I am very pleased to welcome back the Taunton Sinfonietta, led by Mary Eade, and our wonderful soloists, Krystal McMillan (Soprano) Harriet Kirk (Mezzo-Soprano) Lionel Pinheiro (Tenor) and Ryan Ross (Bass). It is great to be working with such professionals and friends. I hope you enjoy our varied and mixed programme!

Programme:

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| 1. | Zadok the Priest | Handel |
| 2. | How lovely are thy dwellings | Brahms |
| 3. | Sanctus (from the German Mass) | Schubert |
| 4. | Orchestra: Mozart Divertimento in D major K136 | |
| 5. | Ave Verum | Mozart |
| 6. | God So Loved the World | Stainer |
| 7. | Quartet: "O Come every one that thirsteth" | Mendelssohn Elijah |
| 8. | Panis Angelicus | Franck |
| 9. | Hear My Prayer (O for the wings) | Mendelssohn |

INTERVAL

Handel "Messiah"

Part 2

22. Chorus – "Behold the Lamb of God"

23. Alto Air – "He was despised and rejected of men"

24. Chorus – "Surely He hath borne our griefs"

25. Chorus – "And with his stripes we are healed"

26. Chorus – "And we like sheep have gone astray"

27. Tenor Recitative – "All they that see him laugh Him to scorn"

28. Chorus – "He trusted in God that He would deliver Him"

38. Soprano Air – "How beautiful are the feet"

40. Bass Air – "Why do the nations so furiously rage together?"

42. Tenor Recitative – "He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn"

43. Tenor Air – "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron"

44. Chorus – "Hallelujah"

Part 3

45. Soprano Air – "I know that my redeemer Liveth"

46. Chorus – "Since by Man came death"

47. Bass Recitative – "Behold I tell you a mystery"

48. Bass Air – "The trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised"

49. Alto Recitative – "Then shall be bought to pass"

50. Alto / Tenor Duet – "O Death, where is thy sting?"

53. Chorus – "Worthy is the lamb that was slain – Amen"

Programme Notes

1. Zadok the Priest – George Frederic Handel (1685 – 1759)

This is the most famous of all the coronation anthems, composed for the anointing of George II in 1727 and sung at every coronation service since then. It is richly scored for voices and instruments with its famous opening bars building the suspense until the release of the glorious chorus entry, one of the most dramatic outbursts in all choral music. Handel retains the sense of excitement right through to the final *Alleluia, Amen*.

2. How lovely are thy dwellings Johannes Brahms (1833-97)

Brahms wrote his German Requiem in the late 1860s, being concerned not so much with peace for the souls of the departed as with comfort for the bereaved. He selected his own texts from the scriptures, underlining his belief that when the trumpets sound for us on the other side, they are not there to summon us to the Day of Judgement, but rather to underline the hope of reunion and resurrection after death. With that in mind, he chose words for this central movement which express joy in the certainty of our eventually reaching the “blest courts of the Lord”.

3. Sanctus (from the German Mass) Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Composed in 1827, the “Deutsche Messe” is based on a sequence of poems written in German by Johann Philipp Neumann who commissioned the work. Designed to appeal to the widest possible congregation, this simple mass was scored by Schubert in a block-chordal, homophonic style suitable for congregational singing. The stunningly simple and beautiful “Zum Sanctus Sehr Langsam” is the fifth of nine movements and provides a reflective and quiet end to our first block of choral singing, leading us into the orchestral piece performed by the Taunton Sinfonietta.

4. Divertimento in D major K 136 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91)

This orchestral piece, composed in 1772 when Mozart was just sixteen years old would have been written to provide instant gratification. Much of the music of the period (including divertimenti, serenades, nocturnes etc), was performed just once, at a public ceremony or high society event. Mozart had already spent two years away from his home town of Salzburg, living in London and Paris and travelling throughout Austria, Germany, France, the Netherlands and Italy. In addition to giving concerts at court, he met many of the famous musicians of the time and had opportunities to study and hear their music. His early compositions are often reflective of where his travels had most recently taken him, in this case he had just returned from Italy and the influence is strong in this work. The three movement structure follows the pattern of the Italian Sinfonia and the writing nods in the direction of the widely respected Joseph Haydn and JC Bach, whom Mozart regarded as both friend and mentor. The sparkling violin virtuosity of the opening *Allegro* is deftly drawn. The slow movement *Andante* unfolds gently with the melodic interest more equally shared between the instruments. The finale *Presto* has a playful spirit, with the central development showing off Mozart’s contrapuntal skill.

5. Ave Verum Corpus Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91)

This concise choral gem was composed right at the end of Mozart’s short life, but unlike the famously unfinished *Requiem*, it is absolutely complete and says everything it needs to say in the shortest possible span. Its apparent simplicity belies the perfection of its shape and substance, with astonishingly subtlety of modulation, a glorious arch-like shape and vocal lines which lie in the most comfortable part of all four voices.

6. God So Loved the World John Stainer (1840 – 1901)

When Sir John Stainer composed “*The Crucifixion*” in the late 1880s, he followed Bach’s example by incorporating into his “Meditation on the Sacred Passion of the Holy Redeemer” congregational hymns, with the intention – as Bach’s had been with his many chorales in the *St Matthew* and *St John Passions* – that all the people should be involved in the story. But he also wrote some fine set pieces for the choir to sing, of which “*God So Loved the World*” is the most profoundly moving – an effect achieved by the divine simplicity of its word-setting.

7. Quartet: “O Come every one that thirsteth” from *Elijah* Felix Mendelssohn (1809-47)

One of the great oratorios, the dramatic work “*Elijah*” is full of contrast, colour and variety. Mendelssohn, a child prodigy, died the year after it was first performed at the age of only 38. Telling the story of the covenant between God and the Israelites, King Ahab marries Jezebel, takes on her religion and hence breaks this covenant, leading the little known prophet, Elijah to curse the Israelite unless they return to Jehovah. Failing in his attempt, Elijah asks God to end his life. An angel tells him to have faith that the true God will win out and this leads to the glorious climax of the oratorio when Elijah ascends to heaven in a fiery chariot. The Quartet being sung tonight is the penultimate number before the final chorus of the whole work. To provide textural contrast to the programme, this beautifully simple arrangement will be accompanied on the piano by Sue Donovan.

8. Panis Angelicus César Franck (1822-90)

The mystery of God made man, who becomes the bread of life in the sacrament is the subject of this communion motet and the setting by Franck is one of his best-known works. It was originally written as a tenor solo and male chorus and was later incorporated into his *Mass for Three Voices*. It retains its simplicity in this arrangement by Kenneth Downing.

9. Hear My Prayer (O for the wings of a Dove) Felix Mendelssohn (1809-47)

We conclude our first half with this delightfully famous setting of text from Psalm 55, Mendelssohn’s “O for the Wings of a Dove”. We welcome the lovely Krystal McMillan as our soprano soloist. Composed in 1844, the anthem was made particularly famous through the 1927 recording by treble Ernest Lough, a chorister in the Temple Church Choir. It contains beauty and dram as the words dictate with anguished singing in the face of the godless enemy and the most lyrical sense of longing in the final section.

INTERVAL

“Messiah” - George Frederic Handel (1685-1759)

Handel’s sacred oratorio Messiah is without question one of the most popular works in the choral/orchestral repertoire today. Tonight we perform the greater parts of sections 2 and 3, appropriate for the Easter celebrations.

The text for Messiah was selected and compiled from the Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible by Charles Jennens, an aristocrat and musician/poet of modest talent and exceptional ego. With Messiah, Jennens seems to have outdone himself in compiling a libretto with profound thematic coherence and an acute sensitivity to the inherent musical structure. With the finished libretto in his possession, Handel began setting it to music on August 22, 1741, and completed it 24 days later. He was certainly working at white-hot speed, but this didn’t necessarily indicate he was in the throes of devotional fervour, as legend has often stated. Handel composed many of his works in haste, and immediately after completing Messiah he wrote his next oratorio, Samson, in a similarly brief time-span.

Although the work was occasionally performed during Advent in Dublin, the oratorio was usually regarded in England as an entertainment for the penitential season of Lent, when performances of opera were banned. Messiah’s extended musical focus on Christ’s redeeming sacrifice also makes it particularly suitable for Passion Week and Holy Week, the periods when it was usually performed during Handel’s lifetime. It became a Christmas tradition later in the 18th century.

Following the pattern of Italian baroque opera, Messiah is divided into three parts. In the first, the way is paved for the Redeemer’s coming, drawing heavily from messianic texts in the Book of Isaiah. After His Advent is announced, there follow descriptions of the events of the nativity.

We are tonight starting at Part two:

Part Two describes the Passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It concludes with the familiar *Hallelujah Chorus*. It was at this point in the oratorio, during one of the early London performances, that King George II spontaneously rose to his feet in a spirit of exaltation. Audiences have traditionally repeated this practice ever since.

In Part Three, the spiritual messages represented by Christ’s teachings are set forth for the instruction and benefit of all. It opens with the moving soprano aria *I Know That My Redeemer Liveth*, and concludes with a final chorus of Amen.

Part Two

22. Chorus

Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. (*John 1:29*)

23. Alto Air

He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. (*Isaiah 53:3*)

24. Chorus

Surely, He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him.

25. Chorus

And with His stripes we are healed.

26. Chorus

All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way. (*Isaiah 53:4-6*)

27. Tenor recitative

All they that see Him laugh Him to scorn; they shoot out their lips, and shake their heads, saying:

28. Chorus

He trusted in God that He would deliver Him: let Him deliver Him, if He delight in Him! (*Psalms 22:8-9*)

38. Soprano Air

How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things (*Romans 10:15*)

40. Bass Air

Why do the Nations so furiously rage together: why do the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed. (*Psalms 2:1-2*)

42. Tenor recitative

He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn, the Lord shall have them in derision. (*Psalms 2:4*)

43. Tenor Air

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron. Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. (*Psalm 2:9*)

44. Chorus

Hallelujah! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth! (*Revelation 19:6*) The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever. (*Revelation 11:15*) King of kings and Lord of lords. (*Revelation 19:16*)

Part Three

45. Soprano Air

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. (*Job 19:25-26*) For now is Christ risen from the dead: the first fruits of them that sleep.

46. Chorus

Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. (*1 Corinthians 15:20-22*)

47. Bass recitative

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, and we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,
at the last trumpet.

48. Bass Air

The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised, incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

49. Alto recitative

Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory (*1 Corinthians 15:54*)

50. Alto / Tenor Duet

O death, where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law. (*1 Corinthians 15:55*)

53. Chorus

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom and strength, and honour, and glory and blessing. Blessing an honour, glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne and unto Lamb for ever and ever. Amen. (*Revelation 5:12-13*)