

Minehead Choral Society – Spring 2022: Saturday, 2nd April 7.30pm Avenue Methodist

Our programme tonight is an indulgence of choruses, solos and some rousing hymns for you to join in. The programme combines elements of Easter, our celebrations for the Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty The Queen and also gives us a chance to reflect on the conflict in the world, particular in Ukraine, where we hope peace will soon be found. I am delighted to welcome back tonight our soprano soloist, Stephanie Berner and am very pleased to welcome Angela Morecroft as our accompanist. I hope you have a memorable evening!

Marcus Capel, March 2022

Programme :

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| 1. God So Loved the World | Stainer |
| 2. Sanctus (from the German Mass) | Schubert |
| 3. How lovely are thy dwellings | Brahms |
| 4. <i>Soprano Solo</i> : Deh Vieni | Mozart |
| 5. Cantique de Jean Racine | Fauré |
| ALL: Guide Me O Thou Great Redeemer | Williams / Hughes |
| 6. Ave Verum | Mozart |
| 7. Locus Iste | Bruckner |
| 8. <i>Soprano Solo</i> : Mädchenlied | Brahms |
| 9. Gloria | Vivaldi |

INTERVAL

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| 10. Panis Angelicus | Franck |
| 11. Hear My Prayer (O for the wings) | Mendelssohn |
| ALL : Jerusalem | Blake/Parry |
| 12. Lacrymosa (Requiem) | Mozart |
| 13. Laudate Dominum (Solemn Vespers) | Mozart |
| ALL: I Vow to Thee My Country | Price/Holst |
| 14. The Lord Bless You and Keep You | Rutter |

Programme Notes:

1. 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's Passions – that all the people should be involved with 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.

2. Sanctus (from the German Mass) – Franz Schubert (1797 – 1828)

Composed in 1827, the *Deutsche Messe* is based on a sequence of poems written by Johann Philipp Neuman 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 complement to our opening number and the larger Brahms work that follows.

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

Brahms wrote his German Requiem in the late 1860s, being concerned not so much with the 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”.

4. Deh Vieni, - Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91)

Deh Vieni, non tardar (“O Come, do not delay) is one of the great arias from The Marriage of Figaro. Often described as the perfect comic opera, this work combines engaging entertainment with exquisite musical construction. It was such a success that, after the third performance, encores had to be limited to keep the opera from lasting all night. The action takes place all in one day, the marriage day of Figaro and Susanna, servants to Count and Countess Almaviva. The main strand of the plot concerns the Count’s flirtations with Susanna in connection with his supposed “*droit du seigneur*” and her clever foiling of his advances. The eventual humiliation of this member of the aristocracy by his “inferiors” greatly appealed to the middle-class audience. “Deh Vieni” is a crucial situation where Susanna and the Countess disguise themselves as each other to entrap the Count. Figaro is hiding in the bushes and Susanna sings seductively, supposedly for the Count but knowing Figaro is listening.

5. Cantique de Jean Racine – Gabriel Fauré(1845 – 1924)

The text, "Verbe égal au Très-Haut" ("Word, one with the Highest"), is a French paraphrase by Jean Racine of a Latin hymn from the breviary for matins, *Consors paterni luminis*. The nineteen-year-old composer set the text in 1864–65 for a composition competition at the École Niedermeyer de Paris, and it won him the first prize. The work was first performed the following year on 4 August 1866 in a version with accompaniment of strings and organ. This beautiful simple melody allows all the parts of the choir to enjoy themselves.

ALL: Guide Me O Thou Great Redeemer Williams / Hughes

This rousing hymn reflects the years of self-sacrifice and evangelism of its author, William Williams (1717-91), both a spiritual and physical pilgrim. Set to the glorious tune “Cwm Rhondda”, written by John Hughes (1873-1932) this is your chance to belt out a great tune!

**Guide me, O thou great redeemer,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty,
Hold me with thy powerful hand;
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven
Feed me now and evermore, Feed me now and evermore**

**Open now the crystal fountain
Whence the healing stream doth flow;
Let the fire and cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through:
Strong deliverer, strong deliverer;
Be thou still my strength and shield, Be thou still my strength and shield.**

**When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death, and hell's destruction
Land me safe on Canaan's side:
Songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee; I will ever give to thee.**

6. Ave Verum- 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 astonishing subtlety of modulation, a glorious arch-like shape and vocal lines which lie in the most comfortable part of all four voices.

7. Locus Iste – Anton Bruckner (1824-96)

Locus Iste (“*This place*”) is a sacred motet composed by Bruckner in 1869. The text is the Latin gradual for the annual celebration of a church's dedication. The incipit “Locus iste a Deo factus est” translates to “This place was made by God”. Bruckner set it for four unaccompanied voices, intended for the dedication of the Votivkapelle (votive chapel) at the New Cathedral in Linz, Austria, where Bruckner had been the cathedral organist. It was the first motet that Bruckner composed in Vienna.

8. Mädchenlied– Johannes Brahms (1833-97)

This charming song is number 5 in Brahms' “Fünf Lieder” (1886). Famous for his great symphonies, requiem and numerous piano compositions, Brahms was viewed by many contemporaries as highly academic, but the diligent, highly constructed nature of his works was a starting point and inspiration for many composers, as diverse as Schoenberg and Elgar. Brahms was also deeply romantic and this can be seen in this simple song “A Young Girl's Song: at night in the spinning-room, the girls are singing, the village lads are laughing, how swiftly the wheels go round.”

9. Gloria - Antonio Vivaldi (1678 – 1741)

Vivaldi composed this Gloria in Venice in 1715, for the choir of the Ospedale della Pietà, an orphanage for girls. Vivaldi, a priest, music teacher and virtuoso violinist, composed many sacred works for the Ospedale, where he spent most of his career, as well as hundreds of instrumental concertos to be played by the girls' orchestra. This piece presents the traditional Gloria from the Latin Mass in twelve, varied cantata-like sections.

The wonderfully sunny nature of the *Gloria*, with its distinctive melodies and rhythms, is characteristic of all of Vivaldi's music, giving it an immediate and universal appeal. The opening movement is a joyous chorus, with trumpet and oboe obbligato. The extensive orchestral introduction establishes two simple motives, one of octave leaps, the other a quicker, quaver - semiquaver figure, that function as the ritornello. The choir enters in chorale-like fashion, syllabically declaiming the text in regular rhythms, contrasting with the orchestral ritornello, which contains most of the melodic interest of the movement.

INTERVAL

10. Panis Angelicus – César Franck (1822-90)

The mystery of God made man, who became the bread of life in the sacrament is the subject of this communion motet and the setting by Franck of one of his best-known works. It was originally written for 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.

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

This is a delightfully famous setting of the text from Psalm 55, composed in 1844 and made particularly famous through the 1927 recording by treble Ernest Lough, a chorister in the Temple Church Choir. It contains beauty and drama as the words

dictate with anguished singing in the face of a godless enemy and the most lyrical sense of longing in the final section.

ALL : Jerusalem – William Blake / Hubert Parry (1848-1918)

Jerusalem tells of the legend that Jesus might have travelled, with Joseph of Arimathea, to Glastonbury, England. The poem by William Blake was included as a patriotic poem in a 1916 collection for a country at war and was set to music by Sir Charles Hubert Hastings Parry, who also composed 5 symphonies and a set of Symphonic Variations. He is particularly well known for this great choral song together with the coronation anthem *I was Glad* and the hymn tune *Repton*, which sets the words “Dear Lord and Father of Mankind”.

Jerusalem

**And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?**

**And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark Satanic mills?**

**Bring me my bow of burning gold:
Bring me my arrows of desire:
Bring me my spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my chariot of fire.**

**I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.**

12. Lacrymosa (Requiem) - Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91)

The dramatic and glorious *Requiem* by Mozart reflects the melodramatic circumstances of its composition. Just a few weeks before his own death in 1791 at the age of only thirty-five, Mozart was approached by a gentleman acting on behalf of an anonymous patron who wished to commission from him a Requiem Mass. This patron we now know to be Count Franz von Walsegg-Stuppach, whose wife had died in February that year. The Count, who was a keen and able amateur musician, wished to be regarded as a major composer and saw in this commemorative commission an opportunity to further his own ends by passing off the Requiem as his own. He therefore conducted all business transactions with Mozart in secrecy so as to preserve his own anonymity; hence the subterfuge of sending a business agent to act on his behalf. On several occasions this gentleman arrived unannounced at the composer's house. To the dying Mozart, well known for his superstitious nature and quite possibly sensing his own impending demise, these mysterious visitations had all the hallmarks of the supernatural

By the time he started work on the Requiem Mozart was already terminally ill, and parts of the composition were actually written whilst on his death-bed. In the event, he died before he could complete it, to the great consternation of his widow, Constanze.

Payment for the work had already been received, and she feared that if it was handed over incomplete the commissioning patron would refuse to accept it and expect his money to be returned. She therefore approached Franz Süssmayr, an able pupil of Mozart who had been with him a good deal during the final year of his life and had several times played through the completed parts and discussed the instrumentation with Mozart.

Of the work's twelve movements only the opening *Kyrie* had Mozart managed to complete in its entirety. For most of the others he had written the vocal parts and a figured bass line (a kind of harmonic shorthand), leaving just the orchestration, for which he had clearly indicated his intentions. For reasons unknown, Mozart postponed writing the seventh movement, the *Lacrymosa*, until after writing movements eight and nine, but managed only the first eight bars before death at last overtook him, leaving Süssmayr to complete this short, intense and dramatic work.

13. Laudate Dominum (Solemn Vespers) - Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91)
Vespere solennes de Confessore (K.339) was Mozart's final composition for Salzburg Cathedral in 1780 before departing his hometown in search of greater artistic opportunities in Vienna. One of two settings made of the Vesper service, K.339 was probably intended for the celebration of St Rupert (the "confessor" of the title and patron saint of Salzburg). The *Laudate Dominum* is one of Mozart's masterpieces, his love of the soprano voice is amply displayed in long, luxurious lines over a simple accompaniment.

ALL: I Vow to Thee My Country – Sir Cecil Spring Rice / Gustav Holst (1864-1934)

This great patriotic hymn was created in 1921 when music by Gustav Holst had a poem by Sir Cecil Spring Rice set to it. The music originated as a wordless melody, which Holst later named "Thaxted", taken from the "Jupiter" movement of Holst's 1917 suite *The Planets*. Whilst entirely apt for the celebrations of this Jubilee year, we also reflect on the message of peace that this deeply touching hymn brings.

I Vow to Thee my Country

**I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above
entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love;
the love that asks no question, the love that stands the test,
that lays upon the altar the dearest and the best;
the love that never falters, the love that pays the price,
the love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.**

**And there's another country, I've heard of long ago
most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know;
we may not count her armies, we may not see her King;
her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering;
and soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase,
and her ways are ways of gentleness, and all her paths are peace**

14. The Lord Bless You and Keep You – John Rutter

This short and simple work was composed by Rutter in 1981 for the memorial service of Edward T. Chapman, the director of music at Highgate School, London, with whom he had studied. It is a setting of the Priestly Blessing, also known as the Aaronic blessing, from the Book of Numbers in the Bible (Numbers 6:24-26). The music is restrained and simple, although being in G-flat major, there are plenty of black notes for the accompanist to work their way around! The first line of the text is

sung by the sopranos alone, repeated by all voices in unions and then expanding into harmony. The two-part homophony, first soprano and alto and then tenor and bass leads into the repeated “And give you peace”. The polyphonic “Amen” grows to a climax in range and intensity, gradually softening before reaching the final long chord.

An emotive and reflective conclusion to our varied programme.

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