

HEXHAM ORPHEUS CHOIR CONCERT



Saturday December 5th, 1998
7.30 pm

ST. MARY'S CHURCH
HEXHAM

PROGRAMME - 50 PENCE



Hexham Orpheus Choir

Conductor: Glenn Davis

Pianist: Camille Lazaro

Soprano: Mary Miller

This concert is dedicated to Dave Cave
who conducted the Choir for many years until 1994
and who died of cancer on March 26th 1998.
A collection plate will be available at the rear of the church
for those who wish to make a donation to the
Macmillan Fund for Cancer Relief.

The Hexham Orpheus Choir always welcomes new members.

We rehearse on Wednesday nights in
St Joseph's Middle School, Hexham.

If you are interested, please ring (01434) 602763.

There is no audition.

We also offer an associate membership for non-singers
who wish to support the choir and attend our social events.

*The Hexham Orpheus Choir is affiliated to the National Federation
of Music Societies with funds provided by Northern Arts.*

Orchard House

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Prog

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) – Three Choral Hymns (Selection from)

Easter Hymn

Christmas Hymn

The *Three Choral Hymns* were written in 1930 for the silver jubilee of the Leith Hill Musical Festival, where Vaughan Williams conducted the first performance. The text is by Bishop Myles Coverdale, who was one of the earliest translators of the Bible. The hymns were well suited to the occasion, being both robust and intimate. The melodies are original ones by Vaughan Williams; he did not choose to use the Lutheran originals. They are square and simple; each is taken up by all voices in turn, and ornamented with elaborate refrains – in the Easter Hymn, this refrain takes the form of an Alleluya, which rings out like pealing bells; for Christmas, a gently rocking Kyrieleyson, and a plainsong-like Alleluya again for Whitsunday.

Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868) – Laudamus Te (from Messa di Gloria)

The *Messa di Gloria* was first performed in Naples in 1820. It is a remarkable work, drawing on Rossini's operatic style and techniques, but also on the characteristics of his sacred music which were generally absent from his operas, such as the extensive use of obbligato instruments in solo arias, and the employment of more contrapuntal techniques that was usual in operatic writing. It was long believed that Rossini pieced together the *Messa di Gloria* from fragments of his earlier operatic work, but in fact it was an entirely new and excellent work, which deserves to be performed as regularly as his other great sacred works of Rossini's post-operatic career. The sumptuous soprano solo, *Laudamus Te* has been described as a delightful act of worship.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) – Hear My Prayer

Although Mendelssohn held no official church appointments during his short but busy musical career, he contributed generously to the repertory of sacred music. Apart from his two great oratorios *Elijah* and *St Paul*, he wrote a large number of smaller pieces, most of which are woefully neglected today.

One that has won a good measure of popularity, however, is *Hear My Prayer*. Although it is heard less often than it used to be, and has undoubtedly suffered from weak and characterless performances in the past, it is a work of surprising power. Mendelssohn composed the piece, which he called a hymn, in January 1844 for Bartholomew's concerts staged in Crosby Hall, London, where it received its first performance in English in 1845. Mendelssohn orchestrated it in 1847.

Hear My Prayer uses a text whose sentiments echo what we find in the psalms, particularly Psalm 55, a song of supplication in the face of extreme adversity. It falls into three main sections. In the first, the sweet quality of the opening soprano solo soon gives way to a note of anguish and urgency. The chorus breaks in upon this mood, and in the second section the soloist leads the chorus in a call-and-response passage that effectively portrays





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a soul embattled and surrounded by its enemies. The final section is the famous setting “O for the wings of a dove”, often performed as a piece on its own, but really at its best here, where its soaring lyricism forms an uplifting ending to a splendid piece.

(Programme note supplied by NFMS)



INTERVAL



Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) – Gloria

Gloria

Laudamus Te

Domine Deus

Domine fili unigenite

Domine Deus, Agnus Dei

Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris

Although he frequently declared that he was “first and foremost a composer of religious music”, it was not until 1936 that Poulenc wrote his first sacred composition – the *Litanies à la Vierge Noire de Rocamadour*. His religious inspiration never left him from then onwards; there followed a Mass and a series of motets, but it was not until 1950 that he wrote his first large-scale choral work – the *Stabat Mater*.

Ten years later the composer employed the same forces – soprano solo with chorus and large orchestra – for the *Gloria*, a work commissioned by the Koussevitsky Foundation of the Library of Congress. The familiar liturgical works, taken from the greater doxology of the Mass, are given a setting that abounds in joy, yet is always sincere and humble. Critics used to label the work as sacrilegious; Poulenc answered them by saying “While writing it I had in mind those Crozzoli Frescoes with angles sticking out their tongues; and also some solemn-looking Benedictine monks that I saw playing football one day.” Here is the secret of Poulenc – he found it difficult to be mournful, even in the most severe sacred text. He would certainly have agreed with Martin Luther’s objection to the Devil having all the good tunes! His contemporary Claude Rostland said of him: “There is in him something of the monk and the street urchin. These are works of a profoundly religious man, in which he himself offers the prayers of a believer.” Certainly this loveable work has justly become popular with singers and audiences alike, and must surely be among the finest examples of religious music of our time.

(Programme note edited from one supplied by NFMS)

