

The Hexham Orpheus Choir
Conductor Glenn Davis

An English Christmas



**Saturday 2nd December 2006
Programme 50p**



The Hexham Orpheus Choir

Conductor Glenn Davis

Assistant Conductor and rehearsal accompanist
Margaret Huntington



With

Philip Cull – Oboe

Margaret Huntington – Piano
and an invited orchestra led by
Julia Boulton

The Hexham Orpheus Choir would like to thank
Cogito Books

5, St Mary's Chare, Hexham Tel 01434 602555
for their continued support as our Principal Sponsor in 2007

Founded in 1955 the choir performs two major concerts each season, plus additional smaller works during the summer months, weddings and fund raising events. Over the years, the choir has appeared at various venues within the region. Many of the choir members also belong to other choirs in the area, with some members also performing as soloists in their own right.

Our conductor, Glenn Davis also leads the Priory Singers, based in Tynemouth, and from time to time the two choirs come together to perform larger choral works. Hexham Orpheus Choir operates a no-audition policy which has always provided a platform for people of various musical backgrounds to come together and perform a wide variety of choral music, from the Renaissance to the present day. The choir also has a very active social calendar and new members are always made very welcome. Should you be interested in joining the choir or would like further information please visit our website or email us at info@hexham-orpheus-choir.org.uk or telephone 07751 346487

Our next performance

**Saturday 12th May
HEXHAM ABBEY**

Howard Goodall

Missa Aedis Christi

Ralph Vaughan Williams

5 Mystical Songs

Gabriel Faure

Requiem

We would like to express our thanks to St Aidan's United Reformed Church
in allowing us to use the Church for tonight's performance.



The Hexham Orpheus choir gratefully acknowledge the financial
support it has received for this concert by
The National Federation of Music



PROGRAMME

1. **All sing:** In The Bleak Midwinter Gustav Holst
2. Come All You Worthy Gentlemen trad. English, arr. Willcocks
What Sweeter Music John Rutter
3. Christmas Cantata Geoffrey Bush
Soloists: Pip Emmer (Soprano), Val Hooker (Contralto)
- (a) Prelude
- (b) Theme and Variations: The Seven Joys of Mary
- (c) Chorale: When Jesus Christ Was Four Years Old
- (d) Lullaby: Little Jesus, Sweetly Sleep
- (e) Scherzo: Make We Merry, Both More and Less
- (f) Carol: This Endris Night
- (g) Intermezzo: I Sing of a Maiden
- (h) Lament: By By Lullay, Thou Little Tiny Child
- (i) Finale: I Saw Three Ships, leading to Epilogue

Interval : Mulled Wine and Mince Pies

4. **All sing:** A Child This Day Is Born trad. English, arr. Willcocks
5. There Is No Rose (from *The Ceremony Of Carols*) Benjamin Britten
O Little Town Of Bethlehem Walford Davies
6. Concerto for Oboe and Strings Ralph Vaughan Williams
(First movement: Rondo pastorale)
7. What Sweeter Music Richard Rodney Bennett
I Sing Of A Maiden Lennox Berkeley
8. Strings: Two Movements from A Simple Symphony Benjamin Britten
(a) Playful Pizzicato
(b) Sentimental Sarabande
9. White Christmas Irving Berlin, arr. Thomson and Davis
10. **All sing:** I Saw Three Ships John Rutter

The Orchestra

Violins

Julia Boulton (**leader**)
Jane Cuggy
Rachel Davies
Gordon Dyke
Kathryn Wakefield
Michael Walton
Helen West

Violas

Eileen Evans
Anne Greaves

Cellos

Nigel Chandler
Peter Richardson

Double Bass

Gordon Callander

Oboe

Philip Cull

PROGRAMME NOTES

Geoffrey Bush lived from 1920 until 1998. His *Christmas Cantata* was written in 1947 and first performed in Oxford. Using a string orchestra with selective contributions from a solo oboe, Bush sets a series of Christmas texts, either his own arrangements of traditional tunes as in the even numbered items and the *I Saw Three Ships* section of 9, or his own freely composed versions, as in the Prelude and Epilogue and numbers 3, 5, and 7. The piece opens with an extended orchestral introduction leading to what could almost be a lament from the Sopranos (*Lullay Jesu*). The men then intone the Collect for Christmas Day. The theme for number two is one of the traditional tunes for *The Seven Joys of Mary*. The Variations lie in the different orchestral treatment for each verse, with particularly discordant harmonies for the reference to Christ's Passion. After a hymn-like setting of Hilaire Belloc's poem, *The Birds*, and a simple realisation of the Czech carol, *Little Jesus*, the choir then have a lively unaccompanied challenge in the central Scherzo (*Make we merry, both more and less*), notable for the constant key changes the choir have to cope with. Bush then cleverly relaxes the excitement with a gentle orchestral introduction to *This Endris Night*, with its flowing melodic line. For me, the highlight of the Cantata is the solo Soprano setting of *I Sing of a Maiden*: a gently undulating string accompaniment with expressive answering figures between the Oboe and Cellos. After a suitably bare version of the *Coventry Carol*, all seems jolly enough when the choir swings into the familiar tune to *I Saw Three Ships*, until the return of the very opening music. This (to me) makes the whole piece just a little more than a mere medley of Christmas Carols. The plaintive ending (prefigured in parts of *Little Jesus*) also seems to remind us that Christ was not born into a cheery "Christmas card" world.

Vaughan Williams wrote his *Oboe Concerto* in 1944. The very mention of VW, the Oboe, and any movement headed "Pastoral" immediately leads us to expect the composer of *The Lark Ascending*, but its mood is more complex than just a rural idyll. It was written for the world-famous virtuoso, Leon Goossens, and indeed makes great demands on its soloist, who plays without a break through the whole concerto. The opening theme is the one that recurs throughout the first movement and explains the "Rondo" of the title. After a series of solo cadenzas the movement ends on a subdued note.

Britten's *Simple Symphony* is an early work from the 1930s (he was born in 1913), but based on even earlier music from the composer's boyhood. The well-known *Playful Pizzicato* comes from a *Scherzo for Piano* written when he was eleven, while the longer *Sentimental Sarabande* is based on two piano compositions from the ages of ten and twelve.

THE HEXHAM ORPHEUS CHOIR

Sopranos

Sarah Barker
Carol Bates
Evelyn Blenkinsop
Dorothy Booker
Ruth Brownlee
Elspeth Christie
Janet Davies
Jill Dexter
Pip Emler
Anne Firth
Nancy Gash

Rosemarie Herdman
Frances Hughes
Margaret Huntington
Melody Price
Carolyn Ramsey
Ann Reed
Elaine Rigg
Nuala Rose
Brenda Waton

Altos

Margaret Bainbridge
Marie Bridges
Sylvia Chainey
Pat Crompton
Sheila Dance
Elizabeth Dixon
Davina Dwyer
Heather Grace
Val Hooker
Wendy Howe
Vivien Hubbuck

Anita Jeffries
Janette Kirton-Darling
Jan Loughran
Ellen Murphy-Clarke
Judith Murray
Pat Rose
Audrey Shiels
Janet Storrie
Catherine Stott
Susan Watson
Jean Wilks

Tenors

John Barker
John Brewster
Keith Brunton
Malcolm Chainey
Tony Compton
Tom Frost

Tim Grew
Susan Kent
Dorothy Peters
Peter Vasey

Basses

James Arkless
Paul Barrett
Paul Berry
Peter Charlton
John Crawford
Robert Firth
John Kent
Don Macleod

Keith Mallinson
Tony May
Owen McArdle
Simon Partridge
Paul Proctor
Jack Shiels
Alan Stephenson
Peter Stott