

Hexham Orpheus Choir

Conductor - Glenn Davis



VAUGHAN WILLIAMS AT CHRISTMAS

**HEXHAM ABBEY
SATURDAY 5th DECEMBER
7.30PM**



The Hexham Orpheus Choir

CONDUCTED BY
GLENN DAVIS



WITH AN INVITED ORCHESTRA LED BY
JULIA BOULTON

CHOIR REHEARSAL PIANIST
MARGARET HUNTINGTON

TONIGHT'S ARTISTS



Iona Brown - Violin

Iona joined the Northern Sinfonia in 1995 and is currently Principal First Violin. She has appeared with them as soloist and leader and performs regularly in the Chamber ensemble.

Born in Manchester, Iona won a scholarship to the Royal Northern College of Music studying with Dr Christopher Rowland and Wen Zhou Li. She won many violin and chamber music awards, also the Hiles medal for orchestra playing. In 1993 Iona joined the Manchester Camerata as principal first violin, also playing in the Camerata Chamber Ensemble and as soloist in Bach's Double Violin Concerto. Iona was also a member of the contemporary music ensemble Psappha, with whom she performed live on Radio 3.

Iona has performed with many outstanding musicians, including a recent series of recitals with Marco Rizzi, Bruno Pasquier, Gary Hoffman and Jean Bernard Pommier, and is guest leader of the Durham Sinfonia.



Glenn Davis - Conductor

Glenn has been involved with choral music all his life, directing the Tynemouth Consort and then, from 1979 to 2007, the Priory Singers. Under Glenn's leadership over the past 10 years the Hexham Orpheus Choir has gone from strength to strength. Concerts have included Brahms' Requiem, Mendelssohn's *Elijah* and Handel's *Messiah* in Hexham Abbey. In 2006 the choir gave what is thought to be the first performance in the North of England of the *Missa Aedis Christi* by Howard Goodall. In a departure from their usual repertoire last year the choir gave a rapturously received performance of *Carmina Burana* by Carl Orff.

THE HEXHAM ORPHEUS CHOIR

Sopranos

Sarah Barker
Evelyn Blenkinsop
Elspeth Christie
Janet Davies
Jill Dexter
Pip Emler
Christine Fenwick
Nancy Gash
Liz Gray
Rosemarie Herdman
Annette Marlowe
Bronya Read
Ann Reed
Nuala Rose
Jay Thacker
Brenda Waton
Caroline Watson
Ros Woodward

Altos

Margaret Bainbridge
Lou Baxter
Wendy Busby
Pat Crompton
Sheila Dance
Susan Davis
Liz Dixon
Davina Dwyer
Alice Emmerson
Val Hooker
Rita Howell
Vivien Hubbuck
Anita Jeffries
Janette Kirton-Darling
Judith Murray
Liz Nisbet
Rachel Ogilvie
Audrey Shiel

Altos

Janet Storrie
Catherine Stott
Gill Thompson
Jean Wilks
Jennie Winter

Tenors

John Barker
John Brewster
Keith Brunton
Malcolm Chainey
Tom Frost
Tim Grew
David Huntingdon
Peter Vasey

Basses

James Arkless
John Crawford
Robert Firth
John Guyon
Michael Jackson
Tom Kelsey
Don Macleod
Keith Mallinson
Tony May
Owen McArdle
Esme Ryder
John Rose
Jack Shiel
Peter Stott

THE ORCHESTRA

Violins

Julia Boulton (leader)
Dawn Allen
Jill Blakey
Jane Cuggy
Ann-Britt Hedley
Sue Innes
Louise Khazaee
Kathryn Wakefield
Karen Wigham

Violas

Anne Greaves
Michael Kershaw
Edgar Senior

Cellos

Deborah Chandler
Clarke Slater
Eleanor Brown

Bass

Hannah Booth
Sam Flynn

Flutes

Brian Stewart
Emma Banks

Oboe

Sue Austen

Clarinets

Jennifer Murray
Anne Francomb

Bassoons

Paul Judson
Rachel Lawson

Horns

Chris Senior
David Milner

Trumpets

David Hignett
Alex Lewis

Timpani & Triangle

Andy Booth

PROGRAMME

THE MUSIC OF RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872 – 1958)

1. The First Nowell – Music for a Nativity Play

- (a) Prelude: God rest you merry, gentlemen.....The Truth from Above (Choir and Alto solo - Val Hooker)
- (b) Angelus ad Virginem (Soprano Solo – Pip Emler)
- (c) The Salutation Carol (Choir)
- (d) The Cherry Tree Carol (Choir)
- (e) As Joseph was a-walking (Alto solo – Sue Davis)
- (f) O, Joseph being an old man truly (Choir and Tenor solo – Peter Vasey)
- (g) In Bethlehem City (Choir: women's voices)
- (h) Bring us in good ale (Choir: men's voices)
- (i) On Christmas Night (Choir and Bass solo - Keith Mallinson)
- (j) Tidings true there be come new (Choir: men's voices)
- (k) How brightly shone the morning star (Choir)
- (l) The First Nowell (Soprano solo Pip Emler, Choir, and *Audience)

* Words for the Audience are on the insert in your programme.

Narration provided by Janet Davies and read by John Brewster

2. The Lark Ascending: Iona Brown (solo violin) and orchestra

INTERVAL

3. A Mixed Bag

- (a) The Turtle Dove (Bass solo - Jack Shiel)
- (b) Orpheus with his Lute (Soprano solo - Pip Emler)
- (c) Heart's Music
- (d) Wither's Rocking Hymn
- (e) The Blessed Son of God (from the Christmas Cantata, Hodie)
- (f) We've been awhile a-wandering
- (g) * **With Audience:** O Little Town of Bethlehem
- (h) * **With Audience:** The Sussex Carol

4. Toward the Unknown Region

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PROGRAMME NOTES

The First Nowell

This is the very last work that Vaughan Williams wrote. In the late summer of 1958 he was approached by Simona Pakenham, with a view to providing music for her nativity play based on medieval mystery plays. She and her husband even suggested that the eighty-six year-old composer could play the role of God (this to an atheist-turned-agnostic!) and First Shepherd. Perhaps wisely, he decided to concentrate on the music, and "immediately went to the box-room for carol books to start on it at once....." (Ursula Vaughan Williams). Christmas meant a lot to him - guests were invited to "Singeries" (impromptu sessions round the piano) where the diet seems to have been of English carols only, (not even *Silent Night!*). *The First Nowell* is a compilation of many of the English tunes he had discovered before the First World War when collecting folk music. *O Joseph, being an old man truly* had been sung to him by a Herefordshire gypsy, for example. Germany appears, nevertheless, in the shape of *How Brightly Shone*, the great hymn that Vaughan Williams may have included as a sort of homage to J.S.Bach. When the composer died the piece was completed by Roy Douglas.

The Lark Ascending

It is appropriate that we are including the famous Lark in a choral concert, as that was the platform for its first performance in Gloucestershire in December 1920. Originally written for violin and piano in 1914 it was put in a drawer until Vaughan Williams' return from active service the Great War. He revised it and scored it for a small orchestra.

The two bars of orchestral introduction and the solo violin's soaring cadenza (from a low D over a span of three octaves), supplies the core of the entire piece, especially the interval of a third between B and D. The first section then unfolds, with prominent contributions from the first clarinet and horn, until the return of the opening cadenza, after which the Flute introduces the middle section with a new folk-like melody. This is developed mainly in the orchestra, with much decoration from the solo violin until its trills, a chiming triangle and bird-song from the Oboe, Clarinet and Horn stimulate a flurry of activity from everyone. A slower reprise of the Flute tune then leads to a return of the very first section, more richly harmonised this time. After a magical coda in which all the woodwind, the Horn and the violins echo the opening melody, the solo violin is left alone to take us back into the heights with its final cadenza. Michael Kennedy has written "When *The Lark Ascending* was written, the sound of the lark in the clear air was a feature of the summer landscape. Nearly a century later, with the decline in the bird's population and the destruction of much of its habitat, it is a rarer joy. Perhaps the increasing popularity of this work is a symbol of nostalgia for an England that is vanishing....."

Toward the Unknown Region

Whether or not he was influenced by his great-uncle, Charles Darwin, it is clear that Vaughan Williams had lost his Christian faith quite early in life. "Who believes in God these days anyway, I'd like to know," said the (perhaps brash) young undergraduate of Trinity College Cambridge. Nevertheless he, like many of his generation, still sought after something beyond the here-and-now. Late in his life he wrote to schoolchildren in Norfolk "...but music will enable you to see past facts to the very essence of things in a way which science cannot do. The arts are the means by which we can look through the magic casement and see what lies beyond." The humanist poetry of the American Walt Whitman (1819-92) seems to have supplied him with much inspiration in this regard; Whitman provided the text for this cantata, then the *Sea Symphony* and later, parts of *Dona Nobis Pacem*.

This "Song for Chorus and Orchestra" was commissioned by the Leeds Triennial Festival and first performed with great success in 1907, (despite the agonies of nerves the composer suffered while conducting it). It follows a tradition perhaps established by Brahms with his *Song of Destiny* and (even more so), by Brahms's admirer and VW's teacher, Hubert Parry. Parry was much influenced by John Ruskin who believed music to be the most ethical of the arts, with a power to uplift the spiritual element in mankind. Parry tried to put this belief into practice with such works as *Blest Pair of Sirens* (which calls for poetry to unite its power with that of music), and *The Soul's Ransom*. *Toward the Unknown Region* is firmly in this tradition. Parry had urged the young Vaughan Williams to write choral music "as befits an Englishman and a democrat" and the composer obliged with a work which, to me, essentially is about the liberation of the human spirit: "Then we burst forth, we float in time and space."

OUR NEXT CONCERT

ROSSINI - Petite Messe Solennelle

Saturday 27 March 2010

Queen Elizabeth High School

www.hexham-orpheus-choir.org.uk