

Hexham Orpheus Choir
Conducted by Glenn Davis

Bach
Christmas Oratorio

Hexham Abbey
3 December 2011
7pm

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Rehearsal pianist Margaret Huntington

The Hexham Orpheus Choir was formed in 1955 and performs three major concerts a year as well as weddings and other events.



As a non-auditioned choir, the Orpheus provides a platform for people from different musical backgrounds to perform a wide variety of music from renaissance to contemporary. Many members also belong to other choirs in the area with some performing as soloists. Works they have performed include Faure's *Requiem*, Beethoven's *Mass in C*, Handel's *Messiah*, Goodall's *Missa Aedis Christi*, Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle* and lately Durufle's *Requiem* in April this year.

The choir has an active social calendar and new members are always very welcome. Rehearsal stake place at Trinity Methodist Church Hexham on Wednesday evenings from 7.30 to 9.30 pm. For further information ask a choir member or visit our website at www.hexham-orpheus-choir.org.uk

Soprano

Claire Arnold
Sara Barker
Marion Bates
Carolyn Below
Evelyn Blenkinsop
Chris Boothroyd
Elspeth Christie
Geraldine Coombes
Janet Davies
Jill Dexter
Pip Emler
Nancy Gash
Rosemarie Herdman
Frances Hughes
Margaret Huntington
Julia Laws
Annette Marlowe
Tanja Pless-Mulloli
Rachel Quinn
Bronya Read

Ann Reed
Nuala Rose
Jay Thacker
Carolyn Vasey
Brenda Waton

Louise Khazaee
Janette Kirton-Darling
Linda Lord
Jenny McKay
Judith Murray
Liz Nisbet
Rachel Ogilvie

Tim Grew
Barry Kadleck
Bruce Reed
Peter Vasey

Alto

Lou Baxter
Sheila Bell
Jennifer Britton
Wendy Busby
Sheila Dance
Liz Dixon
Davina Dwyer
Liz Haldon
Val Hooker
Rita Howell
Claire Huddleston
Anita Jefferies
Joan Kindle

Tenor

John Barker
John Below
John Brewster
Malcolm Chainey
Tom Frost

Bass

Paul Berry
Robert Firth
Don Macleod
Keith Mallinson
Owen McArdle
John McKee
John Rose
Esme Ryder
Jack Shiel
Peter Stott
Nick Lord

The Orchestra

Violins

Julia Boulton (leader)
Jill Blakey
Ann-Britt Hedley
Charlotte Howes
Michael Walton
Karen Wigham

Cellos

Peter Wright (solo)
Clarke Slater

Flutes

Brian Stewart (solo)
Mary Tyers

Bassoon

Paul Judson

Bass

Jim Bickel

Oboes & Oboes d'Amore

Philip Cull (solo)
Judith Rousseau

Trumpets

Michael Walton (solo)
Derek Ruffell
Neil Jowett

Violas

Eileen Evans
Michael Kershaw

Chamber Organ

Michael Haynes

Cor Anglais

Vicky Bates
Claire Wills

Timpani

Paul Campbell

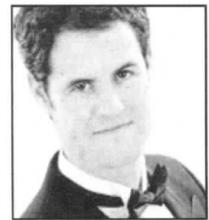
Tonight's Soloists

Soprano **Jessica Holmes** musical life began in the Lancastrian town of Oldham where, as a child, she was a member of their renowned Girls' Choir. After this excellent grounding, singing took a back-seat to study of the piano and the flute. Jessica went to Durham in 1997 to read music and soon discovered that, of the many musical opportunities on offer, it was the choirs that looked most appealing. She became a member of Durham Polyphony and Durham University Chamber Choir, and was also a choral scholar at University College. After graduation in 2000 Jessica remained in Durham, and now teaches music at Durham Johnston School, as well as singing with Palatinate Voices and the Durham Cathedral Consort of Singers. Membership of the Durham Cathedral Consort has brought many opportunities, not least performing Mozart's *Laudate Dominum* in the Sage, Gateshead in 2009, Handel's *Nelson Mass* and Mozart's *Requiem* with the Northern Sinfonia, and the Stanford *Magnificat in G* with the BBC Philharmonic, on Radio 3. Jessica is the soloist in Mendelsohn's *Hear My Prayer* on the recent CD made by the Consort. In April this year Jessica joined with the Hexham Orpheus Choir for the first time singing soprano solo in Durufle's *Requiem*.



Alto **Emma Banks** has lived in the North East for the last five years having spent time studying and working in London and Liverpool. During this time, Emma has had experience of both choral (with Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Chorus, London Symphony Chorus and currently Northern Sinfonia Chorus) and solo work with various local choirs and a small group called the Flash Gordons. Her repertoire includes works by Haydn, Mozart, Goodall, Rossini and the Bach's *St John Passion*.

Liverpool born, alto **Susan Davis** has made the North East her home after gaining a degree in Sciences at Newcastle University. After both choral and solo experience with various Newcastle societies, her solo work developed under the teaching of Clarice Stringer. She gained further choral experience with the Northern Sinfonia Chorus and small group singing with Musica Johannis and has appeared as soloist with a number of choirs in the area including the Northern Sinfonia. Her repertoire includes works by Bach (*St John Passion*), Beethoven, Charpentier, Haydn, Mozart and Rossini as well as Handel's *Messiah* and *Judas Maccaeus*.



New Zealand born tenor **Stephen Chambers** holds a BSc in Physiology, as well as a MusB (Hons) from the University of Otago, a graduate performance diploma (Opera) from the Boston Conservatory, and an MMus (Opera) from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (RSAMD).

His operatic roles include the title role of in *Albert Herring*, Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*, the Schoolmaster in *The Cunning Little Vixen* and Lt. Bonner in Prokofiev's *War & Peace*. He premiered the role of Daumer Rory Boyle's *Kaspar Hauser: Child of Europe*.

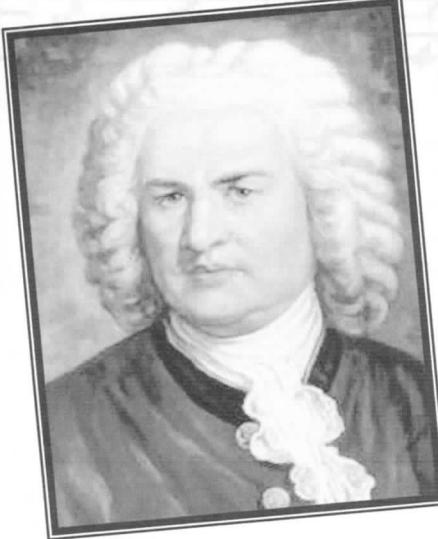
In 2010 he made debut at the BBC Proms as a soloist in Vaughan Williams' *Serenade to Music* (BBC SSO / Donald Runnicles) and at the Edinburgh Festival as a Trojan man in *Iomeneo* (SCO / Norrington). Following this he worked for Clontarf Opera in their educational workshops. This year he went to the Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme working with Mark Padmore on the *St John Passion* (Bach) and also became a Samling scholar in May working with John Mark Ainsley, Della Jones and Paul Farrington.



One time zoologist and National Otter Surveyor of England, baritone **Philip Smith** hung up his waders to study singing with Barbara Robotham at the Royal Northern College of Music. He completed his singing studies in 2008, graduating with distinction. He has won a number of awards and is a Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme alumnus and was awarded an Independent Opera/Royal Northern College of Music Post Graduate Voice Fellowship. He continues to have lessons with Robert Dean.

He regularly performs in concerts and recitals across the UK and mainland Europe. In 2009 he performed at the Uzerche International Festival (France), in Krakow (Poland) and the Making Music Malta 2009 Festival. In the UK he took part in recitals for the 2009 Leeds Lieder+ Festival and the Aldeburgh Festival where he appeared in a recital of Britten Song Cycles with Malcolm Martineau, a concert that was broadcast on BBC Radio 3. Recent oratorio performances include Walton's Belshazzar's Feast, Vaughan Williams Five Mystical Songs, Tippett's A Child of Our Time, Rossini's Petite Messe Solennelle and Elgar's Dream of Gerontius. Philip also appears regularly on the opera stage. This year he has appeared as Sid in *Albert Herring*, a production directed by Keith Warner, at the Cantiere Internazionale d'Arte, Montepulciano and was a member of the Glyndebourne Festival Chorus. Since leaving college he has performed with Longborough Festival Opera, Opera by Definition, Manchester Camerata, Opera Minima, Ensemble 10/10, Edinburgh Studio Opera and understudied for Glyndebourne on Tour.

Philip was a Samling Scholar and made his Wigmore Hall debut in their showcase concert in December 2010. Future plans include the release of a recording of Britten Songs with Malcolm Martineau, return to the Montepulciano Festival to sing Arlekin in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, a recital with Roger Vignoles in Santiago de Compostella, cover Figaro II Barbiere Di Siviglia for Scottish Opera, and Sid in *Albert Herring* for the Royal Danish Opera, Copenhagen.



J S Bach

CHRISTMAS ORATORIO

PARTS 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6

An eighteenth-century oratorio usually meant an opera, but one without costume and with a sacred text. All Handel's oratorios for example were performed in Lent when the London theatres were closed, but the characterisation and setting of the text kept to the operatic and dramatic genre that he had already perfected. Your conductor saw such a "cross-over" quite recently with a staging of Handel's *Samson* at the Buxton Festival, 2008.

Bach's oratorio for Christmas is quite different: a series of six cantatas first performed on six separate days over the season, beginning with Christmas Day (1734) and ending on Epiphany (January 6th) 1735. Like his *Mass in B minor*, it was never designed for a single performance, so what can justify our concert on December 3rd? The first reason is the quality of the music itself, and the second is that the familiar Christmas story gives the piece a feeling of unity. The texts are taken from St. Luke and St. Matthew,

beginning with the announcement of Jesus' birth and ending with the story of the Wise Men and Herod. The third reason is that Bach composed the work as a whole. His zeal for completeness led him to plan an oratorio for each major feast of the Christian year. The fourth is that I would find it impossible to assemble a choir, let alone an orchestra on six separate days over the Christmas holidays!

The music serves three purposes:

- To tell the story. The Biblical narration is mainly given to a tenor soloist, as in the Passion settings. The exceptions are two numbers where the Angel and Herod are represented by the soprano and bass soloists, while the speech of groups is given to the choir who variously represent the heavenly host (no. 21), the shepherds hastening to Bethlehem (no. 26), and the Wise Men (no. 45, where three Wise Men somehow sing in four-part harmony).
- To reflect on the significance of the text. While Handel's pieces are dramatic, Bach's are reflective. Each major quotation from the Bible is used as a focus for meditation on the theological implications of the story. The vocal soloists have two major numbers like this in each cantata, either solos like the famous "slumber" aria in Part Two, where a shepherd sings a lullaby to the sleeping child or a trio in Part Five where soprano and tenor eagerly anticipate Christ's coming to be told by the alto that he's here already. Not only that, the "accompaniment" recitatives (accompaniment in the sense that Bach uses instrumental groups rather than the standard organ-plus-cello) serve the same purpose. The two oboes have a "cradle-rocking" accompaniment to the alto's announcement of Christ's arrival in Part One, while the whole wind-band (four oboes plus bassoon) accompany the bass's invitation to shepherds to serenade the sleeping child in Part Two. The choir plays its part too, with beautifully harmonised hymn tunes, each with individual reference to what has just happened in the story.
- To set a general mood. Each cantata except one begins with a big chorus. Christmas Day opens with choir and full orchestra (timpani and trumpets prominent) celebrating the beginning of the Christmas feast. The same combination has a dance-like chorus of praise to start Part Three. Strings plus two oboes invite the Choir to an even more lively dance to open Part Five, while full orchestra (minus only the flutes) return to celebrate Christ's triumph over the powers of darkness, the overall theme of Part Six. The exception is Part Two. Here the pastoral scene is set as in *Messiah* by the opening orchestral sinfonia, newly composed for the oratorio and setting the flutes and strings against the shepherds' pipes – no fewer than four oboes whose distinctive sound colours the whole of this section.

Glenn Davis

For tonight's performance the Hexham Orpheus Choir is using the New Novello Edition of Bach Christmas Oratorio

We would like to thank

Canon Graham Usher, the PCC and staff of Hexham Abbey

Cogito Books for their continued support as principal sponsors of the HOC

Core Music for their continued support

Eric Cross & Newcastle Bach Choir for loan of the orchestral scores

Samling Organisation for their professional support

The Hexham Orpheus Choir would like to wish you a very Happy Christmas and New Year

Looking forward to seeing you again at our next concert

28 April 2012 ~ Opera Classics

