



PUCCINI MESSA DI GLORIA

HOLST THE PLANETS

FRIDAY 3RD NOVEMBER 2023

HEXHAM ABBEY

HEXHAM ORPHEUS CHOIR

DIRECTOR MARK EDWARDS

THE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA OF THE MOON

TENOR: CHRIS FOSTER

BASS: KEIR McGREGOR

Hexham Orpheus Choir Regd. Charity No.514942



MESSA DI GLORIA



Giacomo Puccini's life was mapped out before he was born: his family had filled the role of Maestro di Cappella of the cathedral in Lucca, Italy, for generations. Only six years old when his father died, he was hardly able to take up the mantle

GIACOMO PUCCINI (1858-1924)

immediately, but he did begin his musical career, first as a chorister and organist in the cathedral, and then studying music at the *Instituto Musicale Pacini* in Lucca and then at the Milan Conservatory.

Puccini composed his *Messa di Gloria* as his graduation thesis from Lucca in 1880. It was his personal tribute to his family's long association with sacred music in the city. Puccini saw a performance of Verdi's *Aida* in 1876, which must have influenced his operatic style. His interest in opera took him away from sacred music once he had graduated and his success meant that, after its first performance, it was not performed again until 1952. American priest, Father Dante del Fiorentino, visited Lucca in the course of his research for a biography of Puccini and returned to the United States with a copy of the manuscript. It was performed in Chicago in 1952, and reintroduced to European audiences in Naples at the end of that year, to huge acclaim.

Kyrie: The *Messa di Gloria* does not open with full operatic force: the Kyrie starts quietly and lyrically, and ends peacefully.

Gloria: This is a tour de force that accounts for nearly half of the mass and gives it its title. In this movement Puccini makes full use of the elements of opera to bring drama to the piece: memorable tunes, rousing choruses, a haunting tenor aria, key changes, sudden switches of mood, and he finishes the movement with a fugue in the best tradition of sacred music.

Credo: Almost as long as the Gloria, it opens with a solemn dialogue between choir and orchestra followed by the unaccompanied chorus singing a duet with the tenor. The mood darkens with a bass chorus, and the minuet-like end of the movement prepares us for the tone of the remainder of the *Messa*.

Sanctus and Agnus Dei: Echoing the first movement, the *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei* are both short and sweet, and the piece almost fades out at the end with a pianissimo 'dona nobis pacem'.

Adapted from programme notes by Newbury Choral Society

INTERVAL

THE PLANETS

Born of Scandinavian descent in rural England to a musical family, Holst received a musical education early, playing the violin and piano, and later taking up the trombone, the mastery of which his father thought would help his asthma. He worked as village organist and choirmaster before attending the Royal College of Music, where he met his life-long friend Ralph Vaughan Williams. Eventually focussing on the trombone he earned a modest living playing with various orchestras. However, he soon gave that life up, and spent the rest of his life teaching music.

It is an interest in astrology, not astronomy, that is central to *The Planets*. Holst began the work in 1913, gradually completing it by 1917. The first performance was given privately in 1918, and word of mouth raised public expectations for the first public performance in 1920. The order and number of the seven movements has generated much discussion about the actual planets and their number and position. However, Holst's work has to do with the astrological signs, of which there are seven, and not with how we define what planets are, or their positions in relation to the sun. The order of movements is the astrological succession.

GUSTAV HOLST (1874-1934)



Photograph by Herbert Lambert (1921)

This chamber edition of *The Planets* by George Morton was commissioned as part of the University of Sheffield's 'Sounds of the Cosmos' project in 2015. Since its publication with Universal Edition in 2016 it has received great acclaim across the world.

Written for individual woodwinds, a small brass section, one percussionist, pianist and a small string section, this new reduction of Holst's masterpiece enables ensembles to bring the work to venues of many sizes.

Mars, the bringer of war: Holst chose an unusual time signature of 5/4 for this evocation of war, beginning with a hypnotic rhythm, repeated over and over, as chords constantly grow and threaten.

Following a reiteration of the driving, repeated rhythm in the strings, the brass features in punchy fanfares. This is the original Darth Vader and the Death Star

music! The dreary, desolate landscape of destruction in war is admirably depicted in a bleak, slower middle section before a repeat of the opening hammering material. This gripping evocation of war ends with dramatic, blunt hammer strokes, separated by pauses that leaves no doubt of the utter destruction and obliteration of war.



Venus, bringer of peace, answers a call from the solo horn, and we are ushered into a tranquil world evocative of the Roman goddess of love and beauty, astrologically associated with harmony and balance. A gentle succession of woodwind passages and lush string sonorities, create a marvellous respite from Mars.

Mercury, the winger messenger, zips by next, in a quicksilver movement befitting the winged messenger of the gods. In astrology, Mercury also is the symbol of rationality and mentality. Cascades of scales and twittering rhythms carry thought along like lightning.

Jupiter, the bringer of jollity: Considered the ruler of the gods, merrymaking and gambling play a part in Jupiter's personality, and the latter aspect comes into play in the jaunty opening tunes, one zippy and syncopated, and the other a rather thumping waltz. But in the middle, we are treated to a noble, exalting tune; a glorious melody that came to be adapted later by Holst to the text, "I Vow to My Country".

Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age, is ushered slowly in by two cold, static woodwind chords, endlessly repeated. After some ominous string comments, the brass intone a stately procession. In astrology Saturn is the founder of social order and civilisations, charged with duty, responsibility, and discipline. The brass evidently carry this duty as they plod to a climax, gradually

subsiding into a dissolution borne by the strings and oscillating woodwinds that floats timelessly and without emotion into an apparent infinity.

Uranus the Magician: Four imposing notes slowly and loudly announced by the brass are the motif of Uranus, returning throughout the movement in a variety of guises, but the movement proper is a stomping, tramping march. The bassoon sets us off on this little rollicking affair, interrupted from time to time by those four identifying notes. It builds, almost out of control, only to subside and there is a half-hearted attempt to resume the march which fails. The brass loudly play the motif again, and finally the strings end this enigmatic paean to the clever "Magician."

Neptune the Mystic: Holst dispenses with many of the organising principles of music and creates an atmosphere, not only of the mystic, but also of the traditional characteristics associated with the planet: illusion, confusion, and deception. He uses exotic successions of harmonies and bites of unconventional scales to create this floating sound. This is truly "space music" long before the clichés with which we are all familiar. As the orchestra gradually fades away, only the wordless women's chorus is left, gradually vanishing from our hearing. It is the only truly human element that stays with us as the composer's exploration of our humanity writ in the heaven's fades.

Adapted from notes by William E. Runyan

HEXHAM ORPHEUS CHOIR

They say that singing in a choir is healthier than drinking and more fun than working out. Now, some of our members will do all three, but there's no doubt that choral singing, not just in concerts like tonight's (exhilarating though it is) but every week, is the activity to top all others. It's creative, sociable, and it's very good for your brain! We have members who've been singing for years, others that are relative beginners, but they all share a desire to come together and make music.

If you'd like to join us, we'd love you to get in touch, or you could just turn up for a rehearsal. All the details are on our website.

<http://hexham-orpheus-choir.org.uk/>

Sopranos

Sarah Barker
Carolyn Below
Lucy Brookes
Paddy Burridge
Elspeth Christie
Judi Cornforth
Fiona Hewitt
Liz McNeil Grist
Eliza Nicholson

Mary Oswell
Anna Pattinson
Tanja Pless-Mullolli
Ann Reed
Maeve Selby
Esther Urwin
Carolyn Vasey
June Welch

Altos

Marion Bates
Cherry Christer
Marge Craig
Sheila Dance
Sue Fowler
Anabel Gammidge
Liz Gray
Julie Harrison
Claire Huddleston
Margaret Huntington
Margret Jacot
Linda Lord

Val Mallinson
Susan Morse
Keron North
Joanna O'Neill
Bronya Read
Siobhan Stephenson
Janet Storrie
Pam Vennart
Ellen Watson
Jean Wilks
Anne Wilson

Tenors

John Below
Malcolm Chainey
Bill Day
Tim Grew
Leigh Harrison
Pat Marriott

Stella Mason
Denis McCaldin
Jenny McKay
Steve Middleton
Rachel Ogilvie
David Pattinson

Basses

Allen Christer
Warwick Eden
Martyn Farrer
Graeme Hellwell
Chris Hewitt
Bob Hull

Michael Jackson
Nick Lord
Keith Mallinson
Paul Stirk
Jim Vennart
Chris Welch

THE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA OF THE MOON

The Chamber Orchestra of the Moon has been specially curated for this concert, comprising professional musicians from across the region.

Violins

Iona Brown
Jane Nossek
Viola
Chrissie Slater
Cello
Gemma Kost
Double Bass
Tony Abel

Bassoon

Sarah Keen
Clarinet
Dov Goldberg
Flute
Clare Crinson
Oboe
Francesca Cox

Horns

Rachel Brady
Chris Senior
Trumpet
Gary Ritson
Trombone
Patrick Kenny

Percussion

Stephen Moore
Piano
Philip Sharp

MARK EDWARDS MMUS

DIRECTOR OF MUSIC



Originally from Edinburgh, Mark trained as a percussionist before taking up conducting, and has recently completed his Masters in Conducting at the Royal Northern College of Music, studying with Clark Rundell and Mark Heron, where he was awarded the Brierley Kershaw Prize for Conducting.

In 2017, Mark won the National Brass Band Conducting Competition and more recently was a semi-finalist in the Citta' Di Brescia-Giancarlo Facchinetti Conducting Competition. Comfortable working on large scale projects for both orchestra and choir, he has recently directed larger repertoire including: Elgar – *The Dream of Gerontius*, Vaughan Williams – *A Sea Symphony*, and Verdi – *Requiem*. As assistant conductor, he has taken rehearsals for RTE concert orchestra and acted as cover conductor for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. Mark has also worked on projects with BBC Philharmonic, Royal

Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Psappha ensemble, assisting conductors such as Sir Mark Elder, Vasily Petrenko, Vassily Sinaisky, John Storgård and Simone Young.

As musical director for the award winning chamber choir Voices of Hope (recent winners of the BBC Choir of the Year Competition), Mark has curated numerous programmes including a recent jazz-inspired concert with Will Todd and a concert of new commissions with Neil Ferris. He is musical director for New Tyneside Orchestra, Hexham Orpheus Choir and is a lecturer in Conducting at Newcastle University. He has also undertaken masterclasses with renowned conductors such as Sir Mark Elder, Marin Alsop and David Hill.

During his time in Manchester, he worked with a variety of RNCM ensembles conducting a large range of repertoire including a number of premieres. With a keen interest in contemporary music, Mark has worked with Royal Northern Sinfonia, London Sinfonietta Academy and Streetwise Opera on new compositions. Recent highlights include performing at the Royal Albert Hall, London and Symphony Hall, Birmingham and live broadcasts for various BBC3 programmes.

THE MUSEUM OF THE MOON

The **Museum of the Moon** (<https://my-moon.org>) is a magnificent touring artwork by UK artist, Luke Jerram and, from 29 September - 11 November, it is in Hexham Abbey. At seven metres in diameter, it features detailed NASA imagery of the lunar surface at an approximate scale of 1:500 000, each centimetre of the internally lit spherical sculpture represents five kilometres of the Moon's surface.

SOLOISTS:

Chris Foster (Tenor)

Originally from Leicester, conductor, singer, pianist, and educator, Chris Foster studied at the universities of Nottingham, Nottingham Trent, and Sheffield. An experienced liturgical singer, Chris is Principal Tenor Lay Clerk at Newcastle cathedral, having previously deputised at Leicester, Derby and Peterborough cathedrals, and Southwell Minster. Whilst in Nottingham, he was a Choral Scholar and then Music Associate at Nottingham Catholic Cathedral, with whom he has toured around Europe and the Far East. As a tenor soloist he has performed a range of repertoire, from Schütz's *Passions* (Evangelist) and Monteverdi's *Vespers* with the English Cornett and Sackbut Ensemble and Monteverdi String Band, various Handel oratorios, Viennese masses, and Orff's *Carmina Burana*. He conducts Mercia Chorale, a chamber choir based around the East Midlands that has performed in cathedrals around the country, giving several premiere performances in the process.

He has worked in recital and masterclass as a piano accompanist with Julian Lloyd Webber and Roderick Williams, and regularly accompanies university recitals and diploma examinations. He is currently Director of Music at Dame Allan's Schools in Newcastle, and was previously Director of Music at Trent College.



Keir McGregor (Baritone)

Keir is a newly-qualified Music teacher across primary and secondary ages in the North-East, currently working at the Durham Cathedral Schools Foundation, and has just joined the Music Department at Dame Allan's School in the new academic year. After graduating from Selwyn College, Cambridge in 2019 with a first in Music, he went on to become a Choral Scholar at Norwich Cathedral, and following this completed a Primary PGCE at Newcastle University in 2022. He now holds a position as a Principal Lay Clerk at Newcastle Cathedral. Although singing throughout his childhood, Keir's first

introduction to liturgical choral singing came at university, where he was a member of Selwyn College Chapel Choir under Sarah MacDonald throughout his degree; this spring-boarded his enjoyment of choral and solo singing, with recordings in Ely Cathedral and international tours, and encouraged him to continue this beyond university. Keir is also a member of small-scale vocal groups in the North-East such as Vox Populi and St James' Consort, as well as occasionally dusting the cobwebs off his cello!



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Tony May and **Margaret Huntington**, for the loan of lighting equipment and to **Graeme Helliwell** for its erection and management.

Members of the committee and many others who have helped, for their valuable contributions throughout this project including **Anabel Gammidge, Julia Grint, Graeme Helliwell, Nick Lord, Linda Lord and Jenny McKay**.

Programme Design: Nick Lord

NEXT CONCERT

CHRISTMAS CONCERT

with carols for all

St Mary's Church, Hexham

Wednesday 13th December 7:30pm

Director: Mark Edwards

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