

South West Chamber Choir

Director: Stephen Trahair

Down in the river to pray

PROGRAMME

Readers: Jane Hamlyn & Christopher Bloor

St Andrew's Church, Bere Ferrers

16 November 2013

By kind permission of the Vicar and Churchwardens

Concert given in support of 'Youth2Youth'

Down in the river to pray

What cheer? William Walton (1902-1983)

All this time William Walton

Hymn to the Virgin Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

READINGS by Jane Hamlyn and Christopher Bloor

A spotless rose Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

Out of your sleep Richard R Bennett (1936-2012)

Bethlehem Down Peter Warlock (1894-1930)

READINGS by Jane Hamlyn and Christopher Bloor

The Lamb John Tavener (b. 1944)

O magnum mysterium Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943)

Tiralee, tiralo Andrew Wilson (b. 1960)

INTERVAL

Jingle Bells J Pierpoint (1822-1893) arr. R Allwood (b. 1950)

New Year Song Joachim Fischer (b. 1958)

Icecrust and Snowflake Joachim Fischer

READINGS by Jane Hamlyn and Christopher Bloor

The Harvest Moon Joachim Fischer

Leaves Joachim Fischer

I'll fly away A E Brumley (1905-1977) arr. S Trahair

READING by Jane Hamlyn

Down in the river to pray Trad. U.S. arr. S Trahair

The nearness of you Hoagy Carmichael (1899-1981) arr. Bignold

Lullaby of Birdland George Shearing (1919-2011) arr. Carter

Welcome to our concert of sacred, secular and light partsongs written or arranged by composers of the twentieth (and twenty-first) centuries, with readings given by Jane Hamlyn and Christopher Bloor.

The music ranges from motets by Benjamin Britten and Morten Lauridsen to cabaret songs by Hoagy Carmichael and George Shearing. Much of the sacred music in the first half is traditionally sung at Christmas, and we will be singing it again in the Great Hall at Cotehele House on Sunday 8 December as part of a Christmas concert beneath the famous flower garland. The second half is devoted to secular songs.

What cheer?

William Walton (1902-1983)

This is the first of two carols by Walton we are singing tonight. It is based on a poem in a sixteenth century Commonplace Book by Richard Hill (commonplace books were scrapbooks containing miscellaneous items of interest to the compiler, from recipes and poems to prayers and odd facts). It has nothing to do with the town of What Cheer in Iowa!

Sir William Walton wrote for many different genres, from symphonies and oratorios such as 'Belshazzar's Feast', to film scores and opera. In his youth he was seen as a modernist, but in later life he came to be regarded as old-fashioned, with works such as the 'Spitfire' Prelude & Fugue and 'Crown Imperial' suggesting that intended to take up where Elgar had left off. But his music is too wide-ranging to be neatly pigeon-holed, and he is now regarded as one of England's greatest composers of the 20th century.

All this time

William Walton (1902-1983)

The second of our two Walton settings is based on another sixteenth century carol of unknown origin. The carol is macaronic, that is to say the words alternate between English and Latin, as with many carols of the mediaeval period. '*Verbum caro factum est*' means 'The Word became flesh' and is from a text from St John's Gospel which is traditionally read at the end of Festivals of Nine Lessons and Carols. The resemblance to some of Britten's work is not surprising, as Walton was a great admirer of Britten.

Hymn to the Virgin

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

This was one of Britten's earliest works, written when he was only 16 and attending Gresham's School. While in the school 'san' for an unknown ailment he whiled away the time by writing this setting of a macaronic carol dating from about 1300, the words of which he found in the Oxford Book of English Verse. He had no manuscript paper, so ruled the staves by hand on sheets of plain paper.

The work is scored for two groups, the main choir singing the English words and the semi-chorus or quartet singing the Latin ones. It was first performed in 1931, and remained one of the composer's favourite works, being one of only two to be performed at his funeral.

Readings: *Have you seen but a white lily blow?* Anon
She walks in beauty Lord Byron (1788-1824)

A spotless rose

Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

This uses words adapted by Catherine Winkworth from the 16th century German carol '*Es ist ein Ros entsprungen*'. Howells' setting was one of his earliest choral works and was published in 1919 with two other carol settings as 'Three Carol-Anthems'. Howells was a contemporary of Vaughan Williams, who was a major influence on his style. He wrote much sacred music, liturgical works as well as concert pieces, and is regarded as one of the greatest English composers of organ music.

Out of your sleep

Richard Rodney Bennett (1936-2012)

Bennett was born in Kent but moved to Devon with his family in World War II. He was a versatile composer, writing jazz, cabaret songs and film scores (including those for 'Murder on the Orient Express' and 'Four Weddings and a Funeral', and the TV series 'Gormenghast') as well as choral and instrumental music and operas. He was a celebrated jazz and cabaret pianist and regularly accompanied singers such as Marion Montgomery and Cleo Lane on tour.

'Out of your sleep' was published in 1967 as No.2 of 'Five Carols', and like all the numbers so far is a setting of words from a mediaeval carol.

Bethlehem Down

Peter Warlock (1894-1930)

This song was composed in 1927 to words by Warlock's friend Bruce Blunt, apparently as an entry for the Daily Telegraph's annual carol competition (which it won). Peter Warlock was the pseudonym of Philip Heseltine, and the name reflected his interest in the occult which was part of an unconventional, even notorious, lifestyle. But with its reverent and moving words and haunting theme this carol has remained popular at carol services ever since.

Readings: *Stopping by woods* Robert Frost (1874-1963)
A Child's Christmas in Wales Dylan Thomas (1914-1953)

The Lamb

John Tavener (b. 1944)

Tavener's setting of William Blake's poem 'The Lamb' is one of his most frequently performed works. It was written in 1982 for his nephew Simon's third birthday. It is typical of his work, with a minimalist style which suits the simplicity of Blake's words. The mirror writing in the phrase '*Gave thee clothing of delight, softest clothing, woolly, bright,*' is a favourite device - the two parts are inversions of each other and also palindromes, so that they are mirror images whether the mirror is held horizontally between the two parts or vertically halfway through the phrase.

O magnum mysterium

Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943)

Lauridsen is said to be the most frequently performed American composer of choral music. His numerous song cycles and choral collections feature regularly in concert programmes throughout the world. As a young man he worked as a forest firefighter and lookout on a tower near Mt St Helens, until he went to the University of Southern California in the 1960s to study composition. He has taught composition there since 1967. His compositional style favouring slow, shimmering chords has inspired a host of imitators from Eric Whitacre to Paul Mealor.

Tiralee, tiralo

Andrew Wilson (b. 1960)

Andrew Wilson is the Director of Music at Kelly College and conducts the Kelly Choral Society. He has composed numerous works including large-scale choral and orchestral works, chamber music, sacred choral works and organ music. He has achieved a growing reputation and his work has been performed by a wide range of artists. He has been commissioned to write music by (amongst others) Voces8, the Dante Quartet and South West Chamber Choir, which gave the first performance of 'Tiralee, tiralo' in 2011.

This is a lively setting of a 15th century carol depicting the visitation of the angels to the shepherds recounted in St Luke's Gospel.

INTERVAL

Jingle bells

J Pierpoint (1822-1893) arr. R Allwood (b. 1950)

'Jingle bells' was published in 1857 by James Pierpoint of Savannah, Georgia as a rather racy song about taking a Miss Fanny Bright for a ride in a horse-drawn sleigh. The trip did not go well, as "*the horse was lean and lank, / misfortune seemed his lot, / he got into a drifted bank / and then we got upsot.*" Some verses are usually omitted.

Our excuse for including it in this concert of 20th century music is that we are using an entertaining arrangement by Ralph Allwood, who was for 26 years the

Director of Music at Eton College. He is the director of the Rudolfus Choir, and a choral advisor for Novello & Co, the National Youth Choir of Great Britain and the Voices Foundation.

New Year Song

Joachim Fischer (b. 1958)

This the first of four settings by Joachim Fischer of poems by Ted Hughes (1930-1998) from his 'Season Songs' published in 1976. Hughes was one of Britain's foremost poets of the latter half of the 20th, being appointed Poet Laureate in 1984 following the death of John Betjeman, and awarded many of Europe's highest literary honours. Much of his work is rooted in nature; he saw beauty in the elemental violence of the natural world, and animals served as a metaphor for mankind's struggle for survival and ascendancy.

Joachim Fischer teaches music and English in schools around Freiburg in Baden-Wurttemberg, and while he was teaching in Liskeard as a student in the 1980s he sang with the East Cornwall Bach Choir. The Cornish countryside and an introduction to Ted Hughes' work inspired him to write these settings, which were first sung by the ECBC in 1986.

'New Year Song' is a light-hearted look at the harbingers of spring - the Christmas rose, the *'tight-vest lamb with its wriggle eel tail'*, the snowdrop, the crocus and the aconite - but the worst cold's yet to come.

Icecrust and Snowflake

Joachim Fischer

The second of the 'Season Songs' is an evocative description of the dank chill of deep winter. He depicts the *'blue frost-bright dawn'*, the *'ice-cumbered trough'*, the *'iron bar rusted sodden'*, the snowflake that *'touched, that registered, was felt'*.

Readings: *When icicles hang by the wall* Shakespeare (1564-1616)
 The solitary reaper William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

The Harvest Moon

Joachim Fischer

The third of Ted Hughes' 'Season Songs' here describes the mysterious wonder of the full moon nearest to the September equinox. The stifling heat of a late summer night is vividly portrayed in the shimmering dissonances of Fischer's setting.

Leaves

Joachim Fischer

The fourth and last of the 'Season Songs' is based on the folk-song 'Who killed Cock Robin?', with the summer leaves playing the role of the deceased. Fischer sets the text to a simple nursery-like tune, with each verse portraying the

distinctive character of those volunteering for the various funeral tasks (the marrow, the sunset, the crow and the tractor among others).

I'll fly away

A E Brumley (1905-1977) arr. S Trahair

Albert Brumley has been described as the "pre-eminent gospel songwriter" of the 20th century with over 600 published songs to his name. He came up with the idea for this song while picking cotton on his father's farm in Rock Island, Oklahoma. Brumley says that as he worked he was "humming an old ballad that went like this: 'If I had the wings of an angel, over these prison walls I would fly', and suddenly it dawned on me that I could use this plot for a gospel-type song." It was published in 1932 and is said to be the most-recorded gospel song.

We sing it in an arrangement for unaccompanied voices with soloists by our Music Director.

Reading:

Useful and acceptable gifts

Joyce Grenfell (1910-1979)

Down in the river to pray

Trad. American arr. S Trahair

The earliest known version of the song, titled "The Good Old Way," was published in 'Slave Songs of the United States' in 1867, but its true origins are unknown. It has become well known since 2000 when Alison Krauss sang it for the soundtrack of the Coen Brothers film 'O Brother, Where Are Thou?' Some versions have 'down to the river to pray' rather than 'in the river', although since the song was traditionally sung at Southern Baptist riverside meetings where full immersion baptism was practiced, 'in the river' seems more appropriate.

The nearness of you

Carmichael (1899-1981) arr. B Bignold

Barrie Bignold is a well-known writer of music for the theatre, film and television. His arrangement of Hoagy Carmichael's cabaret song was written for the retirement party of Sir Hugh Casson as president of the Royal Academy of Arts. It was never published and remained in manuscript. He is thrilled that it has been resurrected and will be sung *a capella*, because it was written to be sung with a piano trio which interspersed the choral parts with instrumental passages. He has kindly agreed to our singing it for you this evening.

Lullaby of Birdland

George Shearing (1919-2011) arr. A Carter

'Birdland' is a New York jazz club named after Charlie 'Bird' Parker. George Shearing wrote this popular song in 1952 and it has been recorded by many artists, from Ella Fitzgerald in 1954 onwards. This unpublished but engaging *a capella* arrangement is by Andrew Carter, a composer, conductor and arranger with many sacred choral and organ works to his name.

Stephen Trahair, the Musical Director, has sung with the choir since 2003, and was appointed MD in 2008. A lawyer by profession, choral music has always been his main interest, and he has sung with many choirs including the RSCM Cathedral Singers and St Martins Singers, as well as having considerable experience of conducting and accompanying choirs. He has written and arranged both sacred and secular choral music, and has produced albums of unaccompanied arrangements of partsongs and carols as well as two albums for organ. He has produced several editions of choral works which form much of the choir's repertoire.

Jane Hamlyn (LLAM Hons) has been acting and singing on stage for many years. Leading roles have included 'Rose' in *The Living Room*, by Graham Greene, 'Mrs. Swab' in Alan Bennett's *Habeas Corpus* and 'Titania' (twice), and she has won 'Best Actress' awards in the National One-Act Play Competition (Surrey section) on four occasions. In musicals she has been 'Anna' in *The King and I* (twice), 'Mrs Squeezum' in *Lock up your Daughters* and Gilbert & Sullivan's 'Iolanthe', among many others. Jane is now co-directing *Aladdin* for Bere Ferrers, her 5th production since moving here six years ago.

Chris Bloor has 50 years of public speaking in one form or another, including many productions with the Haslemere Thespians - one of the best 'am.dram'. companies in Surrey - with roles in plays such as *Confusions* by Alan Ayckbourn, J.B.Priestly's *An Inspector Calls* and *Wait Until Dark* by Frederick Knott, in which Jane Hamlyn played the lead. He has taken part in the National One-Act Play competition, once winning Best Supporting Actor. Currently a member of Belstone A.D.S., he has acted in, and also directed and/or stage managed, their productions on several occasions. He is married to Jane's daughter.

The **South West Chamber Choir**, a group of some 28 voices, performs a wide-ranging repertoire of small-scale choral music including Elizabethan madrigals, Renaissance polyphony, Bach motets, sacred music by English and Continental composers from the 16th to the 21st century, romantic partsongs, and works by contemporary composers such as Arvo Pärt and John Tavener. Much of the repertoire is sung unaccompanied.

Forthcoming concerts:

Sunday 8 December at 2 pm **The Great Hall, Cotehele**
Carols for Advent and Christmas

Saturday 29 March 2014 at 7.15 pm **Buckfast Abbey**
'Salve Regina' - choral music in honour of the Virgin

Saturday 7 June 2014 at 7.30 pm **Landulph Church**
'An Ever-Rolling Stream' - partsongs and madrigals