

Bollington Festival *Choir*

An English Christmas

Sunday 4th December 2016 7.30 pm at St Oswald's Church

Mary Halloran *alto* Steve Thorpe *tenor* Mike Bell *baritone*

Donald Judge *conductor*

Andrew Dean *organ*

A warm welcome to St Oswald's Church and our early celebration of Christmas.

Bollington Festival Choir was formed in 1964 by Dr John Coope. 52 years on, it retains both its sense of adventure and its village roots while attracting singers from a wide area. None of our members face auditions, and they also have the chance to say which pieces or composers they'd most like to sing. The latest poll included a lot of requests for English music, which consequently features strongly this season. All the music you'll hear tonight is by English composers – and two pieces were written this century.

Our Season's Leaflet with details of all our events is available tonight, and we also have a new website www.bollfestchoir.org.uk where you can find out everything you need to know, including how to sing with us!

Our next event is another essential part of the Festive Season – **Messiah for All** at 7.30 on Tuesday 13th December in the Arts Centre. The Choir donates all proceeds from this annual event to charity – this year to **Action Duchenne**. Duchenne is a rare but devastating form of muscular dystrophy affecting young people, particularly boys. There may still be tickets left, but whether you'd like to sing or listen, you'd be well advised to snap them up!

The Choir is delighted to welcome once again the organist, **Andrew Dean**, who made such an excellent contribution to last summer's concert. Thanks as well to **Rosalind Hall**, our regular rehearsal pianist.

This year we have had to bid a sad and final farewell to three long standing and much loved friends who each sang in the Choir for many years: Michael Armitage and Clemence Coope last summer, and only this week to Joyce Marsh. We also say au revoir tonight to one of our tenors, and outgoing Chair, Alan Jackson, who is moving to Sussex. We wish him many happy years there: our loss is surely another choir's gain, that of his grandchildren, and anyone he makes tea or coffee for!

BOLLINGTON FESTIVAL CHOIR

SOPRANOS

Chris Anderton	Olwyn Bloor	Sandra Chorlton
Sue Cooper	Dot Graham	Jenny Kendal
Jean Ransley	Sarah Rutherford	Christine Winton

ALTOS

Claire Barnett	Pat Bell	Sally Bence
Chris Brear	Glenys Gem	Liz Goodwin
Mary Halloran	Lynn Knowling	Irene Mills
Jenny Thorpe	Geraldine Yandell	

TENORS

Alan Jackson	Jim Kendon	David Ransley
Gordon Rowlands	Steve Thorpe	Paul Yandell

BASSES

Mike Bell	Stephen Goldby	Philip Hodgkinson
Steve Kleiser	Gordon Price	Ian Ray
Ambrose Smith	Craig Stagg	David Ward

We wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

PROGRAMME

Please join us in singing the congregational hymns and carols, marked ALL – words on the separate sheet.

It came upon the midnight clear **Sir Arthur Sullivan** **(ALL)**

Among the composers / arrangers of tonight's hymns and carols are **Sir Arthur Sullivan** (of G&S fame); **Gustav Holst** (of Latvian, Swedish and German ancestry) and **Sir David Willcocks**, who revitalised choral carol singing in the 50s and 60s while the legendary Organist and Director of Music at King's College, Cambridge. **Sir Richard Runciman Terry** who composed the next carol was a choral scholar at that illustrious establishment in the 1880s. He contrived to leave the university without gaining a degree, but still became a respected musician and musicologist.

Myn Liking **R R Terry**

Missa Brevis 'Tongues of Fire' **Cecilia McDowall**

Kyrie **Gloria** **Linguae Ignis** **Sanctus and Benedictus** **Agnus Dei**



Cecilia McDowall has an enviable and award winning reputation as a composer of many genres of music. Her works engage performers and audiences alike, being fresh and accessible, though not without challenge. We are very proud that this will be the fourth work of hers we've brought to Bollington audiences following *Ave Maris Stella*, *Christus Natus Est* and *Four English Folksongs*. In a recent email, Cecilia paid us a lovely compliment when she said: *You must be a delightful, open minded choir, so willing to perform contemporary music. Many choirs are reluctant to tackle anything by composers still living and breathing!* We trust we also have a delightful, open minded audience who will enjoy the 21st century music included tonight.

The composer writes: My mass, *Tongues of Fire*, follows the usual framework for a Missa Brevis, but instead of the Credo I have interpolated a movement called *Linguae Ignis (Tongues of Fire)*, a short extract taken from the Acts of the Apostles. The first performance was given at the time of Pentecost to mark the 'Birthday of the Church' in 2000. I have always been captivated by the imagery of the 'divided tongues as of fire' and felt it would bring another element to the mass with its intense drama. I have set the text in Latin in keeping with the rest of the mass; this is a translation from the King James Version, Acts 2:2-4: *And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

The *Missa Brevis 'Tongues of Fire'* was commissioned by the Thames Philharmonic Choir and the Kingston Brass Ensemble, and first performed in May 2000 at Kingston Parish Church, Surrey. In May 2013 the London Festival of Contemporary Church Music Choir performed a revised version for choir and organ in St Pancras Church, London (the version we're performing tonight).

Noel Rawsthorne, who composed this organ solo, studied in Manchester and was organist of Liverpool Cathedral for 25 years – from 1955-1980.

Aria **Noel Rawsthorne**

Away in a manger **Arr David Willcocks** **(ALL)**

John Rutter is, happily, also a living and breathing composer, one much loved by singers and audiences alike. His first compositions, as a student, were for the fine mixed voice Choir of Clare College, Cambridge, just a short walk from King's. His *Requiem* was the main work in our choir's summer concert in June 2015.

Nativity Carol **John Rutter**

O little town of Bethlehem **Arr Ralph Vaughan Williams** **(ALL)**

INTERVAL: Refreshments available

Some say...

Donald Judge

The composer writes: I wanted to honour Shakespeare before the end of the year celebrating the 400th anniversary of his death (something the Choir will do more fully for the 401st next June!) but there is very little by The Bard of Avon that mentions Christmas. A notable exception occurs in *Hamlet* – in Act 1 Scene 1 where the Ghost of the King – Hamlet’s murdered father – stalks the walls of Elsinore Castle and is encountered by three courtiers. The text I selected includes some of their dialogue before Marcellus’ seven line speech beginning *Some say...* The result is a dramatic *scena* for soloists and choir, with an important role for the organ.

When I set Gerald Manley Hopkins’ poem *May Magnificat* for the Choir and orchestra a few years ago, my initial musical idea was just a single note – a solo flute playing B above middle C, from which the music grew organically. *Some say...* also starts with a single note, an E low in the organ pedals. It uses chord clusters and modal scales similar to those in *May Magnificat*. However, in this piece the note E is present throughout – sometimes a deep sustained pedal, sometimes high above the voices, sometimes a repeated staccato note somewhere in between. Thus the note E underpins or colours all the harmonies and melodies – though the music studiously avoids E major!

The piece falls into four contrasting sections, unified by shared musical material. In the first, the organ creates a menacing atmosphere with discordant chords and jagged rhythms, until Marcellus (tenor) interrupts and the chorus voices its disquiet, initially in spoken whispers. In the second section, Marcellus and Bernardo (alto), echoed by the chorus, describe the behaviour of the ghost. Horatio (baritone) challenges it, but it ignores him and vanishes. Bernardo points out that it disappeared at the sound of the cock (its repeated crowing represented by the organ).

People in Shakespeare’s day, including King James I, were obsessed with supernatural beings – ghosts, witches, and malign fairies. In the third section, Marcellus recounts an old legend that says the cock crows all night long at the Nativity, banishing evil spirits from the Earth. His words beginning *Some say...* are set to a long-breathed, stately melody, punctuated by the organ’s fleeting reminders of the Ghost. These disappear as the chorus takes up Marcellus’ words in a contrapuntal section, building to an ecstatic climax that seems to dispel the doom and gloom.

I puzzled for some time as to a satisfactory but surprising conclusion, until the Nativity reference came to my rescue. The appearance of the Angels to the Shepherds that first Christmas Eve must have been as unsettling as the Ghost in *Hamlet*. I chose Latin words familiar from the *Gloria* of the Mass and English ones from St Luke’s Gospel – the King James Bible, completed during Shakespeare’s lifetime. The singers are now Angel messengers – but it’s no song of triumph: rather, the music has a breathless energy – different voice parts even deliver alternate syllables of some words. Their music would like to be in a bright C major, but never quite succeeds. I had in mind an imaginary rustic folk carol with drum and squeezebox, but also a real Italian Renaissance painting. *The Annunciation* by Simone Martini depicts a horrified Mary recoiling from a Gabriel who holds out a substantial olive branch and looks as anxious as she does. While my Angels deliver their message repeatedly to the terrified Shepherds, they never achieve the confidence or unity they show in *Glory to God* in Handel’s *Messiah*. Alongside new snatches of melody, they also use existing (worrying!) material above the repeated E, underlining their supernatural quality. Finally, like the violins in Handel’s version, the Angels vanish into Heaven, leaving only the silence of bewildered witnesses – who, like the three courtiers, have to decide whether to believe their eyes and ears, and what to do next.

MARCELLUS	What, has this thing appear'd again to-night?
CHORUS	‘twas here! ...'tis but our fantasy... ...this dreaded sight... ...twice seen of us... ...this apparition come... ...the bell then beating one...
MARCELLUS	Peace, break thee off; look, where it comes again!
CHORUS	it comes again!
BERNARDO	It would be spoke to.
MARCELLUS	Question it, Horatio.
HORATIO	By heaven I charge thee, speak! <i>The cock crows</i>
MARCELLUS	It is offended.
BERNARDO	See, it stalks away!

HORATIO	Stay! speak! I charge thee, speak!
MARCELLUS / CH	'Tis gone!
BERNARDO*	It faded on the crowing of the cock. <i>*originally Marcellus</i>
MARCELLUS / CHORUS	Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated, The bird of dawning singeth all night long: And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad; The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike, No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm, So hallow'd and so gracious is the time.
CHORUS / SOLOISTS	Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis. Fear not! Gloria! Great joy! A Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. Gloria.

William Shakespeare / Latin Mass / St Luke

Kenneth Leighton was born in the same year as Noel Rawsthorne – 1929 – in Wakefield. Vaughan Williams was one of his early mentors. He held university posts in Leeds, Oxford, and until his death in 1988, Edinburgh.

Paeon	Kenneth Leighton
O come all ye faithful	Arr David Willcocks (ALL)
Fantasia on Christmas Carols	Ralph Vaughan Williams
I saw three ships	John Rutter

Ralph Vaughan Williams is a remarkable figure in English musical history. In the early twentieth century, along with Cecil Sharp and Gustav Holst, he helped to record and preserve a rich oral heritage in imminent danger of being lost. He made imaginative use of some of the folk melodies he discovered in his own pieces, while the character of English folksong helped to shape his own melodic gift. This was revolutionary, given that most English classical composers of his day, including Elgar, were steeped in the German symphonic tradition, Mendelssohn and Wagner: they knew little of their own folk culture – unlike, for example, Czech, Hungarian and Scandinavian composers.

RVW has been unfairly assessed by some as being of the 'cow-pat' school of English pastoral composers. Indeed the very suggestion of such a 'school' seems an insult to many fine composers, some unjustly neglected, and some of whom perished before their time in the mud and horror of Flanders. Mahler, Sibelius, Nielsen and Shostakovich tower as 20th century symphonists, but our own RVW isn't far behind. *A Sea Symphony* is more massive, daring and extraordinary than almost any first symphony in history and far removed from any cows or indeed the countryside. Anyone seeking an idyllic view of pastoral life should look to Beethoven's 6th rather than RVW's 3rd – his *Pastoral Symphony* is a searing lament for the tragedy of the First World War, in which the composer drove ambulances bearing wounded soldiers from the Front. There are few symphonies more disturbing and dissonant than his 4th, written as World War II threatened, and few as desolate as the 8th, the '*Antarctic*'. Above all, RVW was a down to earth, practical musician, and certainly never precious or sentimental. The son of a Gloucestershire vicar, he wrote one of the most beautiful of all hymn tunes, *Down Ampney*, for the words *Come down, O love divine*, named after the village of his birth. But when Walford Davies claimed he'd written *Solemn Melody* 'on his knees', it's said that RVW countered scornfully that he wrote his religious music exactly like his secular works – sitting on his backside.

The songs he chose for his *Fantasia on English Carols* came not from prayer, or his head, or from a book, but from living folk singers in remote villages. Now familiar to most people, they weren't well-known in 1912. The piece contains all the composer's characteristic and contradictory traits – the pastoral, the rumbustious, the reflective and the joyful, underpinned by his distinctive harmonic language. Towards the end, he skilfully combines carols with different time signatures, giving exciting cross rhythms. The piece finishes on an unexpectedly hushed and consoling note, a glimpse of the Eternal. But please restrain your applause, as we follow it immediately with John Rutter's setting of *I saw Three Ships*. Like old wine in new bottles, familiar traditional words are set to a brand new (and very catchy) tune with plenty of humour and an upbeat finish.