

# Bollington Festival *Choir*

Sunday April 9<sup>th</sup> 2017, 7.30pm at St Oswald's Church Bollington

## Let God Arise

Music by Bach, Purcell, Schubert and Handel

**Hrafnhildur Björnsdóttir** *soprano*

**Mary Halloran** *alto*

**Richard Pollock** *tenor*

**Mike Bell** *bass*

**Nicholas Ward** and **Simon Gilks** *violins*

**Owen Little** *viola*

**Graham Morris** *cello*

**Andrew Monk** *double bass*

**Rosalind Hall** *continuo*

**Donald Judge** *conductor*

**Bollington Festival Choir**

### **Sopranos**

Christine Anderton, Olwyn Bloor, Sue Cooper, Val Cutter, Lynne Froggatt, Dot Graham, Jean Ransley, Marcia Rowlands, Sarah Rutherford, Christine Winton

### **Altos**

Anthea Burdus, Claire Barnett, Pat Bell, Sally Bence, Christine Brear, Glenys Gem, Liz Goodwin, Mary Halloran, Pat Hill, Chris Holohan, Lynn Knowling, Sally Parsonage, Jenny Thorpe, Janet Welch

### **Tenors**

Jim Kendon, David Ransley, Gordon Rowlands, Roger Taylor

### **Basses**

Mike Bell, Stephen Goldby, Richard Murphy, Gordon Price, Ian Ray, Ambrose Smith, Graham Smith, Craig Stagg, David Ward

Steve Thorpe has a throat infection: we wish him a complete and speedy recovery. We're very grateful to Richard Pollock for agreeing to sing the tenor solos and Mike Bell for singing in the Bach duet at short notice. This has enabled the concert to proceed as planned. Thanks also to: Rosalind Hall, the Choir's patient and expert accompanist, who has also taken sectional and soloists' rehearsals and is playing continuo tonight; Caroline Hewitt for engaging our splendid freelance orchestral players; to St Oswald's Church for their lovely venue and warm welcome; and to the volunteers providing front of house and refreshments.

“The centre of our European repertoire” was Stravinsky’s description of Bach’s 200 or so church cantatas, mostly written in Leipzig in the 1720s at the rate of one a week for Sunday services at the Thomaskirche. Bach’s musicians must have been prodigiously talented to cope: the Cantatas still inspire and terrify performers in equal measure. Many of them feature elaborate treatments of Lutheran hymn melodies which would have been familiar to 18<sup>th</sup> century congregations.

Cantata 192 is no exception, though it’s unusual in that it sets just the three verses of Martin Luther’s hymn – the one we know as *Now thank we all our God* – with no recitatives, meditative arias, or final chorale. But one melody inspires three entirely different settings. In form, it’s like a concerto, the outer movements in G major and the central one in D major. The chorus sings verses one and three, the melody given to the sopranos in long notes against ornate counterpoint from the other singers and instruments. Sandwiched between the two choruses, verse two is a duet for soprano and bass.

**Chorus:** Nun danket alle Gott mit Herzen, Mund und Händen,  
Der grosse Dinge thut an uns und allen Enden,  
Der uns von Mutterleib und Kindesbeinen an,  
Unzählig viel zu gut und noch jetzund gethan.

*Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices,  
Who wondrous things has done, in Whom this world rejoices;  
Who from our mothers’ arms has blessed us on our way,  
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.*

**Duet:** Der ewig reiche Gott woll uns in unserm Leben,  
Ein immer fröhlich Herz und edlen Frieden geben  
Und uns in seiner Gnad erhalten fort und fort,  
Und uns aus aller Not erlösen hier und dort.

*O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,  
With ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us;  
And keep us in His grace, and guide us when perplexed;  
And free us from all ills, in this world and the next!*

**Chorus:** Lob, Ehr’ und Preis sei Gott, dem Vater und dem Sohne,  
Und dem, der beiden gleich im hohen Himmelsthronen,  
Dem dreieinigen Gott, als der ursprünglich war,  
Und ist und bleiben wird jetzt und immerdar.

*All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given;  
The Son and Him Who reigns with Them in highest Heaven;  
The one eternal God, whom earth and Heaven adore;  
For thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.*

*Martin Luther, translated by Catherine Winkworth*

In the year Bach and Handel were born, a 26 year old English genius who would only live another ten years was busy composing another extraordinary body of work, sacred and profane, from the sublime to the ridiculous (to hear some of the latter, don’t miss our Shakespearean Shenanigans on June 11<sup>th</sup>!)

Purcell's best-known work, and only true opera, *Dido and Aeneas*, was written for a girls' school to a libretto by Nahum Tate, perhaps most famous as author of the words of *While shepherds watched*. It's based on a story told by Virgil in *The Aeneid*. Dido, Queen of Carthage, falls in love with the Trojan hero, Aeneas. Fake news is not just a 21<sup>st</sup> century curse, and the witches plotting Dido's downfall create a spirit disguised as the gods' messenger, Mercury. He tricks Aeneas into abandoning his beloved and setting sail for Rome. Dido's fate, the only consolation for this betrayal, is suicide.

Dido's farewell as she releases a deadly asp from basket to bosom is one of the most inspired and affecting arias in all opera, using a musical form for which Purcell has no equal: in Italian it's a *passacaglia*, but in English a more prosaic *ground* (short for ground bass.) Above a repeated chromatic phrase on the 'cello, Purcell creates a melody and dissonant harmonies that perfectly capture a noble and yet very human tragedy.

**Dido:** Thy hand, Belinda, darkness shades me, on thy bosom let me rest. More I would, but Death invades me; Death is now a welcome guest. When I am laid in earth, may my wrongs create no trouble in thy breast; Remember me, but ah! forget my fate.

**Franz Peter Schubert 1797-1828**

**Mass in G, D 167**

Like Purcell, Schubert had all too brief a life, but like all the composers in tonight's programme, was prolific, possessed a supreme gift for melody, distinctive use of harmony, and the ability to match exactly the emotion of the words he set. Dating from 1815, the teenager's Mass in G has modest proportions but a big lyrical heart, perfect for the Baroque parish church in Lichtental, Vienna where the composer was baptised and worshipped and where it was first performed. Although Schubert later added woodwind, brass and timpani, we perform it in the original intimate version with strings.

**Kyrie:** Kyrie eleison: Christe eleison

*Lord, have mercy: Christ, have mercy*

**Gloria:** Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis. Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te, gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam, Domine Deus, Rex caelestis, Deus Pater omnipotens. Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe, Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis; qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram. Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere nobis. Quoniam tu solus Sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu solus Altissimus, Jesu Christe, cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris. Amen.

*Glory be to God on high, and in earth peace, goodwill towards men. We praise thee, we bless thee, we worship thee, we glorify thee, we give thanks to thee, for thy great glory. O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty. O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesu Christ; O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Thou that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Thou that takest away the sins of the world, receive our prayer. Thou that sittest at the right hand of God the Father, have mercy upon us. For thou only art holy; thou only art the Lord; thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost, art most high in the glory of God the Father. Amen.*

**Credo:** Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem, factorem caeli et terrae, visibilium omnium et invisibilium. Et in unum Dominum, Jesum Christum, Filium Dei unigenitum, et ex Patre natum ante omnia saecula. Deum de Deo, Lumen de Lumine, Deum verum de Deo vero, genitum non factum, consubstantialem Patri; per quem omnia facta sunt. Qui propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem descendit de caelis. Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine, et homo factus est. Crucifixus etiam pro nobis sub Pontio Pilato, passus, et sepultus est, et resurrexit tertia die, secundum Scripturas, et ascendit in caelum, sedet ad dexteram Patris. Et iterum venturus est cum gloria, judicare vivos et mortuos, cuius regni non erit finis. Credo in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum et vivificantem, qui ex Patre Filioque procedit. Qui cum Patre et Filio simul adoratur et conglorificatur: qui locutus est per

prophetas. Et unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam. Confiteor unum baptisma in remissionem peccatorum. Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum, et vitam venturi saeculi. Amen.

*I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and was buried. He descended into Hell. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.*

**Sanctus and Benedictus:** Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua. Hosanna in excelsis. Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini. Hosanna in excelsis. Hosanna in excelsis.

*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts: heaven and earth are full of thy glory: Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna, in the highest. Hosanna in the highest.*

**Agnus Dei:** Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.

*Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.*

## INTERVAL

*refreshments are available at the rear of the church*

**Georg Frideric Handel 1685-1759**

**O had I Jubal's Lyre**

**Ombra mai fu**

**Lascia ch'io pianga**

**Chandos Anthem 11, Let God Arise**

**Oh had I Jubal's Lyre** forms part of the triumphant conclusion to the oratorio *Joshua*. The hero, having vanquished Jericho, gives Caleb the land promised to him by Moses. Caleb promises his daughter Achsah's hand in marriage to whoever can conquer the city of Debir. Othniel rises to that challenge, and Achsah sings this stirring song, proving that she does indeed have Miriam's tuneful voice!

The librettist Thomas Morrell refers to Genesis 4:21: *And his brother's name was Jubal (one of Cain's sons): he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ (a lyre is a small harp): and to Exodus 15: 20-21: Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took the timbrel (tambourine) in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea – of the horses and chariots in the penultimate number of Let God arise!*

**Achsah:** Oh, had I Jubal's lyre, or Miriam's tuneful voice! To sounds like his I would aspire; in songs like hers rejoice. My humble strains but faintly show how much to Heav'n and thee I owe.

**Ombra mai fu** is sung at the outset of the opera *Serse (Xerxes)* by the eponymous hero. First performed in London in 1738, *Serse* was a critical and financial disaster, running for a mere five performances, largely due to its mix of *opera seria* and *opera buffa* – London audiences found the 'continental' blend of the serious and the comic in *Serse* a step too far.

In this aria, sometimes known as *Handel's Largo*, Xerxes sings to a 'beloved', but it isn't a girl – it's a plane tree where he always seeks shade and inspiration. Soon afterwards, he spots a pretty maid, Romilda. She's in love with Xerxes' brother, but Xerxes decides the tree wishes him to make her his bride and queen in preference to his betrothed, Amastre. Amastre is suspicious and disguises herself as

a man so she can keep an eye on Xerxes. Despite Xerxes machinations which put several lives in peril, everyone eventually marries the right person, all is forgiven, and all live happily ever after. *Serse* lay forgotten and unperformed for almost 200 years, until a revival in Göttingen in 1924 inspired over 90 performances in 15 German cities over the following two years alone.

**Serse:** Ombra mai fu di vegetabile, cara ed amabile, soave più.

*Never was the shade of any plant dearer, more lovely, or more sweet.*

**Lascia ch'io pianga** is from the earlier and, at the time, much more successful opera *Rinaldo*. It was written in 1711, the year before Handel came to England, for its first performance in London in 1712. The story is set during the Crusades. Almirena, a Christian, has been captured, separated from her lover Rinaldo, and imprisoned by Armida, the Saracen Queen of Damascus, and a sorceress.

Handel was a musical magpie and recycler, and *Lascia ch'io pianga* is the third reincarnation of a melody that began life as an instrumental *sarabande* in the opera *Almira*, had words added to create an aria in the Italian oratorio which translates as *The Triumph of Time and Truth*, before becoming this lament.

**Almirena:** Lascia ch'io pianga mia cruda sorte, e che sospiri la libertà. Il duolo infranga queste ritorte de' miei martiri sol per pietà.

*Let me weep over my cruel fate, and that I may sigh for freedom. Let my sadness shatter these chains of my suffering, if only out of pity.*

### **Chandos Anthem 11: Let God Arise**

Handel was in England for almost twelve years before he managed to set up his own home (and wine cellar!) in London in 1723. Until then, board and lodging formed part of his contracts with aristocratic patrons. From 1717-1719 he lived and worked at Cannons, the new stately home of James Brydges, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Chandos – a name best known today as a record label. Cannons, near Stanmore in Middlesex, built 'at vast expense' in 1713: it cost an eye-watering £200000. Brydges' ostentatious wealth (some inherited, but some (allegedly!) acquired unethically while he was Paymaster General during the Wars of Spanish Succession) also ran to hiring the world's most celebrated composer.

Among many works Handel composed at and for Cannons were 12 dramatic anthems on Biblical texts, forerunners of the later oratorios. One of the longest, *Let God arise*, sets Psalm 68 and celebrates a vengeful Old Testament God enabling enemies to be vanquished. Even here, Handel indulged in some recycling, as material from his early *Dixit Dominus* is re-worked in a section which depicts the scattering of the enemy and their subsequent flight. The final movement foreshadows the most famous piece he ever wrote. The personnel needed for the Chandos Anthems varies enormously, suggesting Handel didn't always have a full complement of musicians and had to cut his coat according to his cloth. *Let God arise* is the only one to use all four SATB voices for both chorus and solos. It lacks a viola part, but one has been created especially for this performance, partly to cover the single oboe Handel had at his disposal.

**Sinfonia** (instrumental)

**Chorus**

Let God arise, and let His enemies be scatter'd; Let them also that hate Him, flee before Him.

**Aria: Tenor**

Like as the smoke vanisheth, so shalt thou drive them away;

Like as wax melteth at the fire, so let the ungodly perish at the presence of God.

**Aria: Soprano**

Let the righteous be glad, and rejoice before God; Let them also be merry and joyful.

**Duet: Alto & Bass / Chorus**

O sing unto God, and sing praises unto His name. Praised be the Lord!

**Chorus**

At Thy rebuke, O God, both the chariot and the horse are fall'n.

**Chorus**

Blessed be God, Alleluia!

## Biographies

**Hrafnhildur Björnsdóttir** is Icelandic by birth but lives in Bollington. We're especially delighted that Habba is joining us tonight, as laryngitis prevented her singing in our concert last June. She trained at the Reykjavik School of Singing in her astonishingly musical native land and then at Trinity College of Music in London. She has performed all over the world in concerts and on stage in operatic roles from Monteverdi to Britten. In 2012 she coached the Festival Choir to sing in her native tongue when we performed *Two Icelandic Lullabies*. She and her pianist partner Martyn Parkes are often to be found in restaurants, entertaining and delighting diners as *Impromptu Opera*.



**Richard Pollock** was awarded a distinction in Performance from the Royal Northern College of Music as a post-graduate, whilst maintaining a successful career in education. Specialising in solo oratorio and recitals – singing in cathedrals, churches and major concert halls across the country, including Manchester's Bridgewater Hall and Birmingham Symphony and Town Halls – he has received particular praise as the Evangelist in Bach's Passions, as a variety of Handel's heroes, and as Britten's Saint Nicolas and Elgar's Gerontius. Richard is the Headmaster of an independent school in Cheshire, and still finds time to be a husband, father of three, choral conductor, singing teacher, sailor, cook, charity-cyclist, rugby-watcher, F1 fan and dog-walker.



**Mary Halloran** and **Mike Bell** are both members of the Festival Choir and have often sung solos in our concerts. Mary has sung in many choirs including the William Byrd Singers and also ensures, as our Librarian, that we always have the right music. Mike has given solo recitals, most recently a memorable performance of Schubert's *Winterreise* at the Arts Centre, accompanied by Martyn Parkes, with an introduction by David Ward, and artwork from Bollington Art Group, inspired by the songs.

**Dates for your Diary**

Our final concert of the 2017-18 Season is on Sunday June 11<sup>th</sup>, 7.30 pm at Bollington Arts Centre. **Shakespearean Shenanigans** celebrates the 401<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Bard's death with music inspired by him and composed by Thomas Linley the Younger, Henry Purcell, and Ralph Vaughan Williams. Choir members will also contribute solo songs setting words by Shakespeare.

If you're interested in singing with us, all you have to do is come along to the next rehearsal which is this Tuesday, 8-10 pm at the Arts Centre. There are no auditions and you will get a warm welcome!

You can keep up with us at our website: [www.bollfestchoir.org.uk](http://www.bollfestchoir.org.uk)