

Bollington Festival Choir

St Oswald's Church

The Promise of Easter

March 26 2023

Kerry Firth *soprano*

Dot Graham *soprano*

Steve Thorpe *tenor*

Mike Bell *bass*

John Bush *trumpet* strings led by Nicola Bright Rosalind Hall *continuo* Donald Judge *conductor*

Bollington Festival Choir is delighted to welcome back: **Kerry** who sang in *Messiah for All 2022* in aid of East Cheshire Eye Society. **John** who was our guest trumpet in *Messiah for All 2021*. **Nicola** and her quintet who played for the Advent concert and *Messiah for All* in 2022. **Dot, Steve** and **Mike** are stalwarts of the Choir who have sung many solos. **Rosalind** is our accompanist for rehearsals and in many concerts. **Donald** joined the Choir in 1976, was its accompanist for many years, and succeeded Dr John Coope MBE as its conductor in 2002.

Donald Judge: The Donkey

The Donkey

When fishes flew and forests walked
And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood
Then surely I was born.

With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,
The devil's walking parody
On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,
Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;
One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
And palms before my feet.

G K Chesterton

The composer writes: I'd long been fascinated by G K Chesterton's magical poem when I took the opportunity to set it for the Choir's concert in the Methodist Church on Palm Sunday 2005 which included Nielsen's *Springtime in Funen* and *Spring* from Haydn's *The Seasons*. It used the same large orchestra, and Lucy Butler, a young member of Bollington Festival Music Theatre, was the soloist, a role performed tonight by **Dot Graham**. For this concert and venue, the accompaniment has been re-worked for trumpet, strings and piano.

The initial musical idea from which the piece grows is the familiar tune for *Ride on, ride on in majesty* that comes from Thomas Williams' *Psalmody Evangelica* published in 1789. It's never sung, but the first four notes, with the last of them flattened, opens the music for the first verse. Repeated minimalist motifs from the accompaniment create a vision of the nightmare landscape to which the chorus adds the words. In the first three verses, the music builds from a quiet beginning to a loud climax. The tempo is quicker for v 2, where the harmonies shift between chords a semitone apart; and slower for v 3, where sustained notes from the strings sound above and below the singers. Their music is a sustained melody in canon between two voices, while the other two add occasional spiky comments. The Donkey's

voice finally emerges quietly from the hubbub with the word Fools! and new, more fragmented music sets v 4. The final section imagines a calm but ecstatic procession on the first Palm Sunday. It's a *passacaglia* where the bass line, derived from those first 4 notes of the hymn, underpins many repetitions of the word *Osanna*. In the manner of a chorale prelude by Bach, the high trumpet adds the entire melody of the hymn, but in occasional groups of 4 notes that dramatically change the tonality before it finally ends in A, that of the entire piece.

Giuseppe Verdi: Adagio for trumpet and strings

Felix Mendelssohn: Cantata, O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden

This magnificent tribute to J S Bach whose music Mendelssohn revived in Germany and Great Britain dates from about 1840 and consists of two substantial choruses framing a solo aria sung by **Steve Thorpe**. The tune of the *Passion Chorale* was written by Hans Leo Hassler whose music featured in the Choir's Advent concert in 2022. It sets Paul Gerhardt's words from 1656 which most commonly translate in English as O sacred head, sore wounded, and was used by Bach in his Passions. For text and translations (from Choral Public Domain Library cpdl.org) see overleaf.

INTERVAL Refreshments are available at the rear of the church. Please support our raffle with magnificent prizes!

Felix Mendelssohn: O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden

1 Chorus:

O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden, voll Schmerz und voller Hohn,
O Haupt, zum Spott gebunden mit einer Dornenkron.
O Haupt, sonst schön gekrönt mit höchster Ehr und Zier,
Jetzt aber hoch verhöhnet: begrüßet seist du mir.

*O sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded with thorns, Thine only crown;
How pale Thou art with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn!
How does that visage languish, which once was bright as morn!*

2 Aria: Du, dessen Todeswunden, die sündge Welt versöhnt,
Den sie dafür gebunden, den sie mit Schmach gekrönt,
Der Schmerzen litt und Plagen, für mich am Kreuze hier,
Der meine Sünd getragen, begrüßet seist du mir!

*You, whose tormented body redeemed the sinful world,
Whom they had bound so gladly, whom they with shame had crowned,
Who suffered grief and passion for me upon the cross,
Who bore all my transgression, I greet you in distress.*

3 Chorale: Ich will hier bei dir stehen, verachte mich doch nicht;
Von dir will ich nicht gehen, wenn mir das Herz schon bricht,
Wenn ich einst wird erblassen in letzter Todespein,
Alsdann will ich dich fassen, und noch dein eigen sein. Amen.

*Here I will stand beside Thee, from Thee I will not part;
O Saviour, do not chide me! when breaks Thy loving heart,
When soul and body languish in death's cold, cruel grasp,
Then, in Thy deepest anguish, Thee in mine arms I'll clasp.*

Part 2 is a celebratory Easter sequence of music by Georg Frideric Handel

from Suite in D for trumpet and strings:

1 Overture & 2 Allegro

from Messiah:

Chorus, Let all the angels of God worship Him

from Samson:

Aria, Let the bright seraphim soprano

from Messiah:

Recitative, He that dwelleth in heaven & Aris, Thou shalt break them tenor

Chorus, Hallelujah

Aria, I know that my Redeemer liveth soprano

Chorus, Since by man came death

Recitative, Behold, I tell you a mystery & Aria, The trumpet shall sound bass

Aria, If God be for us, who can be against us? soprano

from Suite in D for trumpet and strings:

3 Aria, 4 Untitled, 5 March

from Messiah:

Aria, Rejoice greatly soprano

Choruses, Worthy is the Lamb & Amen

The description of Britain as the *Land without music (except street music)* made in 1904 by the German critic Oscar Schmidt was, of course, nonsense. Maybe he confused street music with the wondrous folk music being collected and preserved by (among others) Cecil Sharp and Ralph Vaughan Williams, one of many composers to incorporate it in his own works, which prompted another underserved slur – the Cowpat School – from Elizabeth Lutyens, composer and daughter of the architect Edwin. But it is true that “English” music has always relied on foreign inspiration. The Elizabethan madrigalists and church composers were strongly influenced by Italian and Flemish masters of polyphony. Purcell took on the latest Italian and French styles with aplomb. By the time of Mendelssohn’s visit in the 1840s, our unparalleled choral tradition inspired him, and he inspired generations of native composers. Inspired by Brahms, Parry and others wrote in the German symphonic tradition. Elgar, largely self-taught, learned almost everything he knew from Wagner. Since Britten, British music and musicians have been both a national and an international wonder.

Handel, enticed to our shores by the Hanoverian King George II, had honed his craft studying the Italian masters, including in their native land. A supremely versatile performer, composer and entrepreneur, his *forte* on arrival was Italian opera, sung in Italian, then all the rage in London and throughout Europe. When it fell out of fashion, Handel struck on the brilliant ploy of setting biblical narratives with English texts to the music of Italian opera. This culminated in *Messiah*, written in just 21 days in 1741. It doesn’t follow a narrative, but is a series of reflections with an inspired text compiled from the *Bible* and the *Coverdale Psalter* by Charles Jennens. Although it was designed to benefit the Foundling Hospital in London, its premiere in Dublin was necessitated by concerns especially about the operatic divas who would sing in it, even in a theatre rather than a church. But it soon became an iconic “English” work and one of the most frequently performed. Much of this sequence may be familiar: Handel, a musical magpie who often stole his own music to adapt, did exactly that both in *Messiah* and in the Suite that intersperses the vocal numbers.