

ST. ALBAN'S, HOLBORN
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Programme £1

LONDON CONCORD SINGERS

Musical Director Malcolm Cottle

Assistant Musical Director Graham Owen

CHORAL MUSIC FOR LENT

Thursday 31 March, 1977 at 7.30pm

MISERERE

JOSQUIN

STABAT MATER

PALESTRINA

CRUCIFIXUS

LOTTI

VIA CRUCIS

LISZT

QUATRE MOTETS

POULENC

(pour un temps de penitence)

MISERERE MEI, DEUS (Ps 51)

JOSQUIN DES PRES
(c. 1445-1521)

Josquin was born in Hainault, in what is now Belgium, about the year 1445 and started his musical career as a choirboy. As a youth he followed the example of many of his predecessors in the Franco-Flemish school of composers and went to Italy, serving at the court of Milan. Then, from about 1486 to 1494 he served the papal court after which he worked at Ferrara. From 1503 to 1515 he was composer to the court of Louis XII of France. After the King's death he retired first to Brussels and then to Condé where he remained until his death in 1521.

Josquin did not have to wait for fame, he was one of the first composers to benefit from the new art of music printing and his works were known all over Europe after about 1500. He was so highly thought of by other musicians that on his death three composers wrote Laments, just as he had on the death of Ockeghem. Martin Luther said that he was 'master of the notes, which must do as he wishes: other composers must do as the notes wish'.

One of the characteristics of Josquin's writing is his constant desire to vary the choral effects. This is particularly true of his setting of the great penitential psalm *Miserere mei, Deus*, the full choir is used sparingly, alternating with duets and trio passages. Divided into three sections, the whole work is pervaded by an ostinato repetition of the words 'Miserere mei, Deus' to the same notes with which it opens. This phrase, sung after each of the twenty-one verses of the psalm, descends through an octave in Part I, ascends, in notes twice as fast, in Part II, and then descends through the interval of a fifth in Part III. The *Miserere* is basically for four voices but a fifth voice is added for each repetition of the opening words.

STABAT MATER

PALESTRINA

(c. 1525-1594)

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina is generally considered to be the greatest writer of church music of the 16th century. He stood at a crossroads of composition. In one direction he looked back to the development of contrapuntal composition from all over Europe, particularly that of the Flemish Masters, whilst looking forward to the more elaborate music of Bach.

Although he wrote a quantity of madrigals, it is for his sacred compositions that he is best known. He assimilated the current styles but he refined them. Much of his writing is contrapuntal, but it always has a great clarity and simplicity. He was closely connected with putting into practice the demands of the Council of Trent; which stated that 'the music of the service must be purged of all secular, lascivious or impure matter and must be devoted not only to the delight of the ears but, above all, to the worship of God and the encouragement of faith'. To this end; the music was to be clear and lucid and nothing was to interfere with the easy intelligibility of the text. Palestrina's music was considered to be the perfect model of the style demanded by the Council.

Stabat Mater is an ancient poem written in the 13th century by Jacopone de Benedictus. It is an intensely emotional poem describing the Crucifixion with special focus on Mary, the mother of Jesus. Palestrina's setting is for double choir and was originally written for the Papal Choir, by whom it was treasured as an exclusive possession for nearly two hundred years, until Dr Burney, when visiting Rome, in 1770, managed to get hold of a copy, probably by bribing one of the singers.

The work, although continuous, falls into five distinct sections, the opening 'Stabat Mater' is mostly antiphonal with the two choirs only joining together on two occasions. The second starting at 'Eia, Mater', is in triple time, returning to common time for the third section, 'Sancta Mater'. In the fourth section, 'Juxta Crucem', the texture becomes much lighter with only the two Soprano lines, the first Altos and second Tenors, this section would almost certainly have been sung by soloists. The work concludes with a section, starting at 'Inflammatum et accensus', which looks forward to the glory that is to come.

CRUCIFIXUS

LOTTI

(1667-1740)

Antonio Lotti was probably the greatest of the Venetian composers of the first half of the 18th century. He was appointed as maestro di capella of St Marks for the last four years of his life and was therefore a direct musical descendant of the great Venetians, the Gabriellis and Monteverdi. Although he is best remembered for his religious works he was a master of all forms of writing and was a noted teacher of both singing and composition. One composer on whom Lotti had great influence was Handel, who, as a young man, met him on a visit to Italy in 1706.

Several settings by Lotti of the Crucifixus section of the Credo have survived. It is not clear if they were part of full Mass settings or individual compositions. This setting is for eight voices, and is remarkable for its opening in which the voices enter one by one; starting with the second basses it builds up through the choir, until all eight voices are singing the word 'Crucifixus'.

There will be an Interval of 15 minutes

VIA CRUCIS

LISZT
(1811-1886)

Organ soloist: Graham Owen

'For want of a better term we may well call the new music Humanitarian. It must be devotional, strong, and drastic, uniting — on a colossal scale — the theatre and the Church, dramatic and sacred, superb and simple, fiery and free, strong and calm, translucent and emotional'. This was Liszt's idea of how church music should be in a letter he wrote to the *Gazette Musicale* in 1834. He certainly lived up to his ideals in his earlier sacred works, particularly in his great oratorio *Christus*, a colossal work, taking over 4 hours to perform, using enormous forces, but rarely all at the same time, there are movements for orchestra alone, and others for unaccompanied chorus and various other combinations.

Via Crucis, written towards the end of his life in 1878-9, certainly lives up to some of Liszt's concepts of religious music, although it is mostly fairly restrained in mood. It is musically a very prophetic work, being a study in a harmonic scheme largely based on the whole-tone scale, and this nearly 30 years before Debussy. In many ways it is a miniature version of *Christus*, consisting of fifteen short movements, a hymn and the fourteen stations of the Cross, some of the movements being choral, some organ solos and the rest are for various combinations of soloists, choir and organ. The opening hymn is the plainsong 'Vexilla Regis' whose first three notes rise by the intervals of a whole tone and a third respectively, which is the phrase used in Gregorian chant to symbolise the Cross. This three note phrase pervades the whole piece. The text was arranged by Liszt's mistress the Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein, and is a mixture of Biblical quotations, medieval Latin hymns and German Chorales.

QUATRE MOTETS POUR UN TEMPS DE PENITENCE

POULENC
(1899-1963)

Francis Poulenc was a member of the group of French-based composers who called themselves 'Les Six' which included Honegger and Milhaud. The philosophy of Les Six was that they should reject Wagnerianism and Impressionism and that they should derive their inspiration from the witty and wordly art of music hall and circus.

Poulenc was a remarkable pianist and much of his early music, particularly that for piano, and also his songs have a tendency towards witty pastiche. This carried over into such works as his ballet *Les Biches* and the opera *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*. But in spite of the immediate charm of these works, his sacred music shows a much more profound feeling and is devoid of the many facile mannerisms which earned him popular success. He once compared his religious convictions to the faith of a country vicar, and it is this idea of simplicity that shapes his church music.

The four motets for a time of penitence were written in 1939 and are very typical of Poulenc's religious style, short phrases and sudden dynamic changes, with, for the most part, the melody in the Soprano with a strictly chordal accompaniment from the other voices.

LONDON CONCORD SINGERS

The choir was started in its present form in 1966. It seeks to maintain a small, well-knit group of some thirty voices, practising and performing a wide range of choral music. Its members come from a great variety of backgrounds, though few of them are full-time musicians. The choir's range of activities is equally varied; it has accepted cabaret engagements at many functions, as well as promoting very successful concerts in and around London. In 1974 the choir sang in all three South Bank concert halls, and in St John's, Smith Square, SW1. The group is also much travelled, and has won competitive prizes at home and abroad. It has visited Richmond, Surrey, Walkern in Hertfordshire, Buxton, Castle Howard near York, Chester Cathedral and the Teesside International Festival. Other festival appearances have included Montreux and Dubrovnik. The choir has enjoyed an enthusiastic reception from both audiences and Press.

MALCOLM COTTLE

The conductor sang for many years as a boy with the choir of St Paul's Cathedral, during which time he sang at the Coronation of the Queen. He also, with the Cathedral choir, toured the United States of America. More recently, as well as conducting the London Concord Singers, he has worked as repetiteur with the New Opera Company at Sadlers Wells Theatre, and toured as Musical Director with the show *Close the Coalhouse Door*. He has appeared as Musical Director at the Sheffield Playhouse, the Swan Theatre, Worcester and at the Nottingham Playhouse in *The Canterbury Tales*. Currently he is working as Piano Accompanist for the tenor John Boulter.

The National Federation of Music Societies, to whom this society is affiliated, supports these concerts with funds made available by the Arts Council of Great Britain.

London Concord Singers would welcome friends wishing to subscribe to increase the activities of the group. Anyone requiring further details or wishing to be placed on the mailing list please contact:

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