

**HOLY TRINITY CHURCH
KINGSWAY · LONDON WC1**
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LONDON CONCORD SINGERS

Conductor: Malcolm Cottle

Organ: Graham Owen

Thursday 28 March, 1985 at 7.30pm

Tonight's programme celebrates some of this year's notable centenaries (Bach, Scarlatti and Tallis) as well as including a 20th century masterpiece (Britten's Hymn to St Cecilia) and a rarity, the very fine Mass, Op 54 by Louis Spohr.

Singet dem Herrn.

J S Bach (1685-1750)

Bach spent most of the first thirty years of his life at Leipzig as Kantor of St Thomas' Church, one of the most important appointments for a musician in Protestant Germany. It was during this time that the finest of his church music including the St Matthew and St John Passions, the B minor Mass and the six German motets were composed.

After his death, most of Bach's music was neglected until Mendelssohn led the revival nearly a hundred years later. It seems, however, that the motets escaped this neglect and were frequently performed during that time. Indeed, 'Singet dem Herrn' was sung especially for Mozart by the choir of St Thomas' An onlooker said of Mozart, who did not know Bach's music, that as he listened "his whole soul seemed to be in his ears".

It is not certain for what occasion 'Singet dem Herrn' was written, although Spitta, Bach's biographer, is of the opinion that it was 'a composition for the New Year'. However, it seems that several of Bach's motets were written for funerals or memorial services for local worthies, and, in view of the words of the Chorale used in the second movement, this could well apply in this case.

'Singet dem Herrn' is written for two 4-part choirs. The words are from Psalms 149 and 150 together with the Chorale 'Wie sich ein vater erbarmet', and the piece consists of three movements although the third has two distinct sections, in the second of which the two choirs come together.

I Sing to the Lord a new song: let the congregation of saints praise him.
Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: and let the children of Zion be joyful
in their King.
Let them praise his Name in the dance: let them sing praises
with tabret and harp.

II Choir II (Chorale) Like as a father pitieth his children
So the Lord has pity on all of us.
He knows that we are weak.
That we are only dust.
Like grass before the reaper,
A fading flower.
The wind passes over it
And it is no more there,
So man passes away,
His end is near.

Choir I O God preserve us,
for without thee is nothing made
of all our troubles.
So be our shield and light
and strengthen our hope,
that we may continue our way.
Blessed is the man who
strongly and firmly relies on your mercy.

III Praise the Lord in his noble acts; praise him according
to his excellent greatness.
Let everything that hath breath: praise the Lord,
Hallelujah.

Sonata in E major

Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757)

There is a school of thought that says that several of Bach's 40 preludes and fugues were written, not for harpsichord but for organ, because of the sustained nature of the writing which would not be possible to achieve on the harpsichord. There is similarly a possibility that the same criterion could apply to this sonata by Scarlatti. Whether this is true or not, it certainly works very well on the organ.

Hymn to St Cecilia

Soprano Solo – Helen Errington

Benjamin Britten

Britten spent the early years of the 1939-45 war in the United States, spending much time with a number of other British ex-patriots, including the poet W. H. Auden who wrote the somewhat enigmatic words of this marvellous piece. Britten composed the music on board ship in 1942, whilst returning to the United Kingdom. The work falls into three main sections, and Britten captures the mystic quality of the words to perfection.

INTERVAL 20 mins

Mass Op 54

Louis Spohr

Spohr was born in Brunswick in 1784 and died in Cassel in 1859, making him roughly contemporary with Beethoven (1770-1827), indeed, according to Stanford, he could remember the time that Spohr was a notable conductor and violinist and a copious composer though today, he is mostly remembered for his Nonet.

The Mass, Op 54 for 5 soloists and two 5-part choirs, was written as a result of Spohr's acquaintance in 1820 with Anton Thibault, who conducted a choral society in Heidelberg which sang only old Italian sacred music. Spohr was permitted to study the scores of this hitherto unknown to him period of music, and, in doing so he was inspired to try himself to write polyphonic a capella church music. During the following summer he wrote his Mass. He decided that he did not want to limit himself 'to the old masters' simple progression in triads' but to extend the harmonic structure to 'the rich modulations of the late Mozart's compositional style'. As a result he finished with a work very much of the early Romantic style.

The work sets the usual sections of the Latin Mass, with the occasional textual difference, and with no Hosanna (Osianna in this case) after the Benedictus. The work is set for two 5-part choirs (with divided sopranos in each case), the 1st choir to consist of the softest voices and to be only one-third as strong as the 2nd choir, the soloists to be taken from the 1st choir.

Kyrie
Gloria
Credo
Sanctus/Benedictus
Agnus Dei

Spem in Alium

Thomas Tallis (c.1505-1585)

Tallis started his career before the Reformation, and was organist of Waltham Abbey at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries in 1540. After the Reformation, he obtained a position at the Chapel Royal and served there under four successive monarchs, eventually becoming organist, a post he shared for some time with William Byrd. Also with Byrd, he was given by Queen Elizabeth I the monopoly of printing music and music paper, and like his partner contributed 17 motets to the 34 they published in 1575 under the title of *Cantiones Sacrae*.

The sponsors of the 1575 collection expressed the hope that this first printed set of English motets would advertise the skill of native composers abroad. The monumental 'Spem in Alium', written for no less than 40 voices, set in eight 5-part choirs (with divided basses) was possibly written in the same spirit of patriotic endeavour, and may well have been performed on some great state occasion such as the birthday of either Queen Mary or Queen Elizabeth. It uses a dramatic style rare in English music of the time. The 40 voices enter successively on points of imitation, working down through the eight choirs, but Tallis soon begins to exploit antiphonal effects between the choirs (usually in groups of two choirs at a time), alternatively contrapuntal passages with broad chordal phrases. He keeps his boldest stroke for the first appearance of the word 'respice', where all forty voices enter together on a chord of A major, the previous passage having ended in C major.

LONDON CONCORD SINGERS was formed in 1966 and, for a small ensemble performs a very wide and ambitious range of choral music, both in English and other languages. They have appeared at all three South Bank concert halls in London as well as the Royal Albert Hall and St John's, Smith Square. The choir has travelled widely in search of experience and last year returned from a short trip to Holland. In the past they have visited Switzerland and Yugoslavia and have been invited to Japan in 1986.

May we draw attention to the London Concord Singers' next engagement which is at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on June 9 with the Zemel Choir. The programme will include Bernstein's 'Chichester Psalms' and a new composition by Yehezkel Braun.

Malcolm Cottle studied as a boy chorister at St Paul's Cathedral Choir School, singing at the Coronation and touring the USA. More recently, as well as conducting London Concord he has worked as repetiteur with the New Opera at Sadler's Wells and conducted for Orpheus Opera. He has appeared as Musical Director at the Sheffield Playhouse; the Swan Theatre, Worcester; Nottingham Playhouse and the Wyvern Theatre, Swindon.

The London Concord Singers would welcome friends wishing to subscribe to increase the activities of the group.

Anyone requiring further details or who wish to be placed on the mailing list please contact Malcolm Cottle telephone 226 1392.

The NFMS supports these concerts with funds made available by the Arts Council of Great Britain.

We would remind members of the public that unauthorised recording of the Concert is not allowed.