

LONDON CONCORD SINGERS

ST. GEORGES, BLOOMSBURY

15th. JULY, 1989

Psalms 2 and 42 (43)

Mendelssohn

In 1841 Mendelssohn was invited by King Frederick William IV of Prussia to be Director of the Music Department of the new Academy of Arts in Berlin. His duties included involvement with the Cathedral choir for whom he wrote four cantatas to psalm texts for unaccompanied choir. The choral writing shows the influence of the polychoral styles of earlier times (Schutz etc), no doubt brought about by his contact with the Berlin Singakademie which he had entered in 1819, at the age of ten, and its director, Carl Zelter, with whom he had studied harmony and composition.

Psalm 2 is for two four-part choirs. It is in four contrasting sections - fitting the mood of the words - plus a Gloria. Further contrast is obtained by alternating tutti passages with two solo quartets.

Psalm 42 is also for two choirs, but in this instance the mens voices are contrasted with the ladies.

Mass for Mixed Chorus and
Wind Instruments

Stravinsky

Kyrie; Gloria; Credo; Sanctus-Benedictus; Agnus

Stravinsky composed his Mass in 1948 specifically for church use, although it is now more often heard in concert performances. The writing is intentionally devoid of emotion so as not to detract from the solemnity of worship.. Stravinsky felt the function of sacred music to be 'to reveal itself as a form of communion - with our fellow man and with the Supreme Being'.

The Kyrie is in sections - blocks of tonalities. In only 52 bars there are cadences in no less than seven keys. Most of the sections are written homophonically but the central 'Christe' has the four voices entering canonically. The Gloria is written in a Concertante-Ripieno style, Soprano and Alto solos, with their feeling of plainsong, alternating with short chanted passages for full choir.

In contrast to the plainsong influence in the Gloria, the Credo has something of Russian Orthodox music about it, with its constant repetition of the musical phrases.. Of the Credo Stravinsky said '... I wish only to preserve the text in a special way. One composes a march to facilitate marching men, so with my Credo I hope to provide an aid to the text. The Credo is the longest movement - there is much to believe'. After the continuous chanting the Amen comes as something of a surprise, being pure polyphony, it could almost have been written by Byrd or Gibbons.

At the opening of the Sanctus, two tenors intone the opening word, followed by the full choir proclaiming it more firmly. 'Pleni sunt coeli' is in the form of a fugue, basically in the Phrygian mode, followed by a lively 'Hosanna'. A gentle Benedictus is followed by a slightly extended version of 'Hosanna'. Concertante-Ripieno is again a feature of the Agnus Dei, this time the orchestra alternates with a capella choir. The oboes and bassoons literally round off the work with a little musical palindrome.

INTERVAL 15 minutes

A World of Imagination

George Nicholson

In 1984 Nicholson was asked by the Royal Academy of Art to write a short piece for an artists service in St. James' Church, Picadilly. He chose some words from a

letter by William Blake to a friend. This turned out to have been a happy choice, as St. James' was Blakes church.

Nicholson is one of our more highly regarded avant-garde composers. Married to soprano Jane Ginsborg, he has recently taken up the position of Professor of Composition at Keele University.

Pageant

Michael Ball

Michael Ball was for some twenty years Head of Music at Manchester Grammar School. Recently he left this position to devote himself fully to composition. He has works commissioned by the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra amongst others. Pageant was commissioned by the Hale Barns Festival and was first performed there in May 1985.

The composer had for some time wanted to write a dramatic piece based on the language and spirit of the medieval mystery plays. He has freely used and rearranged passages from both York and Chester cycles to make a continuous and highly compressed libretto, ending with Dunbar's marvellously strong poem 'On the Resurrection of Christ'.

The first part depicts the Devil (bass solo) and chorus of demons who later get their due deserts from the Almighty (tenor solo). Musically the action is continuous and self-explanatory. The instrumental writing is often very athletic and the lively rhythmic character and jaunty demons' choruses provide in musical terms a recreation of the pageant spirit of the medieval performances.

This performance is supported by funds provided by Greater London Arts.

We are also delighted to announce that, for the second year running, London Concord Singers are to receive a Performing Rights Society award for Choral Enterprise.