

LONDON CONCORD SINGERS

Conductor: Malcolm Cottle

ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH, GLOUCESTER ROAD

8.00pm, Thursday 16th December

Francis Poulenc (1888 - 1963)

Un Soir de Neige

Words by Paul Eluard

Poulenc was the most distinguished composer of *mélodie* since the death of Faure. In style he never questioned the supremacy of the tonal-modal system, chromaticism was never more than passing. For him the most important item was melody. From 1940 to 1945 he remained in Paris, giving many concerts with Pierre Bernac exclusively devoted to French music. In 1943 he wrote *Figure Humaine*, a cantata for double choir with words by Paul Eluard. He followed this in 1944 with the little cantata *Un Soir de Neige* for six-part choir, again with words by Eluard, written over the Christmas period and dedicated to Marie-Blanche de Polignac.

Paul Eluard (born Eugene Emile Paul Grindel in 1895) was one of the most outstanding lyric poets of his time. He participated in the Dada movement, was one of the founders of Surrealism and in 1926 joined the communist party. He became known as the 'poet of the resistance' on account of the poem 'Liberté', from 'Poésie de Vérité', which Poulenc included in *Figure Humaine*.

Though Poulenc met Eluard in 1917, he did not set any of his poems until 1935 when he truly began to know Eluard's poetry. Poulenc came to write many more Eluard songs, but he wrote more choral settings than songs. Because of Eluard's association with Surrealism it is difficult to attempt to give precise meanings to his verse or to understand them in an exact sense. The movements are (1) *De grande cuillers de neige*, (2) *La bonne neige*, (3) *Bois meurtri*, (4) *La nuit, le froid, la solitude*. The first poem is from 'Dignes de vivre' and the remainder from 'Poésie de Vérité'. Each movement's title is taken from the first line of the poem.

Max Reger (1873-1916)

Three 6-part Choruses, Opus 39

Reger was born in Bavaria, the son of a schoolmaster of peasant stock. He studied in Wiesbaden with the composer Riemann, and it was here that he also acquired his lifelong habit of heavy drinking. A visit to Bayreuth at the age of 15 gave him a love of Wagner, and the desire to devote his life to music. His prodigious output (covering all genres except opera) was produced in only 26 years, but he is known today primarily as the most important German organ composer after Bach. His music was written under the influence of Wagner, without slavishly following him and Reger's style extended the possibilities of tonality without discarding its formal framework.

His predilection for counterpoint derived from an early familiarity with the music of Bach and Renaissance polyphony. At the age of 16 he stated that for him there was no difference between harmony and counterpoint. It is this chromatic polyphony which is a primary feature of the Three Choruses. These were written in 1898, whilst convalescing at his parents home in Weiden (after his military service). During this period he wrote works in a wide variety of genres (but the majority of his organ music was still completed by 1900).

Robert C. Hugill (1955-)

Three Prayers - (1) Ave Maria, (2) Et Exaltabo Te, (3) Pater Noster

I am a mainly self taught composer and started writing and arranging music regularly for a number of cabaret performers appearing in fringe venues in London and at the Edinburgh Festival. My musical "Choices" was premiered at the Bridge Lane Theatre in 1989, and a musical revue "The Pleasure of Your Company" in 1991.

My first really serious writing, the "Three Prayers" were partly inspired by my regular singing in the choir for Latin Mass on Sundays, and partly by a desire to write something for Concord. The Ave Maria is based on the dialogue between Gabriel and Mary, expanding into a cry from the entire congregation at the words "Sancta Maria". Et Exaltabo Te is a simple song, setting part of Psalm 29, written for Soprano solo (or group of Sopranos) accompanied by choir. The Pater Noster opens with a figure based on the sound of a congregation muttering the prayer to itself. Over this is floated a lyrical setting of the words for Soprano and Alto in canon. Despite being performed in Latin, the prayer is set in the Anglican version with the final two lines by St. Augustine.

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, Opus 41

At the beginning of 1878 Tchaikovsky was still recovering from the disaster of his marriage. He completed the 4th Symphony and Yevgeny Onegin and started work on the Violin concerto. He escaped from large scale tasks by working on smaller projects such as the 6 Songs opus 38 and his first attempt at Church Music, the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. Whilst not being a devout Christian, he was attracted to the beauty of the Liturgy. His setting came when Russian church music was beginning to shake off the Italo-German influence. He was very conscious of the role Russian composers had played in revitalising the national tradition of orthodox chant.

The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom is used by the Orthodox church on ordinary feasts. Only about a third of the Liturgy covers the Eucharist, the rest is an extensive dialogue between clergy and choir sung in church Slavonic. Tchaikovsky's is a simple setting, using plain harmonies to suit the puritanical tastes of the Russian Orthodox Hierarchy. The publication of the setting in Russia gave rise to an acrimonious court case between the Director of the Imperial Chapel and Tchaikovsky's publishers. Despite this, the Liturgy was first performed in June 1879 at the University Church of Kiev and at a special concert on 30th December 1880 with dispensation from the Synod for concert performance.

The movements being sung tonight are:-

3) Priiditye - Come Let us Worship

Sung at the presentation of the Gospels

6) The Hymn of the Cherubim

Sung at the presentation of the oblation, and signifying the Procession of Christ to Golgotha

11) It is meet to bless Thee

13) The Lords Prayer

14) Praise the Lord from Heaven

17) Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord