

# MUSIC FOR THE MILLENNIUM

LONDON CONCORD SINGERS

Conductor - Malcolm Cottle

St. Cyprian's Church, 18<sup>th</sup> December 1997

## Programme

Heinrich Schütz	Psalm 98
Sir Charles V. Stanford	Magnificat for Double Chorus
Francis Poulenc	Quatre Motets pour le temps de Noël
	Interval
Michael Ball	Sainte Marye Virgine

Tonight's concert is the first in our concert series, **Music for the Millennium**. During the next three years we will be performing some of the great unaccompanied choral music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, alongside well known and lesser known music from the past. Tonight's concert includes on of the major contemporary British works written for unaccompanied choir, Michael Ball's **Sainte Marye Virgine**.

### Heinrich Schütz - Psalm 98

Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672) was the greatest German composer of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the first one of international status. Through the examples of his compositions and through his teaching he played a major part in establishing the traditions of high craftsmanship and intellectual depth that marked the best of German music.

Schütz studied in Venice with Giovanni Gabrieli, from 1609 to 1613. By 1617 he was working for the Elector of Saxony at the Court in Dresden. He remained in Dresden, as Kapellmeister, until he was 60.

In 1619 he published his first collection of sacred music, the **Psalms of David**, Opus 2. These sumptuous works show better than any others the force of his teacher Gabrieli's example. The collection was dedicated to the Elector of Saxony and publication coincided with Schütz's wedding. He sent copies of the print along with wedding invitations to town and city councils throughout Saxony. Several of them responded with generous gifts.

The psalm settings in the collection are dominated by homorhythmic declamation (the so-called *stile recitativo*) in both antiphonal exchanges and tutti sections. The setting of Psalm 98 was first performed in Dresden on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1617.

### Sir Charles Villiers Stanford - Magnificat for Double Chorus

Stanford wrote 9 operas, 7 symphonies, 30 large-scale works for chorus and orchestra, 3 piano concertos, 2 violin concertos, 8 string quartets and many songs and was highly regarded as a teacher by such pupils as Vaughan Williams and Herbert Howells. He received great acclaim during his lifetime, but the years from 1911 to his death in 1924 were the days of his increasing neglect. Styles and techniques of composition were changing rapidly and Stanford could not accept these developments other than as 'ephemeral', after which sanity would prevail. It is only recently that such works as his symphonies have come to be re-evaluated. During his centenary year, Vaughan Williams's commented that if Stanford had been born German or Italian, his operas would have been highly valued (Vaughan Williams also went on to comment that he noticed that Covent Garden were celebrating the Centenary not with performances of **Seamus O'Brien**, Stanford's most successful opera, but with Bellini's **Norma**).

But it is in the area of church music where his music has had its most enduring success. He swept away the empty conventions and complacencies which had debased English music since Purcell. He enriched cathedral music with a whole series of works - Anthems, Motets, Services - many of which have remained in the repertory, without his losing sight of the needs of amateur singers by whom the music would be most frequently performed.

The **Magnificat** Op. 164 is dedicated to the memory of the composer Sir Hubert Parry, who died on 7<sup>th</sup> October 1918, one month after the score was completed. Written for Double Choir without an organ part, the choral lines are characterised by a lively independence which reminds the listener that J. S. Bach was one of the strong influences on Stanford's style. The invigorating opening material returns in the doxology by way of a triumphant peroration. Elsewhere forceful and animated contrapuntal lines alternate with antiphonal effects and passages of richly scored harmonic interest.

### Francis Poulenc - Quatre motets pour le temps de Noël

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 and he found his way to a vast treasury of undiscovered tunes. Texturally, rhythmically and harmonically he was not particularly inventive, but his definitive statement came in a letter of 1942: 'I know perfectly well that I'm not one of those composers who have made harmonic innovations like Stravinsky, Ravel or

Debussy, but I think there's room for new music which doesn't mind using other people's chords. Wasn't that the case with Mozart - Schubert?'

In his early years he was part of the group *Les Six* sponsored by Jean Cocteau, and he gained a reputation as the rich playboy of music (he was born into a wealthy family of pharmaceutical manufacturers). It seemed that melodies flowed from him with every exhalation of breath. Though this in fact disguised his uncertainties of both aesthetic and technique (his lessons in counterpoint with Charles Koechlin went no further than Bach chorales).

But in 1935 his friend Pierre-Octave Ferroud died in a car accident. This tragedy, and a consequent visit to Notre Dame de Rocamadour, restored him to his paternal Roman Catholic faith. These events, and his forming a partnership with the singer Pierre Bernac, brought about a new maturity in his work. His first religious work was the **Litanies à la vierge noire** of 1936. From this time he produced a steady stream of religious choral works. Stretching over a quarter of a century they display a remarkable unity of tone as well as an increasing complexity.

**Quatre Motets pour le temps de Noël** were written, in the early 1950s, for unaccompanied four-part choir. Each motet describes a different moment in the Christmas story. The first motet tells of the great mystery of Christ's birth, opening in a hushed whisper. The second is a dialogue with the Shepherds asking them what they have seen. The third describes the three Magi and the final motet is one of general rejoicing.

#### **Michael Ball - Sainte Marye Virgine**

Michael Ball was born in Manchester in 1946. As a Ralph Vaughan Williams Trust scholar at the Royal College of Music he studied with Herbert Howells, Humphrey Searle and John Lambert. In the summers of 1972 and 1973 he continued his studies with Franco Donatoni in Italy and participated in master classes with Luciano Berio and György Ligeti.

Michael Ball is active in all the main areas of composition. His orchestral output includes **Resurrection Symphonies** (1982) and **Danses vitales: Danses macabres** (1987), both of which were premiered by the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra under Edward Downes. He has also written extensively for wind and brass, and for young musicians. Important choral works include **A Hymne to God my God** (1984) for 16 solo voices and **Nocturne** (1990) for mixed choir, pianos and percussion, as well as the large *a capella* piece **Sainte Marye Virgine** (1979) which is to be performed tonight.

**Sainte Marye Virgine** was written for Stephen Wilkinson and the William Byrd Singers. The composer says that his motivation for using these particular texts was that he felt, apart from Bax's **Mater Ora Filium**, there had been no large scale Marian work written for unaccompanied chorus by a British composer this century.

The texts used are in several languages and range from the 12th to the 20th centuries. The eleven movements form a symmetrical structure, framed by the opening Introitus and the brief closing Canticle. The third movement (for sopranos only) and the fifth, seventh and ninth movements set lines from the Antiphon - Regina Coeli. The fourth and eighth movements are hymns for male and female voices respectively. The most extensive sections of the work are the three *Laudae* - movements two, six and ten. The central movement, *Lauda II*, is based around a recurring quotation from Dufay's **Vergine Bella**.

---

Our next concert will be the second in our series **Music for the Millennium**, exploring the great unaccompanied choral music of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. To follow on from tonight's performance of Michael Ball's contemporary masterpiece, we are including one of the major works from early in the century, **Rachmaninov's Vespers**.

THURSDAY APRIL 2<sup>ND</sup> 1998

7.30pm

ST. MARY'S CHURCH,  
CADOGAN STREET, CHELSEA  
Nearest tube: SLOANE SQUARE

**RACHMANINOV - VESPERS**  
**LASSUS - STABAT MATER**