

LONDON CONCORD SINGERS

Conductor – Malcolm Cottle

Thursday 13th April 2000

St. Cyprian's Church Glentworth Street

Gregorio Allegri – Miserere Mei (Psalm 51)

Thea Musgrave – Rorate Coeli

Interval

Frank Martin – Mass for unaccompanied double choir

Gregorio Allegri – Miserere Mei, for Soli and Choir

Gregorio Allegri was born in Rome in 1582, and became a chorister at the Papal Chapel in 1591 until 1596, when his voice broke. He subsequently became a tenor at S. Luigi del Francesca for the next 8 years, and studied with Giovanni Maria Nanino from 1600 until 1607. In 1604 he was a Singer and Composer at Tivoli and Fermi, and then became Maestro di Cappella at S. Spirito, in Sassia, Rome in 1628. 6th December 1629 saw his appointment as a singer in the Papal Choir, until his death on February 17th, 1652, aged 70. He wrote a large body of work, of both instrumental and sacred choral music, favouring the style of his mentor Nanino, and his mentor before him, Palestrina. It was originally thought that he was born into the Corregio family, that of the late Renaissance painter Antonio Allegri, known as Corregio, but this has since been disproved. He was buried in the Chapel of Santo Filippo Neri, in the Chiesa Nova at Rome, traditionally the burial place of the Papal Choir:

He is almost exclusively known for his setting of Psalm 51 (Vulgate Psalm 50), the Miserere mei, despite numerous other worthy compositions. Most will know this choral work for its haunting top C, sung by one voice in a small choir, and the sweeping harmony of the larger choir, separated by simple plain chant, and also the myths surrounding its performance by the Sistine Chapel Choir.

History beguiles us with tales of secret ornamentation - the so called *abbellimenti* - never written down, but simply passed from performer to performer in the Papal Chapel. It was *de rigeur* for those on the Grand Tour in the 18th century to hear the work in the Sistine Chapel during Holy Week. Many have expounded on the piece's beauty and uniqueness, and legend tells that unauthorised copying of the work was an excommunicable offence. Despite this, Mozart is supposed to have copied the work after hearing it performed, although knowing Mozart, it is neither surprising that he was able to copy the work, nor that he risked the consequences. No copy survives by his hand.

Allegri's setting of the Miserere was one of a group of settings of that Psalm, traditionally performed by the Sistine Chapel choir. Each version of the Psalm used similar *abbellimenti*, sung by the soloists, and Allegri's setting may well have been written to show off existing *abbellimenti*. A number of transcriptions of all (or part) of the Allegri setting were done in the 18th and 19th centuries. Not only Mozart, but Charles Burney and Mendelssohn committed the Miserere to paper. Some of the transcriptions suffer from the regional variations in the era's standard pitch. The version traditionally sung today is essentially a confection produced by Ivor Atkins based on a number of 19th Century transcriptions of the motet. The *abbellimenti* bear little resemblance to those probably heard by Allegri.

Recent research has enabled musicologists to reconstruct the version that would have been known to Allegri. This is a version without the famous top 'C'. As part of this debate, tonight we are performing the piece in an edition which is still essentially that of Ivor Atkins but transposed down by a minor third with the voice parts re-allocated. (The soli are now Soprano, Contralto, Tenor and Bass, the choir is now SATBB).

Thea Musgrave – Rorate Coeli

Thea Musgrave ranks among the world's foremost living composers, and is widely known for the warmth, humour and theatrical qualities of her music. It is a measure of her talent and determination that Thea Musgrave achieved great respect for her work both as a composer and conductor at a time when it was still a rather uncommon profession for a woman.

Born in Scotland on 27 May 1928, she studied first at the University of Edinburgh and later at the Conservatoire in Paris, where she spent four years as a pupil of Nadia Boulanger. In 1970 she became Guest Professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, a position which confirmed her increasing involvement with the musical life of the United States, where she has resided since 1972. In 1974 she received the Koussevitzky Award, resulting in the composition of *Space Play*, and she has also been awarded two Guggenheim Fellowships, in 1974-5, and again in 1982-3. In June 1995 Musgrave received a conferment of Honorary Degree of Doctor of Music from Glasgow University.

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Musgrave has always been eager to extend the apparent conventional boundaries of music and has consistently explored new means of projecting and maintaining essentially dramatic situations in music. As she once put it, she wanted to "explore dramatic-abstract musical forms: that is, dramatic in the sense of presentation, but at the same time abstract because there is no programmatic content... a kind of extension of the concerto principle." She has always been acutely aware of spatial acoustic possibilities: in the Clarinet Concerto the soloist moves around the different sections of the orchestra and in the Horn Concerto the orchestral horns are stationed around the concert hall. Thus the players are not merely an apparatus for the projection of the music, but are also its *dramatis personae*.

Rorate Coeli for unaccompanied chorus was written in 1973 in response to a commission from the National Federation of Music Societies in Great Britain. The work is built on two poems by the famous Scottish poet William Dunbar (the poems were written circa 1500). One poem is the nativity poem of the title and the other is about the resurrection. The motet is framed by the rich chords of the opening line where the full chorus is echoed by soloists. The two poems are set simultaneously, in a manner reminiscent of medieval polytextual techniques. This enables the composer to show the future victory of the resurrection along with the present joy of the nativity. The chords of the opening return at the end combined with an exultant gloria.

Frank Martin – Mass for Unaccompanied Double Choir

Kyrie; Gloria; Credo; Sanctus and Benedictus; Agnus Dei

Frank Martin (1890 – 1974) was well into his fifties before his music caught the attention of an audience much beyond his native Switzerland. It was only on the completion of the oratorio **Le vin herbé** in 1941 that music flowed prolifically from his pen. At this time Martin evolved a musical language that is a wonderful amalgam of the Italian renaissance, Bach, the German Romantics, the French Impressionists and Schoenberg's twelve-note system. His stylistic idiom then remained more or less unchanged until his death.

Of all the works written before 1941 none is so musically assured or distinctive as the **Mass for unaccompanied double choir**. Written in 1922, with a devastatingly effective Agnus Dei being added in 1926, it is a truly wonderful work combining intensely personal moments of religious contemplation with outbursts of overwhelming glory. The mass is a life-enhancing creation of enormous invention and fervour. This sincerely felt and intensely personal work was secreted in a drawer for forty years. It was only after much persuasion by Franz Brunnert, the director of the Bugenhagen Kantorei in Hamburg (who premiered the Mass in 1963) that Martin released the mass.

There were two reasons for Martin's desire to not release the mass. Firstly his devout Christian faith (his father was a Calvinist Minister) convinced him that the public airing of an aesthetic work expressing the essence of Christianity was almost blasphemy. At the Mass's première he wrote that 'I did not want it to be performed ... I considered it ... as being a matter between God and myself. I felt then that an expression of religious feelings should remain secret and removed from public opinion.'

There was a second reason for Martin's reluctance – his devotion to the music of Bach. Beside the genius of Bach, Martin was convinced his own efforts would seem merely presumptuous and he deliberately avoided writing music in the same genre as his idol.

Our Next Concert:-

7.30pm, Thursday 13th July 2000
St. Cyprian's Church, Glentworth Street

Copland – In the Beginning
Benevoli – Mass for Four Choirs
based on Palestrina's motet 'Tu es Petrus'

For the final concert in our **Music for the Millennium** series, we are celebrating the centenary of the birth of Aaron Copland by presenting **In the Beginning**. Based on the part of the King James Version of the Bible concerned with the seven days of creation, Copland chose a mezzo-soprano soloist and mixed chorus a capella to tell the oft-told story. As he explained, "I was striving for a gentle narrative style using the biblical phrase 'And the next day . . .' to round off each section." Robert Shaw conducted the premiere in Memorial Hall at Harvard and again in New York at Carnegie Hall; Nell Tangemen sang the difficult but extraordinarily effective solo part.

Allegrì - Miserere Mei

- 1 (Choir) Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness:
 2 (Men) according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.
 3 (Soli) Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.
 4 (Men) For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.
 5 (Choir) Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.
 6 (Men) Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.
 7 (Soli) Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.
 8 (Men) Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
 9 (Choir) Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.
 10 (Men) Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.
 11 (Soli) Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.
 12 (Men) Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.
 13 (Choir) Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.
 14 (Men) Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.
 15 (Soli) Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.
 16 (Men) O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.
 17 (Choir) For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.
 18 (Men) The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.
 19 (Soli) Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem.
 20 (Soli and Choir) Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.

Thea Musgrave - Rorate Coeli

Rorate coeli desuper!

Done is the battle on the dragon black

Rorate coeli desuper!

Heavens distill your balmy showers,
 For now is risen the bright day star,
 Fro' the rose Mary, flower of flowers:
 The clear sun, whom no cloud devours,
 Surmounting Phoebus in the East,
 Is coming of his heavenly towers;
 Et nobis Puer natus est.

Archangels, angels, and dominations,
 Thrones, potestatis, and martyrs sere,
 And all ye heavenly operations,
 Stars, planet, firmament, and sphere,
 Fire, earth, air, and water clear,
 To him give loving, most and least,
 That come into so meek mannere;
 Et nobis Puer natus est.

Sinners be glad, and penance do,
 And thank your maker hairtfully,
 For he that ye might not come to,
 To you is coming full humbly,
 Your souls with his blood to buy,
 And loose you of the fiends arrest,
 And only of his own mercy,
 Pro nobis Puer natus est.

Done is the battle on the dragon black,
 Our champion Christ confoundit has his force;
 The gates of hell are broken with a crack,
 The sign triumphal raisit is of the Cross,
 The Devils trymmillis with hideous voce,
 The souls are borrowit and to the bliss can go,
 Christ with his blood our ransom does endorse:
 Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro.

Dungen is the deidly dragon Lucifer,
 The cruel serpent with the mortal sting;
 The old keen tiger, with his teeth on char,
 Whilk in a wait has lain for us so long,
 Thinking to grip us in his clawis strong;

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The merciful Lord would not that it were so,
He made him for to fail of that fang:
Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro.

All clergy do to him incline,
And bow unto this bairn benign,
And do your observance divine,
To him that is of Kingis King;
Incense his altar, read and sing
In Holy kirk, with mind digest,
Him honouring above all thng,
Qui nobis Puer natus est.

He for our sake that suffered to be slain,
And like a lamb in sacrifice was dight,
Is like a lion risen up again,
And as a giant raxit him on height;
Sprungen is Aurora, radiant and bright,
On loft is gone the glorious Apollo,
The blissful day departed from the night:
Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro.

Celestial fowls in the air
Sing with your notes upon height;
In firths and in forests fair
Be mirthful now, at all your might,
For passed is your dully night:
Aurora has the cloudis pierced,
The sun has risen with gladsome light,
Et nobis Puer natus est.

Now spring up flowers fro' the root,
Revert you upward naturally,
In honour of that blessed fruit
That raise up fro' the rose Mary;
Lay out your leaves lustily,
From dead take life now at the last
In worship of that Prince worthy,
Qui nobis Puer natus est.

The great victor again is risen on height,
That for our quarrel to the death was wounded;
The sun that wax all pale now shines bright,
And, darkness cleared, our faith is now refounded;
The knell of mercy fro' the heaven is sounded,
The Christians are delivered of their woe,
The Jews and their error are confounded:
Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro.

The foe is chased, the battle is done cease,
The prison broken, the jevellouris fleit and flemit;
The war is gone, confirmed is the peace,
The fetters loosed and the dungeon temit,
The ransom made, the prisoners redeemed;
The field is won, o'ercomen is the foe,
Despoiled of the treasure that he yemit:
Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro.

Sing heaven imperial, most of height,
Regions of air make harmony;
All fish in flood and fowl of flight,
Be mirthful and make melody:
All 'Gloria in excelsis' cry,
Heaven, earth sea, man, bird and beast,
He that is crowned above the sky
Pro nobis Puer natus est.