

London Concord Singers

Conductor – Malcolm Cottle

MUSIC FOR ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS

Thursday 20th December 2001
Grosvenor Chapel

PETER PHILIPS – ALMA REDEMPTORIS MATER
HENRYK GÓRECKI – TOTUS TUUS
ARNOLD SCHOENBERG – FRIEDE AUF ERDEN

INTERVAL

JS BACH – KOMM, JESU, KOMM
WILLIAM MATHIAS – HODIE, CHRISTUS NATUS EST
ARNOLD BAX – MATER ORA FILIUM

Peter Philips (1560 - 1628) – Alma Redemptoris Mater

Philips was an English composer and organist who spent most of his working life in Belgium. He was a Catholic, and as such chose to leave England after a tenure as singer at St. Paul's Cathedral in London. He first went to Brussels, and then quickly on to the English College in Rome where he met the English Catholic landowner Lord Thomas Paget. Philips and Paget travelled throughout Europe together, before settling in Antwerp shortly before Paget's death. There, Philips obtained a position as organist to the chapel of the Archduke Albrecht, and met his colleagues John Bull and Pieter Cornet, as well as probably Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck. He was also highly regarded as a virginal player, and made a living teaching on this instrument.

Philips was one of the most prolific Northern composers of Latin sacred choral music, with a few hundred surviving motets. He also composed music for both instrumental consort and keyboard, many of these pieces surviving in arrangements of both types. These pieces involve the best-known genres of English instrumental music of the time, the fantasia and pavan and galliard. Philips' motets also contain something of the English style in that they are all written with organ accompaniment; his style of vocal composition, however, is more in keeping with the great continental masters of the period, such as Orlandus Lassus. His vocal and instrumental writing is extremely smooth, with well-planned harmonies, and a general lack of contrapuntal artifice. Philips was one of the outstanding vocal composers of his day, publishing motets in German as well as Latin.

The manuscript tradition traces the presently known text of the Alma Redemptoris Mater to the 12th century. The text, however, is thought by some scholars to have been known in the late Carolingian period in France. The manuscript Ancren Riwle contains the Alma and the Ave Regina Caelorum. The Alma is also found in Chaucer's Prioress Tale.

Henryk Górecki (1933 –) – Totus Tuus, Op60, 1987

"I was born in Silesia; Old, ancient Polish land. But three cultures have always coexisted there: Polish, Czech, German. Why do I like Czech music? Where does my knowledge and liking of German and Austrian music come from? Why do I worship Mozart, Schumann, Schubert, Brahms, Beethoven, Bach? Why am I enamored with Szymanowski and Chopin? Why did I grow up with them? Because at the beginning of my musical education, when I had no idea about music--nothing!--these names were always near me: Beethoven, Chopin, Szymanowski Does one need to consider it in a special way, does one need to think much about this? I do not think so. Nobody chooses their time and place of birth."

Górecki studied composition in Katowice in his native Poland. After a post-graduate sojourn in Paris, he became a professor of composition in Katowice. As a composer, he has been known and respected in Poland, but not always well-known around the world. The phenomenal success of his *Symphony no. 3* (Gramophone's "Best-selling CD in 1993") has astounded many of his contemporaries, especially in Poland, where the work had been known for more than a decade. In his home country Górecki's Third was perceived as one of a series of fascinating compositions, the result of a long and complex creative evolution.

Górecki has worked with great determination to develop his own compositional voice, through assimilating the techniques of his predecessors (Bartók, Szymanowski) and those active around him (Boulez, Xenakis, Nono), and then paring away all elements extraneous to his personal expression. These processes were carried out through the 1950s and 1960s, beginning with the *Four Preludes* for piano from 1955, his first numbered opus, and reaching full maturity with *Old Polish Music* from 1969. This is the most radical and dissonant period in his output: in the 1960s, Górecki belonged to the small group of the most avant-garde composers of his time. Together with Penderecki, Serocki, and others he established a pattern for new music: the more dissonance the better, the harsher the sounds, the better. In order to reduce music to pure sound, these composers stripped away all elements, except tone colour. This path to the essentials is encapsulated by Górecki's *Genesis cycle* (1962-1963) and the aggressive *Scontri* for large symphony orchestra (1960), a work filled with clashes of vertical and horizontal sound patterns, often organised serially.

During the 1970s, beginning with *Ad Matrem* (1971) and continuing through to *Symphony No. 3* and *Beatus Vir* (1979), Górecki worked to achieve a direct link between the emotional and spiritual content of texts, both sacred and traditional, and his musical architecture. He sought inspiration in early Polish music: a 13th-century conductus, a 16th-century polyphonic song. The focus on vocal music throughout this period led quite naturally to an emphasis on melody, with a resulting simplification of the harmonic and textural elements. This gradual progress away from dissonance towards consonance, away from aggressive, dramatic, intense music, towards a more mellow style can be witnessed on the pages of *Symphony No. 2, Copernican* (1972).

"I think that music is one of the domains that people really need, and its importance only depends on whether one knows how to receive it. Every person needs to be prepared to know how to "use" music. Not only music -- also literature, painting, sculpture, and film. Tarkowski said that art is prayer. It is something that I also emphasize. But it is difficult to understand: one has to mature to this thought. It seems to many people that prayer means to "recite the Hail Mary"—but someone may recite "Hail Mary" as many times as one wants and it will not be prayer. Olivier Messiaen said during a meeting in Katowice that he is a man of prayer. But what does he do? He writes his notes down, he listens to his birds. And this is supposed to be prayer?" [Górecki, interview of 1997]

Totus Tuus is a hymn to the Virgin Mary that was composed in 1987 for the third visit of Pope John Paul II to his homeland. The choral text is taken from a poem written by Maria Boguslawska. The music is based on chants of the Polish Catholic Church and reflects Górecki's deep love of his country and its musical traditions. The simple form of the chant is repeated to build a musical affirmation of faith.

Arnold Schoenberg (1874 – 1951) – Friede auf Erden, Op13, 1907

Schoenberg began violin lessons when he was eight and almost immediately started composing, though he had no formal training until he was in his late teens, when Zemlinsky became his teacher and friend (in 1910 he married Zemlinsky's sister). His first acknowledged works date from the turn of the century and include the string sextet *Verklärte Nacht* as well as some songs, all showing influences from Brahms, Wagner and Wolf. In 1901-3 he was in Berlin as a cabaret musician and teacher, and there he wrote the symphonic poem *Pelleas und Melisande*, pressing the Straussian model towards denser thematic argument and contrapuntal richness. He then returned to Vienna and began taking private pupils, Berg and Webern being among the first. He also moved rapidly forwards in his musical style. The large orchestra of *Pelleas* and the *Gurrelieder* was replaced by an ensemble of 15 in *Chamber Symphony no.1*, but with an intensification of harmonic strangeness, formal complexity and contrapuntal density: like the *String Quartet no.1*, the work is cast as a single movement encompassing the characters of the traditional four and using every effort to join unconventional ideas (a sequence of 4ths in the *Chamber Symphony*, for instance) into a conventional discourse. When atonality arrived, therefore, as it did in 1908, it came as the inevitable outcome of a doomed attempt to accommodate ever more disruptive material. However, Schoenberg found it possible a quarter-century later to return to something like his tonal style in such works as the *Suite in G* for strings, the completion of the *Chamber Symphony no.2* and the *Theme and Variations* for band.

But he is famous as the pioneer of the style of composition popularly known as atonal, in which there is no overall key centre, all twelve notes of the chromatic scale are given equal status and there is no expectation that dissonances will be resolved. He did not see this as a revolutionary idea, but as the next logical stage of musical evolution from the romantic tradition to which he belonged.

Schoenberg's first atonal works date from the years 1908 to 1913. Therefore his 1907 setting of Conrad Meyer's poem *Friede auf Erden* (Peace on Earth) for eight part chorus was one of his last romantic compositions before he embarked on this new course. The composer later described the piece as an illusion written when he still thought that harmony among people was conceivable. With hindsight one can see some signs of the coming developments: the piece makes use of extreme modulations and highly chromatic passages, stretching the framework of romantic harmony to its limits. Nevertheless as a whole it is firmly centred around the key of D to which it several times returns, especially for the optimistic refrain "*Friede auf der Erde*" at the end of each verse. Originally for a cappella choir, Schoenberg added a woodwind accompaniment so singers could keep pitch during its considerably rough harmonic weather.

In his own words....

"Whether one calls oneself conservative or revolutionary, whether one composes in a conventional or progressive manner, whether one tries to imitate old styles or is destined to express new ideas—one must be convinced of the infallibility of one's own fantasy and one must believe in one's own inspiration. The desire for a conscious control of the new means and forms will arise in every artist's mind; and he will wish to follow consciously the laws and rules that govern the forms he has conceived as in a dream."

JS Bach (1685 – 1750) – Komm, Jesu, Komm BWV 229

One of Bach's duties as Cantor of St. Thomas's Church in Leipzig was to provide music for St. Thomas's and St. Nicholas's churches on Sundays and holy days, and in addition, for funerals. According to the Leipzig school regulations of 1723, pupils and staff were expected to assemble in front of the house of the deceased a quarter-hour before the commencement of the memorial service, and to start singing immediately. The selection of the hymns and motets for funerals was in the hands of the Cantor. In most cases and in accordance with tradition, Bach would have chosen settings from the *Florilegium Portense*, a printed collection of motets. If, however, specific texts were requested and he was commissioned by the bereaved family, he had both to compose and rehearse a new motet in a comparatively short time. Five of the six motets of Bach (*Der Geist hilft uns'rer Schwachheit auf*, *Jesu, meine Freude*, *Fürchte dich nicht*, *Komm, Jesu, komm*, and *Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden*) were probably intended for burial services, rather than for regular Sunday worship.

In the Lutheran liturgy, the motet was far less important than the cantata. Latin motets were sung at Vespers on Sunday afternoons, at the beginning of the main morning service and sometimes during communion. The ordinary repertory of the Leipzig choir consisted of simpler sixteenth and early seventeenth century motets and Bach used his less able singers for these motets, reserving the best singers for the cantatas. Bach's six or seven surviving motets are of considerably greater difficulty than the Leipzig choir's regular repertory. For funeral and memorial services Bach could call upon a greater number of singers so a number of the motets are for eight part chorus. The surviving motets are all late works, composed for the Thomaskirche in Leipzig, and are the only works of Bach which have enjoyed an unbroken tradition of performance: succeeding Cantors valued them highly, and they were regularly brought out for use. *Komm, Jesu, komm* dates from between 1723, the year Bach moved to Leipzig, and 1734.

The texts for the motets are taken from Biblical quotations and chorales; *Komm, Jesu, Komm* is the only motet to use a freely-composed poetic libretto. It is based on two stanzas of a funeral hymn originally written by Paul Thymich of Leipzig on the occasion of the death of a Rector of St. Thomas's. Bach took account of the syntax and content of the first stanza by writing an elaborate eight-part contrapuntal setting divided into three large sections. The first stanza of poetry ends with a famous quote from the Gospel of John, 14:6 (I am the way, the truth and the life). The second stanza, called an "aria" in the autograph manuscript, is set as a simple four-part chorale. The text was originally set to music by one of Bach's predecessors in Leipzig, Johann Schelle. The original text contains many more stanzas, but Bach chose to use only the first and last (for reasons which are not clear).

Bach's vocal writing derives in essence from an instrumental, or organ, style. In such music, the limited scope for cantabile phrasing leads naturally to a prominence of purely harmonic effects, and flowing melodic movement. This goes some way to explain the taxing nature of Bach's vocal parts, and it may encourage the modern performer to learn that his own choristers found such works as *Singet dem Herrn* and *Der Geist hilft* notoriously difficult. They were undoubtedly helped by some instrumental underlay, or at least a continuo part - a practice which was usual by this time, when the motet had begun to borrow from other forms. True a cappella music was little heard in Bach's day.

William Mathias (1934 – 1992) - Hodie, Christus Natus Est

Mathias was born in Whitland, South-West Wales and began composing at an extremely early age. He studied at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth and went on to study composition with Sir Lennox Berkeley at the Royal Academy of Music in London, where he also studied piano with Peter Katin.

Apart from a brief period as Senior Lecturer at Edinburgh University, Mathias spent his professional life in Wales - first as Lecturer in music at the University of Wales, Bangor then as Professor and Head of Department. He founded the North Wales Music Festival at St. Asaph Cathedral and remained its Artistic Director until his death in 1992.

His huge output includes three each of symphonies, string quartets and piano concertos, as well as concertos for flute, oboe, clarinet, horn, violin, harp, harpsichord and organ. His contribution to the choral repertoire is among the most important of any British composer since Vaughan Williams, ranging from works for liturgical use (including the famous anthem composed for the marriage of the Prince and Princess of Wales in 1981) to major choral and orchestral works like *This Worlde's Joie*, *Lux Aeterna* and *World's Fire*.

William Mathias was an optimistic composer whose music often abounds with energy. And yet, he could also compose contemplative music. He was both exceptionally versatile and skilled in his ability to write for any medium. It is interesting that he often followed a 'serious' work with a 'lighter' one and it has been suggested that a thread runs through his complete oeuvre. Like Handel and Beethoven he would revise material and reuse it not because he had run out of ideas but because he valued his material.

Hodie, Christus Natus Est was commissioned by the Collegiate Choir of Illinois Wesleyan University

Arnold Edward Trevor Bax (1883 1953) – Mater Ora Filium, 1921

Bax trained at the Royal Academy of Music, then travelled widely, particularly to Ireland, whose folklore and culture greatly influenced him. He became an honorary doctor of music at Oxford in 1934, at Durham in 1935, and at the National University of Eire in 1947. He was knighted in 1937, became Master of the King's Musick in 1942, and received the KCVO. He was also an excellent poet, under the pseudonym of Dermot O'Byrne. His brother was Clifford Bax the playwright.

But there is something deadening about that Knighthood (and a Master of the King's Musick). What do we expect from such a composer: acres of choral music, marches, pomp and circumstance? The fact that six of his seven symphonies, in fact the best of his music, were written before he accepted his Knighthood in 1937, should reassure us. Here is a composer whose musical world celebrates the high summer of youth and beauty and mixes with it a razor-edged sense of their passing. Darker, violent moods also storm through the music. Irish Celtic legend, Northern sagas, woodland idylls and the world of faerie weave in and out. There is none of the hackneyed rural element which many people, sometimes unfairly, associate with British music.

Bax was born of wealthy parents in Streatham, London, on 8 November 1883. Their move to Ivybank in Streatham in 1893 coincided with his father beginning to take him to August Manns' Crystal Palace concerts. By 1896 Bax had begun to compose profusely. This compulsion burnt on a high flame until the mid-1930s. He went to the Royal Academy of Music in September and it was during these years that he discovered the early poetry of W.B. Yeats which, as late as 1949, he declared "meant more to me than all the music of the centuries."

Bax was essentially a non-establishment figure liberated from society's conventions by the accident of his birth into an affluent family. He did not have to work or teach to survive. After his teenage years he seems never to have had a conventional home, moving from hotel to hotel and finally living out his last years at the White Horse pub in Storrington in Sussex. He spent much time in the Gaelic far west: at Glencolumcille in Ireland and Morar in Scotland. He was a very fine pianist though not a conductor. He learnt Irish Gaelic and wrote in the language. His two children were named Dermot and Maeve. He began his regular visits to Ireland while at the Academy. He wrote and published various poems one of which, celebrating the martyrs of the Easter Uprising in Ireland, was banned by the British authorities as subversive. His poetry is passionate and vivid to this day. As an author he wrote various articles and short stories under the pseudonym "Dermot O'Byrne". The first volume of an episodic but colourful autobiography was significantly called *Farewell My Youth*. Sadly there was to be no second volume.

Other than his masterpiece, *Mater Ora Filium* which was written in 1921, Bax isn't associated with choral music. It is one of Bax's most uncharacteristic and striking works, inspired by hearing, for the first time, a performance of Byrd's Mass for 5 voices. The text is a 16th century, macaronic (Latin and English) Christmas carol, preserved in manuscript at Oxford University.

"The result on paper looks an almost unsingable jumble. In performance it was admirably calculated, full of the most adorable surprises" (Edward Dent, 1922).

Bach - Komm, Jesu Komm

Come, Jesus, come, my flesh is weary
my strength fails more and more.
I long for your peace;
the bitter path becomes too hard.

Come! I will yield to You;
You are the right path,
the truth and the life.

So I give myself into Your hands
and say World, good night!
Just as my life's course is hurrying towards its end,
the Spirit is opportunely healthy
it hovers next to its Creator,
as Jesus is and remains
the true way to life.

Mathias - Hodie, Christus Natus Est

This day Christ was born:
this day the Saviour appeared:
this day the Angels sing on earth,
and the Archangels rejoice:
this day the just exult, saying:
'Glory to God in the highest, Alleluia'

Philips - Alma Redemptoris Mater

Loving mother of the Redeemer,
gate of heaven, star of the sea,
assist your people who have fallen yet strive to rise again.
To the wonderment of nature you bore your Creator,
Yet remained a virgin after as before.
You who received Gabriel's joyful greeting,
have pity on us poor sinners.

Schoenberg - Friede auf Erden

While the shepherds left their flocks to bring the angel's
word through the lowly gate to the mother and child,
the heavenly servants sang in the starry sky and heaven
continued to ring: Peace, peace on earth!

Since the angelic annunciation, oh, how many bloody deeds
did the armour-clad perform in battle on wild horses.
During how many holy nights did the ghostly choir of the
ghosts sing hesitatingly, urgently pleading, quietly lamenting
Peace, peace.... on earth!

But it is eternally believed that the weak will not at all times
fall prey to every brazen murderous deed.
In murder and in horror, something like justice works and
acts. A new kingdom will appear and it will seek for peace on
earth.

Gradually it will grow to carry out its holy duty forging
weapons that aren't dangerous, flaming swords for justice,
a royal house that is blooming with strong sons
whose bright tubas roar Peace, peace on earth!

Conrad Meyer

Górecki - Totus Tuus

I am wholly yours, Maria,
Mother of Our Redeemer
Virgin of God Pious Virgin,
Mother of the Saviour of the World

Bax - Mater Ora Filium

Mother pray to your Son, that after this exile, he will give to
us the joy of all the blessed.

Amen

(translation of Latin text only)

Our Next Concert



Moeran
Songs of Springtime

Kodály
Part Songs

Villette
O Magnum Mysterium
Three Motets

Poulenc
Mass

St. James's Church, Piccadilly

Saturday 20th April, 2002
7.30 pm