

London Concord Singers – 1st April 2003 4

conductor Malcolm Cottle

Programme

Darius Milhaud – Les Deux Cités

Bohuslav Martinů – Dandelion Romance

(soloist – Karen Gilbert)

interval

Orlandus Lassus – Timor et Tremor

Jonathan Harvey – I Love the Lord

Robert Schumann – Four Partsongs for Double Choir Opus 141

Darius Milhaud (1892 - 1974) – Les Deux Cités

Babylone, Elegie, Jerusalem

One of the most prolific composers of his time (during his long life he would write in a bewildering variety of genres and his catalogue runs to over 450 opus numbers) Milhaud was born into a Jewish family in Aix en Provence and to the end of his life retained a strong connection with Aix and with Provence. He trained in Paris with Charles Widor and Vincent D'Indy. Whilst at the Paris conservatoire he made enduring friendships with the composers Georges Auric and Arthur Honegger. Also of great importance were the friendships he made with literary figures such as Jammes and Claudel. By 1917, Milhaud had set Jammes' *La brebis égarée* as an opera, prose excerpts from André Gide's *La Porte étroite* and the first two parts of Claudel's *Oresteia* trilogy

From 1917 to 1919 Milhaud acted as Claudel's secretary when he was posted to a diplomatic post in Brazil. Milhaud's visit to Brazil with Claudel led to an interest in the popular music of the country. He used a Brazilian legend as the basis for his jazz inspired ballet, *La Creation du Monde*. Claudel went on to write the librettos for a number of Milhaud's works.

In the 1920's Milhaud was part of the group known as 'Les Six'. (the others were Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Francis Poulenc and Germaine Tailleferre) The principal characteristics that the members of the group had in common were an antipathy to Wagnerism and impressionism. Not surprisingly the group was never terribly cohesive and Louis Durey left quite early on. The group's mentor was Jean Cocteau, though his influence on Milhaud was not as strong as on some of the other members of the group. Milhaud's style had been fixed since before the war and he still remained strongly linked to the literary figures of Claudel, Jammes and Gide. At this time Milhaud was much affected by jazz and one of his best known works is the jazz-influenced *Le Boeuf sur le Toit*, and a bar named after the work became one of the haunts of Milhaud and his friends.

His opera *Maximilien* was coolly received at the Paris Opera in 1932 and the 1930's saw something of a reduction in his prodigious output. But in 1940 Milhaud and his family emigrated to USA in order to flee the Nazis and he took up a post teaching at Mills College in California. Once settled in California, his composing activities were vigorously renewed. Whilst teaching at Mills College his pupils included Dave Brubeck, Burt Bacharach and Steve Reich.

Milhaud's style cannot be confined by the influences of jazz and Les Six. Another area of musical interest was polytonality - writing in two (or more keys) at once. Milhaud made a comprehensive study of this technique and brought it into use in much of his work, he regarded this as an appropriately Latin solution to the development of tonality. His Jewish-Provencal background was also another important thread in his composing life. He disliked Wagner and Brahms, but accepted Mahler and Richard Strauss; Schoenberg was someone that he greatly admired and the two were friends for many years. He was by no means a conventionally religious composer, though he did write a number of Jewish liturgical works. Tonight's piece **Les Deux Cités** (written in 1937), with its depiction of Babylon and visions of the New Jerusalem, represents one of Milhaud's rare explorations of explicitly Christian symbolism.

Paul Claudel (1868-1955) was a French poet, playwright and diplomat. Amongst his best known works are *Five Great Odes* and *The Satin Slippers*. He was a prominent figure in the French Catholic renaissance. He entered diplomatic service in 1898 after his completing his studies. He finally retired in 1935. In theory he was anti-Nazi, but he managed to write triumphal odes to both Petain and to De Gaulle.

In the three movements of **Les Deux Cités**, Claudel recreated biblical text in his own style. *Babylone* deals with the fall of Babylon, drawing heavily on the Psalms. *Elegie* is an elegy for the doomed city, describing the vitality that has been lost. The final movement *Jerusalem* is based around the vision of the Holy City by St. John of the Cross.

Bohuslav Martinů (1890 – 1959) – Dandelion Romance

Martinů was born in the village of Polička, in the mountains of Bohemia and Moravia, where his father was a bell-ringer. A sickly child, he rarely left the tower in which his parents had their home, so his first 12 years were spent looking down on the village with a birds-eye view. This distinctive view of the world profoundly influenced his compositions; he was to write later in life, it was "not the small interests of people, the cares, the hurts, or the joys" that he saw from that great height, but "space, which I always have in front of me." He learned the violin from a local tailor and made a local reputation for himself, giving his first public concert in 1905.

He entered the Prague conservatoire in 1906 as a violin student but, tiring of the routine, left after two years after failing his examinations. He transferred to the Organ school, but he again failed to settle and was expelled. He started concentrating on composition and teaching, studying on his own and making progress thanks to an intense personal discipline. He eventually joined the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra in 1918. He re-entered the conservatoire and became a pupil of Suk (Dvorak's son-in-law). In 1923 he won a scholarship that enabled him to study in Paris with Albert Roussel. By 1931, he was established in Paris and able to marry. With the threat of German invasion in 1940 he escaped, with difficulty, to Portugal and eventually ended up in the United States. After the Second World War he became professor of composition at the Prague Conservatoire, returning to America after two years.

A prolific composer, his works span a number of styles. Whilst some works are indebted to the Czech, Slovak and Moravian folk material of his childhood, his music from the 20's and 30's was very influenced by the jazz-oriented atmosphere of 1920's Paris and later by neo-classicism. Much of his music from his later periods reflects his profound nostalgia for his homeland. In 1955 a friend sent him a manuscript of poems by his fellow country-man, Miloslav Bureš. Martinů was immediately taken with them and within a few weeks he had written his cantata 'The Opening of the Wells'. His collaboration with Bureš continued after this. In 1957, whilst staying in Rome, Martinů set the poem **Dandelion Romance**. Though originally conceived for women's chorus a cappella, the work is functionally part of his group of cantatas, *Songs of the Highlands* (*The Opening of the Wells*, *Dandelion Romance*, *The Legend from the Smoke of Potato Fires* and *Mikesh of the Hills*) even though the other cantatas use voices and instruments. Besides textual links (all the cantatas set poems by Bureš), the works are all musically related as well.

In the **Dandelion Romance**, a young woman is waiting for her lover to return after seven long years of military service. We are performing it in the later version for mixed a cappella choir in an edition based, at the composer's request, on the performances of the Czech Choral Society.

Orlandus Lassus (1532 - 1594) - Timor et Tremor

Lassus was a Franco-Flemish composer and legend holds that as a choirboy with an uncommonly beautiful voice he was thrice kidnapped from his birthplace for service elsewhere. It is not certain, however, that he was ever a chorister in Mons. His first known position was in the service of Ferrante Gonzaga, who passed through the Low Countries in 1544 on his way to Italy. Lassus spent the next decade in Italy, at first with Gonzaga, later in the service of Constantino Castrioto of Naples. By 1553 he was choirmaster at St. John Lateran in Rome, remaining there for a year, then returning to his homeland and settling briefly in Antwerp. His career from 1556 was centred in Munich at the court chapel of Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria, as *maestro di cappella* from 1563, with duties that included some travel in Germany, Flanders, France, and Italy. While employed at Munich, he came to know both Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli, each of whom spent time in the musical establishment he directed. His accomplishments brought formal recognition from Emperor Maximilian II, the French king Charles IX, and Pope Gregory XIII.

Lassus's production of over 2,000 works in nearly every Latin, French, Italian, and German vocal genre known in his time places him among the most prolific and versatile composers of the era. A close connection between text and music, in both small- and large-scale respects, is perhaps the single most prominent characteristic of his output.

Jonathan Harvey (1939 -) – I Love the Lord

After studying at Cambridge, Harvey studied privately (on the advice of Benjamin Britten) with Erwin Stein and Hans Keller, thus gaining an early familiarity with the music of the 2nd Viennese school. Whilst working at the music department of Southampton University, Stockhausen's music had a profound effect on him and he developed his own complex, personal language. In the late 1960's, whilst a Harkness fellow at Princeton, he was strongly influenced by Milton Babbitt. In the early 1980's he was invited by Pierre Boulez to work at IRCAM, going on to write four works for them.

Despite this modernist background, Harvey's wide-ranging catalogue includes a significant body of choral works many of which are suited to church performance. Choral music has remained a constant factor in his output,

illuminated by his deeply spiritual view of the world. All of his choral music manages to combine a serious intent with a sense of joy. **I Love the Lord** uses one of Harvey's distinctive hallmarks, the slowly separating and merging chords.

The following two notes were written at various times by the composer:

This anthem, written in 1976 for Martin Neary and the Winchester Cathedral Choir, is the fruit of listening to the Choir sing the liturgy week after week. The profound impression they have made, in the context of the services and the building, provided the inspiration for the music. A G major chord sounding through most of the anthem depicts the joyful love and irrepressible faith of a soul that clings to its Lord despite its suffering and anguish.

The words used in this anthem are taken from Psalm 116. They are concerned with love in the face of death. The music represents the courage of this love by a G major chord that persists in the solo voices almost throughout the piece, despite the opposition of other harmonies in the tutti choir which slide chromatically away. Towards the end the conflicts cease as the soul returns to its rest, secure in the hand of God. I Love the Lord is in memory of my mother, Noelle Harvey.

Robert Schumann (1810 - 1856) – Four Partsongs for Double Choir Opus 141

An die Sterne, Ungewisses Licht, Zuversicht, Talismane

Schumann finally married his beloved Clara in 1840. The long outpouring of songs and song-cycles that this relationship had brought forth was replaced by a concentration on other forms, such as symphonies and chamber music. He also taught at the Leipzig conservatoire. In 1844 he toured Russia with Clara, but on his return a severe attack of depression led him to move to Dresden in search of quiet. 1846 saw Clara giving the first performance of the piano concerto (written in 1841 and 1845) and Mendelssohn gave the first performance of the 2nd Symphony. Whilst Schumann was living in Dresden he conducted the "Liedertafel". Also he founded a mixed voice choir and wrote these four part songs for them. During 1848, the year of the abortive revolution, Schumann had to flee Dresden. In 1850 he moved to Düsseldorf, hoping to earn more by conducting. This was not a success and mental health problems culminated in a suicide attempt when he threw himself in the Rhine. He spent the remaining 2 years of his life in an asylum.

All four part-songs are written for double choir and make use of antiphonal effects; the textures being varied by use of imitation and passages set for solo voices. Towards the end of the fourth song (*Talismane*) there is a passage setting the words 'Mich verwirren will das Irren' whose remarkable chromaticism looks forward to the part-songs of Brahms.

Our forthcoming performances:-

Saturday 12th June, 4.00pm

Doncaster Parish Church

Flowers in Music

Thursday July 15th, 7.30pm

St. Cyprian's Church, Glentworth Street, London

Concord Singers' Summer Music

Saturday 31st July, 8.45pm

Iglesia del Pi, Barcelona

Sunday 1st August, 8.00pm

Sung Mass at Barcelona Cathedral

Wednesday 13th October, 8.00pm

St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church, Cadogan Street, Chelsea

A concert of music by John Tavener in celebration of his 60th birthday

Thursday 16th December, 7.30pm

St. Cyprian's Church, Glentworth Street, London

Christmas Concert

Milhaud - Les Deux Cités (sung in French)

1 – Babylone

She is fallen, proud Babylon.

Except the Lord build the house, except the Lord guard the city, the city is built in vain, it is in vain that men labour, vainly do they toil to raise the walls, who build the ramparts of the city.

She is fallen, proud Babylon.

I, John, did hear the voice of an eagle high in the midst of heaven, and he cried: Oh woe. She is fallen, proud Babylon. Because God has suddenly become mindful of her sins, he will give her something to drink, a grand goblet filled with wine and with fire which has not been quenched. Come out from that vile city my people.

She is fallen.

All who stand outside the city shall say, trembling with terror: Woe! Proud Babylon. The port is gone, the warehouses are gone; the workshop is gone, the market is gone, there is no-one, they no longer come to buy what she would sell. Merchandises of silver, gold and precious stones, purple, sweet-smelling sandalwood, ivory, and all manner of rare metals and wrought things, of cinnamon and fragrant perfumes, gems and incense, wine and olives, flour, beasts and lambs, and the souls of men.

And you, Oh Heaven, rejoice on her ruin. Martyrs, lift up your cries of joy to heaven, because the Lord has now revenged you upon her. Proud Babylon is fallen. She is divided into three! She is fallen, proud Babylon.

2 – Elegy

The music of the drum and the harp, the music of the harp and other instruments, the sound of the trumpet and the flute, and of one voice and another. Behold, all of these are silent for ever. And no craftsman, of whatever craft, will find employment within your walls. The voice of the millstone will be hushed and the other trades will be silent for ever within your walls. The light of the lamps above you will shine no more. And the sound of a voice with another voice, the sound of the bride and of the bridegroom, the voice calling in answer from within, they will be heard no more. And all of those delights, which drew all people to this city, are at an end, alas!. O wondrous city, clothed in purple and gold, decked with pearls and diamonds. The music of the harp and all the other instruments, the lovely music of the trumpet and the flute and the sound of one voice with another, all of these are silent for ever. The sound of the millstone will be hushed, the deep sound of the mill, will be silent for ever.

3 – Jerusalem

And I, John, I saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem descending down from heaven from the side of God like a bride who is adorned for her husband. And then I heard a voice saying: Behold the tabernacle of God with his own people and he will dwell with them. They themselves shall be his chosen people, the Lord himself with them. And He shall be their God. Jerusalem was built as a city that participated in her own building. The Lord shall dry all the tears of those that weep and death shall be no more; grief and mourning shall be no more.

Ah, may my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth and may my right hand lose its cunning if my heart ever forgets you, Jerusalem. Winter is past, the rain has ceased to fall, flowers have appeared in our land. The voice of the turtle dove is heard, the fig tree produces buds, the grape vine gives out its wonderful odour.

Arise my best beloved and come! Like a lily surrounded by thorns, thus is my best beloved among the other maidens. I have looked for you in every crevice, under all the stone steps, in all the hidden places of the ramparts. And would hear your voice as it is sweet. Now the turtle dove sings low. My beloved is mine and I am his.

What are these wounds in the middle of your hands? Ah, then may my right hand lose all its cunning. And there shall be no more night, and you will have no need of the light from the lamps, for God, the Lord God himself, it is He who will take care to give you light. The gates of Jerusalem, never shall they be closed.

Ah, may my hand lose its cunning and my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth. Whosoever thirsts, I will freely give him a draught of water from the spring which flows from the well of living water. And I saw the stream of living water, splendid as crystal, which flows from the throne of the Lord and of the Lamb.

If my heart forgets thee, Jerusalem. Ah, may my right hand lose its cunning and may my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth, if ever my heart forgets, Jerusalem.

Paul Claudel (1868-1955)

Martinů - Dandelion Romance (sung in Czech)

If you were but a swift grey dove, you are too far away now.
I would like to lie down in the shadow of your wings.
In the soft blue shadow, to lie and think of the touch of your strong hands.
Our promised joy is lost like when a seed falls into the wild grass.
Alas, what long hours dearest, have I spent looking for it,
but I found only hard bare rock where the seed fell on the ground.
Bare and grim, nought growing on it but a lonely pine tree.
Our love should have served us better than this.
A grim rock with ravens circling overhead, how long, how long have I waited for you here!
How many harvests have I seen, how often scattered the seed abroad?
Dear heart, how long did nothing but moonlight come through my open window?
Nothing but the silver moon, silver as leaves in the evening light,
Maybe it was the first strands of silver in my hair.
Seven years are you gone, slow years like a nightmare.
Tell me, are you the Emperor's bondman, bound for ever?
Yesterday I went to cut fresh grass and found a place where there were no stones or hard grim rock.
Golden on the dark earth gleamed the dandelions,
enough gold for a fair ring in each bright head.
All its gold gone, one was blown, misty grey like the dawn,
all its gold had gone to make a shining ring for your hand.
A fair gold ring all for you, with a dew drop for a stone.
Tell me, my dear heart, whether you wear my ring?
Tell me, dear heart, why have I kept faith with you?
As if I had planted the wind in my garden.
As she sat and sorrowed, dropping her head so low,
a white pigeon circled above over her head.
Oh, that is no pigeon, it is her love come home,
over seven forests, seven cloudy hill-tops
He has crossed seven hill tops and seven rivers.
When a soldier comes home, it is a joyful journey.
Tell me, then my soldier, does my love think of me?
Were you always true to me during that sad time?
The heart of such a soldier has room for many loves,
Seek out for yourself, in consolation, another beloved.
Any message for him, when you knew him so well?
What can the quivering birch tree leaves say to the sharp frost?
May he have no less happiness than there are leaves in this green wood.
May he long enjoy as much good health as there is green grass in this wood.
May the clear water in his well never fail him, nor the gay songs that he used to sing me.
Each morning the bread that I cut strikes at my heart with a knife
and when sprinkling salt I feel the wound smart.
He took my love, though without my dowry.
Without him, what am I but a meadow that none will harvest?
Seven years was too long. Longer for a lonely man who pines.
Dandelions blooming in the dark rich earth,
each bright gold head once more with enough gold for a fair ring.
Only one has faded, misty grey like the dawn,
all its gold has gone to make a gold ring for me.
A golden ring, a bright dewdrop for jewel,
leaves of beaten silver from the trembling aspen.
Said the soldier, smiling, his true love embracing.
No ring was ever made of truer gold than your heart.
Truer than the gold ring seven years on my hand,
shining there a dewdrop clear like a gleaming jewel.
One cool dewdrop from that morning full of sadness,
when I said farewell to you my best beloved.

Miloslav Bureš.

Lassus - Timor et Tremor (sung in Latin)

Fear and horror overcome me, the shadows fall upon me, have pity on me O Lord, have pity on me, I confide my soul to you.

Hear my prayer, O God, for you are my refuge and my powerful aid, Lord; I have called upon you and I will not be confounded.

Harvey – I Love the Lord (sung in English)

I love the Lord because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.

Because he hath inclined his ear to me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.

The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow.

Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.

Return unto thy rest, O my soul; the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.

For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.

I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living. I love the Lord.

Schumann – Four Partsongs for Double Choir (sung in German)

1 - An die Sterne (To the Stars)

Stars, in the celestial distance!

You brighten the Earth's twilight

with rays of a better world.

Are your ghostly eyes not looking towards the earth,

So that they whisper peace into the clouded heart?

Stars, in the celestial distance!

Are there also dreams of life in that space?

Stars in the celestial distance,

Is there bliss, joy, sadness, pain beyond the sun?

Is there a feeling heart?

Stars, in the celestial distance!

Don't you wave Heaven's peace to me from far away?

Will not peace be given to the weary in the golden pastures.

Stars, until my spirit lifts its wings and floats to your peace,

my longing hangs on you.

I am hoping, I am faithful.

Could you deceive?

Friedrich Rückert (1788-1866)

3 - Zuversicht (Faith)

Direct your gaze upwards

Oppressed and wounded heart.

Then, quite soon, your deepest sorrow

will turn into delight.

Happily you may raise your hopes

Regardless of how high the tide will rise.

How could you be forsaken

If love remains with you.

Johann Christian Freiherr von Zedlitz (1790 – 1862)

2 - Ungewisses Licht (Uncertain Light)

Without track, without paths, climbing up rocks

A man storms ahead, a wayfarer.

Plunging creeks, surging rivers

Roaring forest, nothing to check the pace.

Above him, dark clouds are moving, hunting like armies;

Rolling thunder, pouring rain,

Starless night, nothing to check the pace.

Finally, ha! Finally, something shimmers from afar!

Is it a will-o'-the-wisp, is it a star?

Ha, how this shimmer twinkles so friendly,

How it tempts me, how it waves to me!

Swiftly the wanderer hurries through the night,

Towards the light it pulls him with might!

Tell me, are these flames, the rising sun?

Is it love – is it death?

Johann Christian Freiherr von Zedlitz (1790 – 1862)

4 - Talismane

God's is the East

God's is the West

Northern and southern lands

Repose in the peace of his hands.

He, the only judge,

Desires for everyone what is right.

Of each of his hundred names,

Let this one be highly praised! Amen.

I am bewildered by my wandering;

Yet you know how to disentangle me.

When I wander, when I stray,

You soon show me the right way

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 – 1832)