

LONDON CONCORD SINGERS

Conductor - Malcolm Cottle

MUSIC ON ST. PATRICK'S DAY - MARCH 17TH 2005
GROSVENOR CHAPEL, SOUTH AUDLEY STREET, MAYFAIR

Charles Wood - Hail Gladdening Light

E. J. Moeran - Phyllida and Corydon

INTERVAL

Dame Elizabeth Maconchy - Creatures

Samuel Barber - Reincarnations

For tonight's St. Patrick's Day concert, we have assembled a programme of music with Irish connections. Wood was Irish born, though trained in England; Moeran came from an Irish background (his father was Irish); Elizabeth Maconchy, though English, spent much of her childhood in Ireland and Barber set words by the Irish poet James Stephens.

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Charles Wood (1866 – 1926)

Hail Gladdening Light

Charles Wood was born in Armagh, Ireland; he attended the Royal College of Music in London. He later attended Cambridge and earned a Mus. Doc. in 1894. He became Professor of Music at Cambridge in 1924, in succession to Stanford. For most of his life he stood in Stanford's shadow, from which he finally emerged only in the last 2 year's of his life, after Stanford's death.

Though he lived in England, he continued to be interested in Ireland and co-founded the Irish Folk Song Society in London. Several of his chamber works and songs use Irish material. His church music has remained very popular in the Anglican tradition. **Hail Gladdening Light** remains one of his best loved motets.

Ernest John Moeran (1894 – 1950)

Phyllida and Corydon

Madrigal – Phyllida and Corydon (Nicholas Breton, 1545–1626)

Madrigal – Beauty sat bathing by a stream (Anthony Munday, 1553–1633)

Pastoral – On a hill there grows a flower (Nicholas Breton, 1545–1626)

Air – Phyllis inamorata (Lancelot Andrews, 1555–1626)

Ballet – Said I that Amaryllis (Anon., C16)

Canzonet – The treasure of my heart (Sir Philip Sidney, 1554–1586)

Air – While she lies sleeping (Anon., C16)

Pastoral – Corydon, arise (Anon., C16)

Madrigal – To meadows (Robert Herrick, 1591–1674)

After being demobbed Moeran became a schoolmaster at Uppingham School, but in 1923 he started studying with John Ireland. His music from this period has a characteristic distinctive harmony, residing somewhere between the chromaticism of Delius modified by Warlock and the bimodality of Vaughan Williams. In 1930's he returned to the Cotswolds and set out to expand his style and consciously develop his technique. In 1930 Moeran wrote his first set of Elizabethan choral settings, **Songs of Springtime**, at a time when he was moving away from the influence of Warlock and Delius towards his mature style. These changes would eventually lead to his transformation into a remarkable symphonist, a significant achievement for a man who had

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initially conceived music lyrically, drawing on his immediate responses to nature.

In **Phyllida and Corydon**, which was written in 1939, Moeran returned to setting Elizabethan lyrics. The lyrics form a rough narrative of Corydon the shepherd's wooing of the nymph Phyllida. Though the wooing is ultimately successful, Moeran includes a number of extra lyrics which darken the mood, including the final haunting of Herrick's 'To Meadows'. In these choral pieces, Moeran has left Delius behind and developed his own distinctively 20th century version of the English madrigal. He does not give us a straight imitation of the Elizabethan madrigalists, but cross pollinates the 16th century structures with chromaticisms and modulations.

Geoffrey Self described the work as *"highly characteristic of its composer, and valuable therefore precisely because of the stylistic inconsistency. For we are continually made aware, throughout his music, of a kind of divide/dichotomy. Within it lyricism has two faces – major/minor tonality is split in false relation, passages of pastoral diatonicism are dispersed in polytonality: and here, in Phyllida and Corydon strict Tudor polyphony is set against extreme chromaticism."*

From the Musical Times, November 1939 (note that the review refers to the first broadcast performance, the first performance was given by Kennedy Schott's A Capella Choir at Aeolian Hall on October 24th 1939):-

The BBC Singers gave the first performance of this suite of nine unaccompanied pieces on October 30th 1939. I admired the choir's manipulation of the material, as it was directed by Leslie Woodgate. The male singers still sound a bit etiolated through over-refinement; such slight stroking sometimes fails to make us feel the chordal nerve of swiftly-changing harmonic passages. The choir's verve was happy, its pointing (as in 'fa-la's) often pretty, and its spirit, at the best, truly evocative.

The first impression about the music is that it stands in a clear succession, finely following an ancient convention with a revived sensitiveness; the twentieth century mating with the sixteenth (Breton, Munday, Sidney, and the like poets). This composer subtly individualises certain procedures of modality and harmonic strangeness which few besides Warlock have

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satisfactorily bent to their use. The modal convention has sometimes weakened Moeran's art; here its use is almost entirely congenial; his fresh air can disperse the mists that enrap some of his brethren when they 'go modal'. That is the considerable achievement of a rich imagination. In harmonic suggestiveness he is at his best, finding appropriate inflections for the subtlety of a vocal caress. Now and again he over-subtilizes, I think, as in 'weep you no more' (No. 7). To match in music the curious blend of simplicity in subject and exquisite fragility of poetic expression is an almost impossible task for any musician. The moment he forsakes the shore of period-style, as we know it in ayre or madrigal, he braves an ocean of harmonic currents which may carry him to ports he seeks not – or even to over-emotional shipwreck. Moeran navigates with high wisdom; the seamanship is as admirable as the ship is beautiful.

Elizabeth Maconchy (1907 – 1994) Creatures

1. The Hen and the Carp (Ian Srailler)
2. The Snail (James Reeves)
3. Rendezvous with a Beetle (E.V.Rieu)
4. Cat's Funeral (E.V.Rieu)
5. The Dove and the Wren (traditional)
6. Cat! (Eleanor Farejon)

*"Being a composer is a wonderful life sentence
from which there is no escape."*

Elizabeth Maconchy

Maconchy was born in Hertfordshire of Irish parents, and spent her childhood in Ireland. With no radio or concerts, her musical experience was limited to what she herself could create at the piano. She studied composition under Charles Wood and Vaughan Williams and she delighted in exploring Bartok, Berg and Janacek; she impressed Vaughan Williams with her originality. Thanks to a travelling scholarship to Prague, her *Concerto for Piano* was first performed by the Prague Philharmonic in 1930; later that year *The Land* received its first performance at the Proms and was received with brilliant success.

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Her career as a composer was run in parallel with raising a family (the composer Nicola Lefanu is her daughter) and she had to cope with a long bout of tuberculosis (which killed her father and younger sister). There were also persistent prejudices against a female composer; but she produced a significant body of work as well as receiving numerous awards. She was created a Dame in 1987, partly in recognition for her tireless promotion of new music.

Her music is characterised by its combinations of opposites, passion with formal argument, wit and intellectual control, English pastoralism and tough, no nonsense Central European astringency; but the whole is suffused with a free-wheeling energy.

Creatures were written in 1979 and commissioned for performance at the 1980 Chester Summer Festival. In them, Maconchy sets a group of witty, subversive poems about animals; but this wit is combined, in her own inimitable manner, with a certain apposite toughness of musical material.

1. The Hen and the Carp

Once in a roostery there lived a
speckled hen, and when—
Ever she laid an egg this hen
Ecstatically cried:

"O progeny miraculous, particular
spectacular.
What a wonderful hen am I".

In a pond nearby
Perchance a fat and broody carp was
basking,
but her ears were sharp,
she heard Dame Cackle cry:

"O progeny miraculous, particular
spectacular.
What a wonderful hen am I".

"Cackle", bubbled she,
"For your single egg,
O silly one,
I lay at least a million;
Suppose for each I cried:
O progeny miraculous, particular
spectacular.
What a hullabaloo there'd be!"

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2. The Snail

At sunset when the night dew falls,
 Out of the ivy on the wall
 With horns outstretched and pointed
 tail,
 Comes the grey and noiseless snail.
 On ivy stems she clammers down
 Carrying her house of brown.

Safe in the dark, no greedy eye
 Can her tender body spy,
 While she herself, a hungry thief,
 Searches out the freshest leaf.
 She travels on as best she can
 Like a toppling caravan.

3. Rendezvous with a Beetle

Meet me in Usk
 And drone to me
 Of what a beetle's eye can see
 When lamps are lit
 And the bats flit
 In Usk
 At dusk.

And tell me if
 A beetle's nose
 Detects the perfume
 Of the rose
 As gardens fade
 And stars invade the dusk
 In Usk.

4. Cat's Funeral

Deep, down deep,
 Bury her deep,
 Safe in the earth's cold keep,
 No more to watch bird stir;
 No more to clean dark fur;
 No more to glisten as silk;
 No more to revel in milk;
 No more to purr.

Deep, down deep,
 Bury her deep,
 She is beyond warm sleep.
 She will not walk in the night,
 She will not wake to the light.
 Deep, down deep,
 Bury her deep,
 Safe in the earth's cold keep.

5. The Dove and the Wren

The dove says coo, coo,
 What shall I do?
 I shall never be able to bring up two.

Poo! says the wren,
 I've got ten,
 And rear them all like gentlemen!

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6. Cat!

Cat! Scat!
 After her, after her
 Sleeky flatterer,
 Spitfire, chatterer,
 Scatter her
 Off her mat!

Wuff! wuff!
 Treat her rough,
 Git her, git her,
 Whiskery spitter!
 Catch her, catch her,
 Green eyed scratcher!
 Slathery slithery hisser,
 Don't miss her!

Run til your'e dithery
 Hithery, thithery,
 Pfitts! Pfitts!
 How she spits!
 Spitch! Spatch!
 Can't she scratch
 Scritchng the bark of the sycamore
 tree,
 She's reached her ark
 And's hissing and hissing at me.
 Pfitts! Pfitts!
 Wuff! Wuff!
 Scat! Cat!
 That's That!

Samuel Barber (1910 – 1981)

Reincarnations

1. Mary Hynes
2. Anthony O Daly
3. The Coolin'

Barber was born in Pennsylvania, USA; he wrote his first piece at the age of 7 and his first opera at 10; at the age of 14 he entered the Curtis Institute to study voice, piano and composition. He would go on to study conducting with Fritz Reiner. Whilst at the Curtis Institute he met fellow composer Gian Carlo Menotti; this was the beginning of a relationship that was both personal and professional. In addition to being Barber's life partner, Menotti supplied the libretti for two of Barber's operas (**Vanessa** and **A Hand of Bridge**).

A distinguished melodist, Barber's music, always beautifully crafted, is very much reliant on traditional forms and it is always imbued with romantic sensibilities, albeit filtered through a harmonically rich and rhythmically complex idiom. His **Adagio for Strings** (an adaptation of the slow movement of his 2nd String Quartet) is an iconic work which remains uniquely identifiable.

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But Barber's musical idiom has not always been what the establishment wanted. His opera **Anthony and Cleopatra** was commissioned to open the new Metropolitan Opera House in New York in 1966, it was a notorious failure as Barber did not provide the sort of large-scale grand opera that the Met patrons wanted. This failure hit Barber hard and affected his subsequent output. He had always stood aloof from the American musical establishment, refusing to take sides in the tonal vs. atonal, Stravinsky vs. Schoenberg debates, but this left him vulnerable to criticism and critical attack after the failure of the **Anthony and Cleopatra**.

Reincarnations was first published in 1942; in these three contemporary madrigals Barber sets poetry by James Stephens. Without having recourse to folk-song or pastiche, Barber magnificently catches the distinctive Irish timbre of Stephens's text and the pieces look ahead to Barber's later Celtic and James Joyce settings.

James Stephens (1882 - 1950) was born in Dublin and started out as a solicitor's clerk. He wrote both poetry and fiction; he was notable for his fanciful and highly coloured prose. Amongst his literary friends was James Joyce; he and Joyce shared the same birth year, a fact which caused Joyce to suggest Stephens finish 'Finnegan's Wake' should Joyce himself fail to do so. The three poems that Barber chose to set are Stephens English versions of Irish Gaelic poems by Anthony Raftery (1779 - 1835). Raftery was blinded by smallpox in childhood and illiterate and eventually became a wandering bard.

Dates for your Diary

7.30pm, Thursday 14th July 2005, London

(location to be announced - see <http://www.londonconcordingsingers.org.uk>)

Summer Concert - A Musical Tour of the EU

8.30pm, Saturday 6th August 2005, Eglise de St. Thomas, Strasbourg, France

Summer Concert - A Musical Tour of the EU

11am and 6.30pm, Sunday 7th August 2005, Strasbourg Cathedral, France

Sung Mass