

London Concord Singers

Conductor Malcolm Cottle

Saturday, November 15th 2008
Church of St. Alban the Martyr
Holborn

PROGRAMME

Tchaikovsky ~ Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

∞ interval ∞

Schnittke ~ Concerto for Choir

Piotry Illyich Tchaikovsky (1840 – 1893) ~ Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, Opus 41

The late 1870's were a time of change and turmoil for Tchaikovsky. In 1877 Nadezhda von Meck, the widow of a wealthy industrialist, commissioned some chamber music from him, thus starting a 13- year relationship during which time she supported Tchaikovsky financially and emotionally. The allowance she paid him enabled him to stop teaching at the conservatoire in 1878 and concentrate on composition. Their exchange of letters (over 1,200 in all) provided Tchaikovsky with companionship, friendship and encouragement, even though the two never met. (An interesting aside to this relationship is that from 1880 to 1882, Nadezhda von Meck employed a young musician to teach piano to her children and to accompany their singing. The young musician travelled with the family and would eventually wish to marry one of her daughters. The musician in question was a young Claude Debussy.)

In 1877 Tchaikovsky's favourite pupil, Vladimir Shilovsky, married suddenly, impelling Tchaikovsky into taking a similar step. He may have hoped that by marrying his former composition pupil Antonina Miliukova, he could bring some sort of stability and respectability to his life; perhaps he thought that he could be openly married whilst continuing to be privately homosexual. But whatever he imagined could happen, marriage was the wrong step for him. They separated after just six weeks and Tchaikovsky came to a severe emotional crisis.

Ironically, he was at his most creative at this period, writing his Fourth Symphony and opera **Eugene Onegin**. One of his rare pieces of Russian Orthodox sacred music also dates from this time, his setting of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. In 1878 Tchaikovsky set 15 movements from the Divine Liturgy for unaccompanied SATB chorus.

We know from one of Tchaikovsky's letters to Nadezhda von Meck that the idea of composing the Liturgy occurred to him in April 1878, the work was composed in May and was with his publisher by July. It first appeared in print in 1879 and this caused protests and legal proceedings brought by the Director of the Imperial

Chapel Choir. Tchaikovsky's publisher, Jurgenson, was accused of publishing the Liturgy without the approval of the Director of the Imperial Chapel Choir, and of ignoring a number of government decrees and synods.

The case dragged on for a long time, but in June 1879 Jurgenson was allowed to publish the work subject to local approval in Moscow and the piece was finally printed in late 1880. The first performance took place at Kiev University Church in June 1879, with a private concert performance in Moscow in November 1880.

Though not a regular churchgoer, Tchaikovsky was deeply attached to the rituals and music of the Russian Orthodox Church. "There is nothing like entering a church on a Saturday, standing in the semi-darkness with the scent of incense wafting through the air, lost in deep contemplation searching for an answer to those perennial questions, wherefore, when, whither and why?" This quote from one of Tchaikovsky's letters gives some indication of the spirit behind the composition of the Liturgy. The work is imbued with the rich tradition of Russian Orthodox singing, with its precise requirements for setting the text and using old chants. It is an important precursor to Rachmaninov's Vespers. To us the piece seems to encapsulate the spirit of Russian Orthodox sacred music, but even today the work is often considered as being too Western by the Russian Orthodox Church.

Tonight we are performing 6 movements from the work.

3. Come, Let Us Worship [Priiditye]

Come let us worship and fall down before Christ.

*O Son of God, who rose from the dead, save us who sing to Thee.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!*

Lord bless Thine inheritance, and save us.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy upon us.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen

Holy Immortal, have mercy upon us.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, holy Immortal, have mercy upon us.

6. Cherubic Hymn [Izhe Kheruvimi Taino]

Let us who mystically represent the Cherubim and who sing the thrice-holy hymn to the life-creating Trinity, now lay aside earthly cares. Amen.

That we may receive the King of All, who comes invisibly escorted by the angelic hosts.

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

11. It is Truly Fitting [Dostoino Yest]

It is truly fitting to bless thee, O Birth-giver of God, ever blessed and most pure and the Mother of our God. More honourable than the Cherubim and incomparably more glorious than the Seraphim, without the defilement thou gavest birth to God the Word: true Birth-giver of God, we magnify thee.

13. Our Father [Otche Nash]

Our Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed be thy Name; Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.

14. Praise the Lord from the Heavens [Khvalitye Gospoda Sniebiess]

Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise Him in the highest.

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

15. Blessed is He Who Comes in the Name of the Lord [Blagosloviyem Gryadi Vo Imya Gospodnye]

Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord. The Lord is God and has appeared to us.

We have seen the true Light, we have received the heavenly Spirit, we have found the true Faith by worshipping the undivided Trinity. This has saved us. Amen

Let our mouth be filled with Thy praise, O Lord, that we may sing of Thy glory, for Thou hast granted us to partake of Thy holy, divine, immortal and life-giving Mysteries. Keep us in Thy holiness that we may meditate on Thy justice all the day long.

Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.

Lord, have mercy.

To Thee, O Lord. Amen.

In the Name of the Lord. Amen.

Blessed be the Name of the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. Amen.

Glory to the Father, and to Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Lord, have mercy.

Father give Thy blessing.

May the blessing and the mercy of the Lord be with you.

Lord, grant long life to him who blesses and sanctifies us.

☪ interval ☪

Alfred Schnittke (1934 - 1998) ~ Concerto for Choir

Alfred Schnittke was born on 24 November 1934 in Engels, on the Volga River, in the Soviet Union. His father was born in Frankfurt, to a Jewish family of Russian origin, and he had moved to the USSR in 1926. Schnittke's mother was a Volga-German born in Russia. Schnittke began his musical education in 1946 in Vienna where his father, a journalist and translator, had been posted. In 1948 the family moved to Moscow, where Schnittke studied piano and received a diploma in choral conducting.

From 1953 to 1958 he studied counterpoint and composition with Yevgeny Golubev and instrumentation with Nikolai Rakov at the Moscow Conservatory. Schnittke completed the postgraduate course in composition there in 1961 and joined the Union of Composers the same year. He was particularly encouraged by Phillip Herschkowitz, a Webern disciple, who resided in the Soviet capital.

In 1962, Schnittke was appointed instructor in instrumentation at the Moscow Conservatory, a post which he held until 1972. After Shostakovich's death in 1973 he became the Soviet establishment's main target among musicians. Under Brezhnev, his symphonies were virtually banned. To support himself during this time, Schnittke composed music for 60 films and 8 plays.

Schnittke has written in a wide range of genres and styles and is noted, above all, for his hallmark "polystylistic" idiom. The idiom he developed during this period, with its technique of mixing direct quotation, original invention, historical cross-references and pastiche, could be seen as protective covering from censorship of his religious convictions..

His **Concerto Grosso No. 1** (1977) was one of the first works to bring his name to prominence. It was popularised by Gidon Kremer, a tireless proponent of his music. Schnittke composed 9 symphonies, 6 concerti grossi, 4 violin concertos, 2 cello concertos, concertos for piano and a triple concerto for violin, viola and cello, as well as 4 string quartets and much other chamber music, ballet scores, choral and vocal works. His first opera, **Life with an Idiot**, was premiered in Amsterdam and his two subsequent operas, **Gesualdo** and **Historia von D. Johann Fausten** were unveiled in Vienna and Hamburg respectively.

The **Concerto for Choir** (also known as the **Concerto for mixed chorus** and the **Choral Concerto**) was written in 1984-85 and is Schnittke's major choral work. It sets the third chapter of "The Book of Mournful Songs" by the great Armenian medieval poet Gregory of Narek (951 -1003). "The Book of Mournful Songs" (or "The Book of Lamentation") is the poet's major work, written at the end of his life. The book focuses on man's inner life and is coloured with humanistic individualism typical of Armenian poetry and philosophy of the time. Schnittke set Naum Grebnev's modern Russian translation of the text.

The **Concerto for Choir** was completed in the summer of 1985 and dedicated to Valeri Polyanski and the USSR Ministry of Culture Chamber Choir.

In his concerto Schnittke sought to reflect the poet's world, which is diverse and full of contrasts. "Gregory of Narek's text", said the composer "is but the preparation for the understanding of actual meaning which is revealed in the process of reading but cannot be conveyed in words".

Everything that Schnittke did arose out of the text. He said of the piece: "I wrote music which was evoked by this text, but not the

music I wanted to write". He did not write the music in order to adhere to a particular fashion or to achieve popularity or notoriety. Instead he expressed his inner most thoughts, by listening to his own personal voice.

God and religion have always been important subjects of interest to the Russian intelligentsia, even though forbidden in Soviet time. Schnittke's strong religious interest was relatively well known. But it should be borne in mind that the theme could be seen as a protest against communist ideology; an affirmation in the freedom of conscience and the freedom to choose whether to believe or not.

A number of Schnittke's earlier works had religious connotations. His Catholic **Requiem** (1975) was only allowed to be performed because it was used as incidental music to Schiller's "Don Carlos". Schnittke hid the text of the Requiem Mass underneath the instrumental lines of his **Piano Quintet** (1972-76) and his **Second Symphony** (1979) had the soloists and choir singing wordlessly instead of the mass. His **Fourth Symphony** (1984) was another song without words which mixed different religious musics, combining Jewish, Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic influences.

Another factor in the genesis of the **Concerto for Choir** was that in 1985 Schnittke suffered a stroke and was declared clinically dead on several occasions, but he recovered and continued to compose.

The **Concerto for Choir** has passages where Schnittke reflects ancient Armenian choral singing, using such ideas as parallel fifths at the opening and a characteristic mode (with augmented 2nd and diminished octave) in the 3rd movement. But one of the biggest influences is the Russian choral concerto of the 18th century as exemplified by the works of Bortniansky or Berezovsky; pieces which were to have a strong influence on liturgical music by Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov.

Each movement represents a different aspect of text: (1) the rapturous praise and appeal to God; (2) the list of those whom the lamentations might be expected to reach; (3) the hope of

redemption and deliverance for those who will understand the essence of these words and for the poet himself who wrote them; (4) the humble prayer asking God to complete these songs and give them a healing power.

At first the language of the piece seems straightforward, based on the traditional harmonies and melodic structures of Russian Orthodox music. But Schnittke builds on this and combines it in ways of his own, including such elements as gradually building up a cluster of notes, superimposing major and minor chords with a common third (e.g., C sharp minor and C major), alternating major and minor triads of the same enharmonic tonic (e.g., D sharp minor and E flat major), plus an extensive use of imitation and canon.

Schnittke uses each of the 4 voice parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) flexibly divided into 2, 3 or 4 parts so that for most of the piece the total number of parts varies between 8 and 16. For the closing pages Schnittke subdivides some voice parts even further and adds a group of soloists. This section is harmonically unadventurous, being basically in D minor, with a total of 26 parts articulating what is essentially an 11-part chord. But the way Schnittke sets the soloists against the slowly changing chords in the choir is magical.

1. O Master of all living

*O Master of all living,
Bestowing priceless gifts upon us,
God creating all out of nothing,
Mysterious, omniscient, frightening,
Merciful and implacable,
Ineffable and inscrutable,
Invisible, eternal, boundless,
Terrifying and beneficent.*

*You are unfathomable, intangible,
Without beginning and without end,
You are the only one who is measureless,
Who is true and real in the world,
It is You who give us blessing,
You are a noon without nightfall, light without shadow,*

*Our only fountain of peace
That lightens our temporal existence.*

*You are limitless and omnipresent,
Our sweetest honey and our daily bread,
An inexhaustible treasure, purest rain,
Forever plentiful might,
You are a guardian and guide to us,
A healer knowing our ills,
Support to all, an all-seeing eye,
A hand of abundant giving,
Radiant with greatness, welcome to all,
Our tireless shepherd, benevolent tsar,
All-seeing, vigilant day and night,
A judge dispensing fair judgement,
A non-oppressive gaze, a voice of comfort,
You are a message bringing peace.*

*Your forbidding hand and all-seeing eye
Warn mortals against vice,
A judge of what is right and wrong,
A glory that inspires no envy,
You are a light to us, a greatness without limit,
A path, invisible but straight.
Your imprint is invisible, we can only see Your favour,
It descends to us on earth from heaven.*

*The words that I pronounce glorifying You
Are poorer than those You should have heard,
O God, by right,
Had I not been so poor in speech.
God blessed, praised,
Glorified by all living in the universe,
All we are destined to achieve
Is born by Your wise inspiration.*

*O God, show me in my doubts
The path of purity
And, guiding me to the gates of salvation,
Be content and rejoice.
The purpose of Your slave's paean*

*Is not glorification or eulogy,
My worthless words are a supplication
By which I long to obtain salvation.*

2. I, an expert in human passions

*I, an expert in human passions,
Composed this collection of songs, where every verse
Is full to the brim with black sorrow,
For I detest these passions in myself.
I wrote so that my words could reach
Christians in all corners of the earth.*

*I wrote for those who only enter life
As well as for those who have lived and matured,
For those completing their earthly journey
And stepping over the fateful limit.*

*I wrote for the righteous and for the sinner,
For the comforting and the inconsolable,
For the judging and the convicted,
For the penitent and those enslaved by sin,
For do-gooders and villains,
For virgins and adulterers,
For all: the high-born and the godless,
Downtrodden slaves and grand princes.
I wrote equally for husbands and wives,
For the degraded and those risen high,
For rulers and for the oppressed,
For abusers and for the abused,
For those who give comfort and those who are comforted.*

*I wrote equally for those on horseback and those on foot,
For the insignificant and for the great,
For city-dwellers and for half-savage highlanders,
And for him who is the supreme ruler,
Whose judge is God alone,
For people who are vain and those who are pious,
For monks and holy hermits.*

*May these verses, full of my suffering,
Become a guidance to someone.*

*May he who repents a black transgression
Find comfort in my writings.
May someone turn to his good
My work, my zeal.
May my verse, turning into a prayer and a supplication,
Elicit God's mercy.*

3. God grant deliverance from sin

*God, grant deliverance from sin
To all who grasp the meaning of these mournful words,
All who comprehend the essence of this work.
Free them from the baneful fetters
Of doubt, which is the same as crime.
Give them the absolution they long for,
Let their abundant tears flow.*

*May their supplication, raised in my voice,
Please You.
May they also raise a prayer
For me, Your slave,
God, may Your light and grace descend
Upon Your obedient slaves,
All the repentant who read
With sympathy this book of mournful songs!*

*If You receive all those who in my wake
Come to You with my zealous prayer,
Open the gates of Your holy abode
To me too, O merciful God.
And if my tearful prayer
Falls, like rain, washing away my sins,
May this water of life
Also wash me, Your base slave.*

*O God, if you save all those
Agreeing with the thoughts that I express,
Forgive my grave sins
And save me too, O blessed God.
If my song inspires in some soul
Thoughts pleasing to You,
My heavenly Father,*

Do not deprive me of Your grace.

*If those who comprehend my verse
Raise their trembling hands –
May the pain of my sorrowful moans
Join their pure prayer,
And if the thoughts expressed in this book
Are pleasing to You,
Be merciful to my ancestors
If Your generous grace,*

*If someone poor in spirit
Wavers in the holy faith in a moment of grief,
May he find support in this book
And, taking heart, put his trust in You.
If someone weak in faith begins to fear
That the temple of his hope will not hold out,
May your hand strengthen that unstable temple
With the lines of this mournful book.*

*When someone cruelly tormented by an illness
Almost loses his bond with life,
May he find strength in these lines
And rise again, praying to You.
If deadly fear or doubt
Suddenly seizes someone,
May he find solace in this book,
May he find peace by Your grace.*

*And if the burden of unredeemed sins
Pulls a sinner into the abyss, may he,
By the power of the words that You inspired in me,
Be saved and pardoned forever.
If somewhere there is a sinner
Who does not escape the Devil's trap -
Allow my work to be his support
And set the madman right with Your own lights.*

*And if someone in fatal pride
Is ready to forget the words of holy prayers –
Allow me to bring him back to the sacred faith*

*By the power of the words that You inspired.
Allow my book of sorrowful songs
To bring back to the Eucharist and the Cross
Those who persist in their contemptible vanity
In satanic blindness.*

*And let my song,
Inspired by your divine mercy,
Calm the storm of unbelief
That rages, as over the water, over people's souls.*

4. Complete this work

*Complete this work
Which I began in hope
And with Your name,
So that my singing may become healing,
Curing the wounds of body and soul.*

*If my humble work is finished
With Your holy blessing –
May the divine spirit in it
Join with my meagre inspiration.*

*Do not extinguish
The revelation You have granted,
Do not abandon my reason,
But, again and again, receive praise
From Your servant.
Amen.*

Malcolm Cottle was chorister of St. Paul's Cathedral and sang at the Coronation in 1953. He is currently Musical Director of St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church, Cadogan Street, Chelsea. For over 35 years he was Musical Director of the North London Progressive Synagogue and is currently Musical Director of Southgate Progressive Synagogue. Malcolm has been Chorus Master of Hatfield Philharmonic Chorus and has worked with New Opera Company, Beaufort Opera, and Orpheus Opera. He has been conductor of the London Concord Singers since 1966.

Malcolm has worked in theatre as Musical Director at Sheffield Playhouse, Nottingham Playhouse, Wyvern Theatre, Swindon and Swan Theatre, Worcester. He currently works at the London Studio Centre for Dance and Drama, for whom he has directed the music for several shows, ranging from *Show Boat* to *West Side Story* and *Hair!* He is also Assistant Musical Director to the Alyth Choral Society.

London Concord Singers:

Soprano: Merrie Cave, Alison Cross, Bozena Borzyskowska, Charlotte De Mille, Pam Feild, Victoria Hall, Sonia Harle, Pia Huber, Maggie Jennings, Sylvia Kalisch, Diana Maynard, Sarah Moyse, Rowena Wells

Alto: Tricia Cottle, Gretchen Cummings, Helen Ford, Caroline Hill, Valerie MacLeod, Sally Prime, Ruth Sanderson, Jill Tipping

Tenor: Katie Boot, Steve Finch, David Firshman, David Garioch, Robert Hugill, Margaret Jackson-Roberts, Phillip Schöne

Bass: Richard Burbury, Michael Derrick, David Lowe, John McLeod, John Penty, Kevin Raftery, Christopher Slack, Colin Symes

London Concord Singers would like to thank those singers who have joined us especially for this concert to enable us to perform the Schnittke Concerto for Choir.

London Concord Singers was established in 1966 by the conductor, Malcolm Cottle and he has remained the Musical Director ever since. The choir became a registered charity in 1996. The choir rehearses weekly in Central London and gives three main concerts per year with a repertoire ranging widely from Renaissance to Contemporary. Concert programmes tend to concentrate on unaccompanied music and are known for their eclecticism.

London Concord Singers have given a number of world, UK and London premieres of works by composers such as John Rutter, Andrzej Panufnik, Richard Rodney Bennett, John McCabe, Kenneth Leighton and Michael Ball, as well as pieces specially written for the choir. The choir has also given performances of major contemporary pieces such as Alfred Schnittke's Choral Concerto and Malcolm Williamson's Requiem for a Tribe Brother.

In recent years the choir have undertaken a short foreign concert tour each summer; places visited include Rouen, Caen, Ghent, Bruges, Strasbourg and Barcelona. On their 2003 French tour, the choir sang to an audience of 1300 in Rheims Cathedral in a concert which was part of the *Flâneries Musicales d'Été*. In July 2006, the choir travelled to Tallinn, Estonia, and in 2007 they performed in Basel, giving concerts in the Basler Münster as well as singing mass at Mariastein monastery. This year they performed in Verona.

Programme notes by Robert Hugill.

Singers Wanted

We are always keen for new singers to join the choir. If you are interested, then please speak to one of the singers tonight or contact the Hon. Secretary, Robert Hugill.

Telephone: 020 7374 3600

Email: info@londonconcondsingers.org.uk

Join our Mailing List

Just send an email to info@londonconcondsingers.org.uk and we will add you to our mailing list, sending you regular information about our concerts. We are happy to send mailings as emails or real leaflets in envelopes, just let us know your name and address.

London Concord Singers
36 Torrens Road, London, SW2 5BT

Dates for your Diary

Thursday 2nd April, 7.30pm

Easter Concert

Grosvenor Chapel, South Audley Street, Mayfair

Saturday 16th May, 7.30pm

Music under the Pyramid

Christ Church, Redford Way, Uxbridge

Wednesday 15th July, 7.30pm

Summer Music

St. Michael's Church, Chester Square, Victoria

31st July – 2nd August 2009

Tour to Antwerp