

The West Somerset Singers

*The West Somerset Singers welcome you
and present*



*A
Seasonal Celebration
of
Great
Composers*

Saturday 5th December 2009

**Musical Director - Nick Thomas
Organist - Alex Davies**

Programme

Messe de Minuit (sur des airs de noel) - **Charpentier**
Soloists:
First Soprano - Pat Phillips
Second Soprano - Gill Thompson
Alto - Anne-Marie Twort

Air Lilliburlero - **Purcell**
Performed by
by Nick and Elaine Thomas

Ave Maria - **Mendelssohn**
Tenor Solo: Chris Ball

INTERVAL - 15 minutes

Te Deum - **Haydn**

Suite from The Snowman
For flute and piano.
Music by **Howard Blake**.
Performed by Nick and Elaine Thomas.

When God Was Minded To Be Born - **Malcolm Archer**
(words by M. Woodruff)

For Unto Us A Child Is Born - from **Handel's Messiah**

O Men From The Fields - **Arnold Cooke**
(words by Padraic Colum)
Alto solo: Margaret Roe

The Three Kings - **Peter Cornelius**
(arranged by Ivor Atkins)
Baritone Solo: Chris Doyle

No Longer a Baby - **Jan Sanborn**
(words by Bryan Jeffrey Leech)

Congregational Carols -
God Rest You Merry Gentlemen
O Come, All Ye Faithful

Refreshments will be served in the church hall after this evening's performance

Programme Notes

This evening we mark the anniversary of the great composers Handel, Haydn, Mendelssohn and Purcell as well as performing Charpentier's beautiful Messe de Minuit and a selection of festive pieces.

Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643 - 1704)

Messe de Minuit

Although he never held a position in the court of Louis XIV, Charpentier was one of the leading composers in 17th century France. Many of his biographical details are unclear, but he studied for some years with Carissimi in Rome. As a result, his music is influenced by the prevailing Italian vocal style. While Charpentier's long association with Moliere's troupe of actors resulted in many stage works, he also held appointments involving sacred music. By the early 1680s, he was employed by the Dauphin as Musical Director, writing both dramatic works and large-scale motets and soon became the maitre de musique to the principal church of the Jesuits in Paris, a position which required the composition of sacred dramas as well as motets and masses. In June 1698, he was appointed Musical Director at La Sainte Chapelle, a prestigious post second only to the directorship of the Royal Chapel at Versailles and one which he held until his death in 1704.

Charpentier's 'Messe de Minuit pour Noel' probably dates from the 1690s. It is scored for six soloists, four-part choir and an orchestra of two flutes, strings and continuo. It is the best-known of his eleven surviving Masses, owing its appeal to the fact that many sections of the work are based on traditional French carols. After the first Kyrie, Charpentier has written in the manuscript: 'Here the organ plays the same carol'. The Credo is followed by an indication that during the Offertory the strings should play the carol 'O leave your sheep', a setting of which appears in another of the composer's manuscripts.

Programme Note by Cappella Novocastriensis

**Franz Joseph Haydn (1732 - 1809) 200 year anniversary of the death of the composer
Te Deum for the Empress Marie Therese
(Te Deum in C)**

Haydn composed two settings of the Te Deum laudamus – one in the 1760s and this later one which was composed for (and seemingly at the insistence of) the Empress Marie Therese of Austria sometime after 1797. The Empress, who was the consort of Francis I, Emperor of Austria, greatly admired Haydn's music and sang the solo soprano part in private performances of the late masses and oratorios during Haydn's lifetime. Evidence of the première of this Te Deum is lacking; the first documented performance we know about was one conducted by Haydn himself at Eisenstadt, one of the palaces owned by his employer Prince Nikolaus Esterházy II, on 8 September 1800.

The Marie Therese Te Deum belongs to the period of Haydn's Indian summer, when in his late 60s he produced his last great oratorios *The Creation* and *The Seasons* and his last six Masses. Like those other works it displays the freshness and vitality of a composing mind that was still at the height of its inventive powers. The piece is in the festive key of C, a tonality which in *The Creation* Haydn employed to represent the celestial praise when major and the darkness of chaos and hell when minor. In common with the earlier Te Deum setting that he composed (also in C), tonight's work makes liberal use of trumpets and drums. It falls into three divisions: two outer major-mode sections marked *Allegro con spirito* framing a brief adagio in C minor.

The joyful opening, in unison, sets the words "Te Deum laudamua" ("We praise Thee, O God") to music loosely based on Gregorian chant. The tempo slows and the mood darkens for the words "Te ergo quaesumus famulis tuis subveni, quos pretioso sanguine redemisti" ("We therefore pray Thee, help Thy servants, whom Thou hast redeemed by Thy precious blood").

In addition to being in the minor, this adagio passage has some chromatic features that put one in mind of the Representation of Chaos from *The Creation*. The original tempo and mood of exhaltation returns at the words "Aeterna fac cum Sanctis Tuis" ("Make us to be numbered with Thy Saints in glory everlasting").

Into this last section Haydn incorporates a splendid little double fugue at the words "In Te Dominum speravi" ("O Lord, in Thee I have trusted"). He also draws a telling contrast between the ebullient optimism of these words with

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the heartfelt appeal "Non confundar in aeternum" ("Let me never be confounded"), the music for which momentarily recalls the dark chromatic uncertainties of chaos again. But the work ends as it began, with Haydn using the unequivocal key of C major to assert his view of the joyous unity between God and His people.

Programme Note by William Gould

**Felix Mendelssohn (1809 - 1847) 200 year anniversary of the birth of the composer
Ave Maria Op. 23/2**

This is a work that dates from a time of travel. In September 1830, en route to Italy, Mendelssohn began work on it in Vienna, blaming the 'dissipation' of that city for his decision to "go into myself and write a sacred piece". As a composition by a member of a Jewish family converted to Protestantism, it is music of a surprisingly Catholic cast, a contemporary commentator remarked that "the music sings so convincingly of Mary's sanctity that it could easily lead a non-Catholic to her". The tenor soloist and the other voices alternate in the two outer sections, while the central movement at 'Sancta Maria' is purely choral. The choir sings in eight parts throughout, and the texture is further enhanced by brief passages for eight solo voices singing independently of the choir after the return of the opening material.

Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum,
Benedicta tu in mulieribus.
Sancta Maria, mater Dei,
Ora pro nobis peccatoribus,
Nunc et in hora mortis nostri.

Hail, Mary, full of grace, The Lord is with you,
Blessed are you among women.
Holy Mary, mother of God,
Pray for us sinners,
Now and in the hour of our death.

(Antiphon derived from Luke I, v. 28)

Programme Note by John Nightingale for the South London Singers, 1997

These notes were supplied through the Programme Note Bank of Making Music, the National Federation of Music Societies.

Henry Purcell (1659 – 1695) 350 year anniversary of the birth of the composer**Air Lilliburlero**

Purcell was born in London in 1659, the son of Thomas Purcell one of the King's musicians. He was boy chorister of Chapel Royal, studying with Pelham Humfrey and John Blow. In 1674 Purcell was appointed tuner of Westminster Abbey organ and at the age of 18 succeeded Matthew Locke as composer to the King's violins. He succeeded Blow as organist at Westminster Abbey in 1679. In the following year he published Fantasia for strings and then began to compose the long series of 'welcome odes' and other official choral pieces. Lilliburlero appears in Purcell's Musick's Handmaid under the title 'A New Irish Tune' as a harpsichord piece and he also used it as a ground bass in music for the play The Gordian Knot untied.

(Note is edited from entries in The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Music, 2007)

Instrumental piece performed by Nick Thomas

George Frideric Handel (1685 - 1759) 250 year anniversary of the death of the composer**For Unto Us A Child Is Born from the Messiah**

George Frideric Handel (23 February 1685 – 14 April 1759) was a German-born Baroque composer who is famous for his operas, oratorios and concerti grossi. Handel's compositions include 42 operas; 29 oratorios; more than 120 cantatas, trios and duets; numerous arias; chamber music; a large number of ecumenical pieces; odes and serenatas; and 16 organ concerti. His oratorio Messiah, with its "Hallelujah" chorus, is among the most famous works of classical music and is a popular choice for performances in the Christmas season.

(Note taken from Wikipedia)

Biographies

Musical Director - Nick Thomas

Nick is at present head of music at Kingsmead School, Wiveliscombe where he recently directed a production of Jesus Christ Superstar. His musical interests are wide and varied. He is a multi instrumentalist concentrating mainly on flute, piano and piano accordion. He was until recently musical director and organist at St George's C of E Church, Wilton. He has performed and worked with many groups in the Taunton area including Orchestra West, and many local operatic societies.

As well as directing the West Somerset Singers, Nick is the musical director for Somerset Opera's touring show 'Patience.'

He regularly plays accordion, flute and whistle with his folk band Tranters Folly. He greatly enjoys making music, and in particular bringing out the best in other performers - be they adults or young people.

Organist - Alex Davies

Alex Davies studied at Trinity College of Music London where his organ teachers included John Winter and Sean Farrell. On completion of his Bmus he was awarded a scholarship to pursue post graduate studies in organ with Roger Sayer at Rochester Cathedral. Whilst studying at college he won the Cardnell organ prize and was organ scholar to St Augustine's Queens Gate and St. Alfege in Greenwich. He has performed in concerts, and given recitals at venues throughout London including; Marylebone Parish Church, Royal Naval College Chapel, Royal Festival Hall, Southwark Cathedral. In 2003/4 he worked at Blackburn Cathedral as organ scholar assisting the busy music department, accompanying services and playing in concerts and recitals.

Currently Alex is working in the family Hotel business in Lyme Regis and locally as a musician. He is organist at the Parish Church and a member of the Lyme Regis organ appeal committee and directs Lyme Bay Chorale. Over the last two years Alex has directed numerous concerts at the Parish Church in Lyme, which have raised significant funds for local charities and has recently produced the CD recording 'With love from Lyme' capturing over one hundred local performers which has sold successfully in aid of the organ appeal.

Tenor – Christopher Ball

Christopher has been active in the music life of the Taunton area for over 30 years. As a singer he has made numerous appearances on stage, in churches and in the concert hall. He has conducted a diverse range of pieces from Mozart to Sondheim for operatic societies in Wellington and Taunton and is currently Musical Director of Somerset Opera.

Baritone – Chris Doyle

Chris Doyle's performing career has included stage, choral and solo work. His range runs from barbershop quartets to Zadok the Priest - and most things in between! Since coming to Somerset, Chris has sung in Wells Cathedral and also venues in and around Taunton. As well as performing with WSS, Chris sings with Wilton Church choir, Taunton Choral Society and occasionally Taunton Camerata. This is Chris's third solo performance with the West Somerset Singers. He harbours a secret yearning to play the part of Fagin on stage...

God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen

God rest you merry, gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay,
For Jesus Christ our Saviour
Was born upon this day,
To save us all from Satan's power
When we were gone astray:

*O tidings of comfort and joy,
comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy.*

From God our heavenly Father
A blessed angel came,
And unto certain shepherds
Brought tidings of the same,
How that in Bethlehem was born
The Son of God by name:
O tidings ...

The shepherds at those tidings
Rejoiced much in mind,
And left their flocks a-feeding
In tempest, storm and wind,
And went to Bethlehem straightway,
This blessed Babe to find:
O tidings ...

But when to Bethlehem they came,
Whereat this Infant lay,
They found Him in a manger,
Where oxen feed on hay;
His mother Mary kneeling,
Unto the Lord did pray:
O tidings ...

Now to the Lord sing praises,
All you within this place,
And with true love and brotherhood
Each other now embrace;
This holy tide of Christmas
All others doth deface
O tidings ...

O come, all ye faithful

O come, all ye faithful
Joyful and triumphant,
O Come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem.
Come and behold Him, Born the King of angels;

Refrain

O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

God of God, Light of Light,
Lo! he abhors not the Virgin's womb;
Very God, Begotten not created.

Chorus

Sing, choirs of angels, Sing in exultation;
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God, In the highest;

Chorus

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, Born that happy morning;
Jesu, to Thee be glory given;
Word of the Father, Now in flesh appearing.

Chorus

About West Somerset Singers

The West Somerset Singers is a mixed voice adult choir founded in 1945 by Arthur Temple, head of music at Taunton School.

The intention was for the choir to perform unusual works in contrast to Taunton Choral Society. At this time the choir had twenty four singers drawn mostly from the music staff of local schools and concentrated on cameo, unusual and frequently modern works.

Arthur Temple's friend, the baritone Henry Cummings, became Patron and joined the choir in both religious and secular works. The great Soprano, Isobel Baillie, was also a soloist in those days and works such as E.J. Moerans 'Songs of Springtime' and Malcolm Sargent's 'The Second Crucifixion' appeared in the programmes.

Arthur Temple conducted the choir for the first fifteen years or so handing over to the leading soprano, Elizabeth Rowe. Three years later, the remarkable Bob Tullett, the musical director at Bishop Fox's School, took on the baton. He coached the choir to success at Bath Music Festival.

Over the years the choir has seen a few changes in conductor including Chris Banks, Richard Barrell and Dawn Lankester but Arthur Temple's original concept of performing little known works has largely been maintained.

In 1994 the choir became a registered charity. Its Committee is elected annually at the AGM and comprises Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, NFMS representative and not more than six other members including a librarian and publicity officer.

The West Somerset Singers celebrated their Diamond Jubilee in December 2005 with a concert at St Mary Magdalene Church, Taunton with a repertoire including Charpentier 'Midnight Mass', Buxtehude 'The Newborn Infant' and Vivaldi 'Gloria'.

Today the choir is led by Nick Thomas, head of music at Kingsmead School, Wiveliscombe. Choir numbers have fluctuated but currently are close to fifty.

West Somerset Singers meet on Monday evenings for two terms in the Gwyn Williams room at Taunton School.

Our next rehearsal will take place on Monday 11th January 2010 at 7.30pm.

New members very welcome.

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Acknowledgments

The West Somerset Singers would like to thank **St George's C of E**, Wilton for their hospitality.

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Members would like to express their gratitude to **Rachel Robinson** for accompanying the choir at their Monday evening rehearsals.

Members would also like to thank Paul Williams and Peter Roe for translation of Latin text.