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UNIVERSITY CHOIR & CHAMBER CHOIR

Saturday 4 December 2021, 7.30pm
Great Hall, Trent Building

PROGRAMME

The Gallant Weaver

James MacMillan (b.1959)

First performed in April 1997 by Paisley Abbey Choir, this ideal introduction to MacMillan's secular choral music is rich in Scottish flavour, appropriate to its Robert Burns text. Characteristic vocal elements are the ornamental inflections drawn from Scottish folk music and Gaelic Psalmody, and the overall mood is one of tranquillity. Distinctive colourings of the voice parts are explored through triple divisions of the sopranos and double divisions in the other parts.

© Paul Spicer

Choral Dances from Gloriana

Benjamin Britten (1913-76)

Time

Concord

Time and Concord

Country Girls

Rustics and Fishermen

Final Dance of Homage

Britten's opera *Gloriana*, Op.53, was first performed at a gala event at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, on 8 June 1953 in the presence of Queen Elizabeth II, in honour of whose coronation (which had taken place just six days before) the work had been composed. Although popular with the general public, who flocked enthusiastically to the early run of performances, the opera was harshly treated in the national press: critics who were already sceptical of the composer's meteoric rise to fame were delighted that the audience at the gala première – largely made up of unmusical diplomats and other dignitaries – was baffled by the work, and offended by its warts-and-all portrayal of an ageing monarch. Always pathologically sensitive to criticism, Britten made little attempt to promote the opera after this unfortunate debacle and it only became established in the mainstream operatic repertory many years after his death. He nevertheless salvaged certain parts of the score and sanctioned their use in concert performances.

The set of six Choral dances from 'Gloriana' for unaccompanied chorus was first performed by the BBC Midland Chorus in a broadcast on 7 March 1954; the set was later rearranged to include tenor solo and harp obbligato for a performance to mark the opening of the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, in 1967. The dances occur in the first scene of the opera's second act, which portrays a colourful masque at Norwich's Guildhall attended by Queen Elizabeth I during a royal progress. Britten had intended this scene to combine vivid pageantry with a homage to Elizabethan song and dance, but later felt that it impeded the dramatic flow of the opera as a whole, and in some later productions the entire scene was cut. The sequence begins with the appearance of the demigod Time, 'lusty and blithe', who is followed by his wife Concord. Her song is set to music made up entirely of concords, a deliberate witticism on Britten's part. After Time and Concord have danced together, country girls, rustics and fishermen join in the celebrations before the concluding 'Dance of homage' to the visiting sovereign.

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Sleep

Eric Whitacre (b.1970)

In the winter of 1999, I was commissioned by Ms. Julia Armstrong to set her favourite poem, Robert Frost's immortal 'Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening'. Following the successful premiere, I began receiving calls from conductors trying to get a hold of the work. And here was my tragic mistake: I never secured permission to use the poem and Robert Frost's poetry has been under tight control from his estate since his death. After a long legal battle, the estate of Robert Frost and their publisher forbid me from using the poem for publication or performance until the poem became public domain in 2038. I was crushed. After many discussions with my wife, I decided that I would ask my friend and brilliant poet Charles Anthony Silvestri to set new words to the music I had already written. Tony wrote an absolutely exquisite poem, finding a completely different (but equally beautiful) message in the music I had already written. I actually prefer Tony's poem now...

©Eric Whitacre

Five Negro Spirituals from A Child of Our Time

Michael Tippett (1905-88)

Steal away
Nobody knows
Go down, Moses
By and by
Deep River

Tippett began his oratorio *A Child of our Time* as the Second World War broke out and its composition gave the composer a creative outlet for his pacifism (he was later imprisoned as a conscientious objector). Central to the oratorio are the Five Negro Spirituals which function in a similar manner to the chorales in Bach's Passions. In 1958 Tippett extracted the spirituals from the oratorio and re-scored them for voices alone. The genius of these arrangements lies in Tippett's ability to take orchestral accompaniments and to make them work as vocal lines. The effect is a grand one in which Tippett retains the directness of expression of the spirituals while lovingly adorning each one with musical gestures which were very much of his own time.

Zadok the Priest

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

As a newly naturalized British citizen Handel was invited to compose the music for the coronation of King George II on 11 October 1727. Of the four anthems written for the occasion, Handel's setting of 'Zadok the priest' was performed at the Anointing moment of the ceremony and has been sung at every subsequent coronation.

Northern Lights

Ola Gjeilo (b.1978)

Ola Gjeilo was born in Norway in 1978 and moved to the United States in 2001 to begin his composition studies at the Juilliard School in New York City. He is currently composer-in-residence with Voces8. Ola's concert works are performed all over the world, and his debut recording as pianist-composer, the lyrical crossover album *Stone Rose*, was followed in 2012 by its sequel *Piano Improvisations*. Many of Ola's choral works are featured on Phoenix Chorale's bestselling *Northern Lights* album, which is devoted entirely to his music for choir.

Here are Ola Gjeilo's own words recounting his experience witnessing the northern lights and how this inspiring event moved him to write the piece of the same name:

'Northern Lights' is my most Norwegian production in years; composed in an attic outside of Oslo at Christmas time in 2007, it's one of the few works I have written in Norway since I moved to New York in 2001. The US is my home now, so I guess my work has been increasingly reflecting my love for American music, writing and scenery. Most of all, this piece and its text is about beauty. About a 'terrible', powerful beauty, although the music is quite serene on the surface.

Looking out from the attic window that Christmas in Oslo, over a wintery lake under the stars, I was thinking about how this ‘terrible’ beauty is so profoundly reflected in the northern lights, or aurora borealis, which, having grown up in the southern part of the country, I have only seen once or twice in my life. It is one of the most beautiful natural phenomena I’ve ever witnessed, and has such a powerful, electric quality that must have been both mesmerizing and terrifying to people in the past, when no one knew what it was and when much superstition was attached to these experiences.

Northern Norway is one of the areas where aurora borealis is easiest to spot, thanks to the warming effects of the Gulf Stream, which makes the area habitable. At www.visitnorway.com, you can find incredible pictures of the aurora borealis phenomenon, pictures that also greatly inspired this piece.

Chichester Psalms

Psalm 108, vs.2

Psalm 23

Psalm 131

Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990)

Like Benjamin Britten’s *Rejoice in the Lamb* (1943) and several liturgical works by other British composers, Bernstein’s *Chichester Psalms* (1965) were commissioned by Walter Hussey, the Dean of Chichester Cathedral. Hussey had first come to national attention as an energetic patron of the arts during his time as vicar of St Matthew’s Church, Northampton, some twenty years previously, and after taking up his Deanship in 1955 he continued to commission notable art works and compositions until his retirement in 1977. He did not, however, feel that his resources would stretch to engaging a full orchestra for the première of the new Bernstein piece, and this is reflected in the unusual choice of instrumental forces, which comprise brass, two harps, percussion, and strings. The first performance of *Chichester Psalms* was in the event given in the United States by the New York Philharmonic under the composer’s baton in July 1965, Hussey having generously waived his rights to the first performance; the British premiere took place in Chichester Cathedral later in the month and was given by the combined choirs of the cathedrals of Chichester, Salisbury, and Winchester.

When writing to invite Bernstein to compose the piece, Hussey confessed that he would be delighted if the score had ‘a hint of *West Side Story*’ about it. He may have ended up with more than he bargained for, since Bernstein (as was his habit) lifted much of the musical material from pre-existing scores, not only from his most famous Broadway musical, but also from the projected musical *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Thus, the menacing canon for tenors and basses in the middle of the second movement, which sets the Hebrew text for ‘Why do the nations rage?’, originated in an early version of the Prologue to *West Side Story* where the text was ‘Make the sons of bitches pay’(!). The first movement is an exhilarating setting of the *Jubilate Deo* (‘Make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye lands’), while the second pits a tender response to ‘The Lord is my Shepherd’ against the anguish of Psalm 2. A searingly intense prelude for strings leads into an unashamedly melodic finale which celebrates the message of Psalm 133: ‘how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity’.

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Calum Fraser

Calum Fraser is a versatile conductor who specialises in operatic and choral repertoire. He studied at The University of Manchester and with Simon Halsey, Adrian Partington and Sarah Tenant-Flowers. Calum is a founding Musical Director of Scottish professional chamber choir Caledonian Voices and Musical Director of Streatham Choral and Farnham & Bourne Choral Society. He is also Director of Choirs at the University of Nottingham, with whom he travelled to Malaysia in 2016 and directed orchestral performances in Ningbo and Zhejiang, China, in 2017. Since September 2019, Calum has held the role of Director of Music at St Leonard’s Church in Streatham. Calum is the founding Artistic Director of Magnetic Opera, with whom he has conducted *The Barber of Seville*, *Maria Stuarda*, *La bohème*, *The Medium* and *The Marriage of Figaro*. Previously, he was Musical Director of Winterbourne Opera and Opera’r Ddraig and worked with ensembles including St George’s Singers and Ad Solem. Calum has appeared in masterclasses with leading conductors including Richard Bonyngé and Eric Whitacre.

Henry Parkes

Henry Parkes has enjoyed a varied career as a church musician, piano accompanist, répétiteur, orchestral keyboardist, and academic. Following organ scholarships at St George's, Windsor and Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, he went on to combine doctoral and postdoctoral research at the University of Cambridge with freelance work in London, including a stint as Associate Director of Music at All Saints, Margaret Street, near Oxford Circus. Solo recitals during this time included Westminster Abbey, Coventry Cathedral and the Buxton Festival, whilst accompanying activities included concerts with Andrew Kennedy, Ashley Riches, the Exon Singers, and the Schola Cantorum of Oxford. Orchestral credits range from the BBC Proms to the Vienna Musikverein to the Wilderness Festival. As an organist he can be heard on several recordings with the London Philharmonic Orchestra (Holst *The Planets*, Strauss *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, Brahms *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, and Dvořák *Stabat Mater*), as well as a 2010 Naxos release of James Whitbourn's *Luminosity* that still occasionally graces the airwaves of Radio 3 and ClassicFM. He is a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists, a past recipient of the Limpus Prize for performance, and holder of the Silver Medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians. Within these walls he is better known as an Associate Professor in the Department of Music, where he teaches courses on early music and publishes research on medieval chant.

University Chamber Choir

University Chamber Choir, directed by professional conductor Calum Fraser, was founded in 2016. Chamber Choir provides opportunities for singers to perform challenging repertoire to a high standard, performing alongside University Choir, University Philharmonia as well as performing concerts on its own. Membership is by invitation following an audition and all singers are also members of University Choir.

Soprano

Anna Gould
Emma Hewins
Georgina Kerby*
Sophie Lagden
Amy Lennon
Tessa Marley
Elizabeth McShane
Lois Merchant
Donna Smith
Alice Tune

Tenor

Benjamin Ball
Jacob Crabtree*
Fraser Ellson
Paul Emmett
Chris Ma
Joseph Zuccala

Alto

Klaudia Chmielewska
Charlotte Hayward-Faulkner
Rosalind Helsby
Marina Serdar*
Mara Thielemans
Carys Tyson-Taylor

Bass

Samuel Boobier
Max Butterworth
Sam Grimes
Nathaniel Ingham
Robert Johnson
Kelvin Njorge Macharia
Benjamin Richards
Peter Saunders*

University Choir

Calum Fraser, Director

Sam Grimes, Assistant Conductor

Charlotte Kitchen & Chloe McAleece, Arts Administration Ensemble Trainees

University Choir is an unauditioned choir comprising current students, staff and alumni of the University of Nottingham. The choir rehearses weekly and tackles a wide range of repertoire from Baroque to 21st-century works. Repertoire has included Szymanowski *Stabat Mater*, Beethoven *Symphony No.9 'Choral'*, John Adams *Harmonium*, Rachmaninov *The Bells* and Mozart *Requiem*.

Soprano

Iona Aylwin
Sara Berry
Phoebe Burgess
Jessica Clarke
Liliana de Lillo
Monireh Faizi
Anna Gould*
Emma Hewins
Rebecca Hughes
Georgina Kerby
Charlotte Kitchen
Sophie Lagden
Amy Lennon
Tessa Marley
Elizabeth McShane
Hermione Mellor
Lois Merchant
Ellis Molinghen
Jaine Mould
Kathleen Murray
Hayley Renshaw
Hazel Russell
Pia Schardt
Donna Smith
Alice Tune
Hannah Walton-Hughes
Joan Whiting

Alto

Ellen Bicknell
Lucy Blick
Klaudia Chmielewska
Rosie Clark
Tess Clothier
Catherine Glenister
Charlotte Hayward-Faulkner
Rosalind Helsby*
Elena Howard
Lydia Kear
Jessica Meyer
Anisha Sarkar
Anne Sempik
Marina Serdar*
Wendy Start
Mara Thielemans
Carys Tyson-Taylor
Mairead Ward
Penny Wilkerson
Alex Zak
Franka Zlatic

Tenor

Benjamin Ball
Peter Briggs
Jacob Crabtree
Fraser Ellson*
Paul Emmett
Warrick Kear
Chris Ma
Angel Moya-Benegas
Joseph Zuccala

Bass

Daniel Blyth
Samuel Boobier
Max Butterworth
Chett Cassidy
Ed Clarke
Sam Grimes
Alex Hill
Nathaniel Ingham
Robert Johnson
Kelvin Njorge Macharia
Benjamin Richards*
Peter Saunders