

Portishead
Choral
Society

CHRISTMAS CONCERT

Portishead Choral Society
Conductor: Jonathan Palmer

Richard Lennox (Organ)

Annie Garry (Soprano)

Rosa Witts (Mezzo Soprano)

Alexander Robinson (Tenor)

Roger Kelly (Bass)

Portishead Methodist Church
Friday 16th December 2022 at 7.30

PROGRAMME

www.portisheadchoral.co.uk

PROGRAMME

Awake the Trumpet's Lofty Sound (from 'Samson')

Handel

For many years Handel's 'Samson' was every British choral society's antidote to 'Messiah'. However, over the past two or three decades it has been neglected, probably for no other reason than sheer cost. From its first performance in 1742, Samson was an immediate success; indeed the ever-cynical Horace Walpole said, "Handel has set up an oratorio against the operas and succeeds." One of the most outstanding aspects of the work is that Handel composed it within a month of completing Messiah. Two masterpieces in quick succession is some feat. 'Awake the Trumpet's Lofty Sound' is the first chorus of Act 1.

Your Voices Tune (from 'Alexander's Feast')

Handel

'Alexander's Feast' is an Ode with music by Handel set to a libretto by Newburgh Hamilton who adapted his libretto from John Dryden's ode Alexander's Feast, or the Power of Music (1697) which had been written to celebrate Saint Cecilia's Day (Nov 22nd). The piece was a great success and it encouraged Handel to make the transition from writing Italian operas to English choral works. This is the concluding chorus of the work.

'Coronation' Mass in C major

Mozart

Of the sacred works that Mozart composed in Salzburg, none is as well-known or as popular as the 'Mass in C' K317. In 1779 Mozart returned from his disastrous trip to Paris and, partly out of material necessity and also to please his father, he took up a position in the Archbishop's service in Salzburg. His duties included "to provide the court and church with new compositions of his own creation". At the first opportunity Mozart fulfilled this demand, composing the mass for the Easter Day service on 4th April 1779. Although it was conceived as a "Solemn Mass", its length suggests a "Short Mass" as demanded by the requirement that, even for the most solemn occasions, a mass had to last no more than 45 minutes. It therefore had to have a grand ceremonial setting but a compact structure, so Mozart omits formal closing fugues for the 'Gloria' and 'Credo'. The 'Credo' with its problematic, vast text is in a tight rondo form, and the 'Dona Nobis Pacem' recalls the music of the Kyrie.

Even as early as the 19th Century the mass was already popularly referred to as the "Coronation Mass". The nickname grew out of the misguided belief that Mozart had written the mass for Salzburg's annual celebration of the anniversary of the crowning of the Shrine of the Virgin. Certainly the music itself is celebratory in nature, and would have fitted a coronation or Easter Day service perfectly. The soloists are continually employed either as a quartet, in pairs or in solo lines that contrast with the larger forces of the choir. Perhaps the most obvious reason for the mass's popularity in Prague in 1791/2 was the uncanny similarity between the soprano solo Agnus Dei and the Countess's aria 'Dove Sono' from Figaro which had been so successful there in the 1780s.

INTERVAL

Two movements from 'Hodie'

Vaughan Williams

Choral, 'The Blessed Son of God'

Lullaby, Sweet was the Song (Soprano solo, Miriam Dunn, and ladies' voices)

'Hodie' (which translates as 'this day') was a product of Vaughan Williams's old age, but it flows with a vitality, force and inventiveness. Written in 1953-4 it was first performed at the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester Cathedral in 1954. The composer had always wanted to write a substantial, large-scale Christmas work, and here he fused the religious spirit of the festival with British overtones, with

associations to English countryside carols. Vaughan Williams used no specific folk tunes in this work, but by this point in his career he had so synthesized their character that his folk tune-like themes sound fully authentic. These two calm movements reflect both the Christmas theme, and the recognisable personal style of the composer.

Softly the Night is Sleeping

Palmer

(Annie Garry, Rosa Witts, Alexander Robinson, Roger Kelly)

'Softly the Night is Sleeping' is the second movement of 'Awake the Voice', a work that was commissioned by Portishead Choral Society for their Diamond Jubilee celebrations and was composed during the Spring of 2014. The three verses are set for solo voices in different combinations: two duets, soprano/alto and tenor/bass are followed by the full ensemble. While the music is essentially the same for each verse, it appears to be different due to the contrast of vocal colour.

Candlelight Carol

Rutter

Angels' Carol

Rutter

John Rutter has a number of large-scale works for chorus and orchestra to his name. However, he is perhaps best known for his carols and other short pieces, which have become as traditional at Christmas as mince pies. His music is gratifying to sing, impeccably crafted, melodically rich and entirely infectious to satisfy anyone seeking a balanced programme of Christmas choral music.

Symphony No 1: Final

Vierne

(Organ solo, Richard Lennox)

This music is one of the staples of the solo organ repertoire. It compares in grandeur to the famous final movement Toccata of Widor's Fifth Organ Symphony. It opens with a memorable ostinato figure, while the opening melody is set in the deep bass of the pedalboard. The development section is one of the most creative sections of the entire symphony, transforming the main theme through many permutations in different ranges of the organ, and through many distant key centres.

Audience carols

arr. Palmer

Deck the Hall, Silent Night, God Rest you Merry Gentlemen

I have always loved the idea of involving the audience in a musical performance, especially at Christmas time when audiences always seem to want to join in. This is my third set of carol arrangements, the other previous ones having been used for our past Christmas concerts. The essential principle behind them is the elimination of the routine repetition of singing through countless verses, by presenting certain challenges that will keep everyone 'on their toes'. The role of the audience is not optional; you often alternate with the choir and have your own part to sing. There are also key changes to contend with, and sections where the men and ladies sing separately. Keep your wits about you, make sure you have a word-sheet, and join in with the fun!

Hark the Herald Angels Sing

trad.

Jonathan Palmer (Conductor)



After a distinguished teaching career in a variety of schools, Jonathan decided to retire in 2007 in order to concentrate on his composition, and for eight years was a part-time research student at the University of Bristol. In August 2010 he was awarded the Raymond Warren Prize for Composition. Having studied under Professor Geoff Poole and Professor John Pickard, he completed his PhD in Composition in January 2015, and became a Fellow of Trinity College, London, in Composition.

Over the years he has conducted numerous choral societies and orchestras. His choice of repertoire is varied, from Handel, Haydn, Mozart and Schubert to Vaughan Williams, Bernstein, Gershwin, and Rutter. In 1984, he directed performances of Olivier Messiaen's *Trois Petites Liturgies* at Sherborne Abbey and Clifton Cathedral, and in 2007, conducted a large-scale performance of Orff's *Carmina Burana* with massed choirs at the Colston Hall, Bristol.

Jonathan was appointed Musical Director of Portishead Choral Society in September 2013. During the 2013-14 season, he directed the choir in Handel's *Messiah*, Gounod's *Messe Solennelle de Sainte-Cécile* and Edward German's *Merrie England*. In the spring of 2014, he composed a special new cantata for the choir to coincide with the Diamond Jubilee celebrations. *Awake the Voice*, a thirty minute work in six movements for chorus, soloists, audience and orchestra, received its first performance in Gordano School, Portishead in December 2014. It was subsequently performed again in December 2018 in Clifton Cathedral in a collaborative Christmas-themed concert with Nailsea Choral Society and Chew Valley Choral Society. He enjoys the challenge of devising imaginative programmes for the concerts, and always tries to combine sacred and secular, familiar and the less-known, old and new, while seizing any opportunity for the audience to participate! In June 2019, the finale of the concert 'From Russia with Love' even required the audience to sing in Russian!

In 2009, he was appointed as a Choral Director for 'Choirs at Sea', and for a time, enjoyed numerous voyages on cruise ships forming choirs from the passengers. However, with the pandemic, he has withdrawn from that activity, and is now a member of a team of visiting speakers. He plays the cello and particularly enjoys playing chamber music. In his spare time he enjoys maintaining his classic cars, instrument restoration, cooking and travelling.

Richard Lennox (Organ)



Richard joined Portishead Choral Society as their accompanist in September 2016 and has played for their rehearsals and concerts over the past six years. He has recently worked with Weston Operatic Society as their Musical Director for '9 To 5 The Musical' at the Playhouse Theatre in Weston Super Mare, and has played in many concerts around the West Country. He played a return online concert with the international acclaimed bass/baritone Jonathan Viera 'Live from the Steinway Room', recorded on Sunday 30th October 8pm, and still available to view on YouTube and Facebook.

Richard plays all genres of music, which makes him an exciting professional musician. His other accomplishments include accompanying students for their exams (vocalists and Instrumentalists) at dance schools in Epsom and Cheltenham. Last year he had the privilege of accompanying one of the BBC Singers, Jamie W Hall, performing with Weston Choral Society.

Each year Richard has the pleasure of performing at the Royal Albert Hall - a Christian event 'Prom Praise' with the All Souls Orchestra and Choir, playing on their mighty organ and their Steinway piano. He also accompanies their soloists, including Mike Smith, Graham Kendrick, and Jonathan Viera.

Richard has had several interviews with Radio Bristol, and been invited to play his music; they are excellent in promoting his work. Various CDs have been recorded by Richard, with sincere thanks accorded to Chris Emmerson.

Annie Garry (Soprano)



Annie is a recent graduate from the University of Bristol, where she studied Civil Engineering and held a Vice-Chancellor's music scholarship. Annie attended Brighton College, where she achieved grade 8 in voice, piano and oboe and through participating in various school musical productions, choirs, and Glyndebourne Youth Opera, she developed her passion for making music. She studies singing with Angela Hickey and during university was President of the University Madrigal Ensemble and sang with the University Singers.

Annie is now a member of the Fitzhardinge Consort, a choral scholar at Clifton Cathedral and a member of the Rodolfus Choir, with whom she has recorded for BBC Radio 3 and for a Katherine Jenkins album. Annie was also a member of the National Youth Choir of Great Britain for two years, with whom she performed Brahms' German Requiem at the BBC Proms under Ilan Volkov, this summer.

Other recent highlights have included performing Handel's 'Dixit Dominus' at Ryedale Festival under John Butt, performing the soprano solo for Mendelssohn's 'Hear my Prayer' with Bristol University Chamber Choir and performing the title role in Purcell's 'Dido and Aeneas' with Bristol University Opera Society.

Rosa Witts (Mezzo Soprano)



Rosa is a Bristol-based singer and composer, recently graduated from the University of Bristol with a First-Class Bachelors in Music. During her degree she specialised in Contemporary Composition and Extended Vocal training, studying composition alongside John Pickard, and voice with Angela Hickey.

Rosa sings as a Soprano in The Fitzhardinge Consort and was Musical Director of the multi-award winning UK champions of A Cappella, The Bristol Suspensions, between 2020-2022. She has recently returned from a sell-out run at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, where she was the Musical Director and Producer for the show *On Wednesdays We Wear Maroon*.

Rosa has previously been a member of the Bristol University Singers, Glyndebourne Youth Opera, and East Sussex Bach Choir.

Alexander Robinson (Tenor)



Alex is a recent graduate from the University of Bristol, and currently works at the University's Student Union. His first notable performance was as a treble soloist, when he was cast as Miles in Britten's opera *The Turn of the Screw* in Salzburg. He also recorded the treble solos for a Christmas CD recorded at Abbey Road Studios in 2008, and in the same year also appeared in a music video by Dido!

As a tenor, Alex was a choral scholar for the London Youth Chamber Choir and at Southwark Cathedral, and as a soloist sang with these choirs in venues such as St. Paul's Cathedral, London, and St. Mark's Basilica, Venice.

He has recorded CDs with conductors such as Valery Gergiev and the late Sir Charles Mackerras, and was awarded first place in the 2017 Blackheath festival for young singers.

During his tenure at the University, Alex was an active member of the Opera Society, playing the title roles in Handel's *Acis and Galatea* and Bernstein's *Candide*. He also played the role of Toby in BOPS' sell-out production of *Sweeney Todd*, and was cast as Ralph Rackstraw in Gilbert and Sullivan's infamous *HMS Pinafore*. Alex is current a choral scholar at Clifton Cathedral where he sings every Sunday.

Roger Kelly (Bass)



Roger was born and raised in East London, and began his musical education under David Flood in the Canterbury Cathedral Choir, aged just 8. He went on to the King's School Canterbury, training under Andrew Pollock of the London Symphony Orchestra, Nick Todd of the Tallis Scholars, and David Rees-Williams, and achieving Grade 8 Singing, Viola, and Piano.

Roger moved to Bristol just over 6 years ago to study music at the University, and has stayed here ever since after falling in love with the South West. As well as his undergraduate degree in Music, he also has a Master's Degree in Musical Composition having studied under Professor John Pickard.

Roger has performed in countless musicals, operas, concerts and consorts over the last few years. Some highlights include performing with the Bristol University Madrigal Ensemble for six consecutive years, being a part of the Stile Antico Youth Consort, performing Vaughan Williams' 3rd Symphony with the University Symphony Orchestra, and singing the bass solo for the Mozart Requiem in St George's, Bristol, earlier this year. In his spare time, Roger enjoys supporting the Arsenal, stumbling onto a surprisingly nice local pub, and doing household chores.

Next concert

Portishead Choral Society

Haydn

The Creation

Saturday 25th March, 7.30

Methodist Church, Portishead, BS20 6EN

**Eloise Routledge (Soprano), Paul Badley (Tenor), Marcus Evans (Bass),
Richard Lennox (Organ), Jonathan Palmer (Conductor)**

**New members welcome – please see our website
or contact a committee members for more information.**

Portishead Choral Society
President: Pamela Rudge, GRSM(Hons), ARCM
Registered Charity No: 1039773

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M Bailey
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If you would like to become a patron, please contact the General Secretary, Richard Wall. Contact details can be found on our website.

Future Concerts

The next Portishead Choral Society concerts will be:

- 25 March 2023: **The Creation**, Haydn
- 10 June 2023: **'An Afro-American Celebration'**
Highlights from two operas that are rarely performed: Scott Joplin 'Treemonisha' and George Gershwin 'Porgy and Bess', with soloists!

New members are always welcome. Rehearsals are at Portishead Methodist Church on Thursday evenings at 7.30pm. More information is available on our website.

Members of the choir are available to sing at weddings, funerals, and other events. Please contact a committee member or see our website for further details.

[Clevedon Choral Society](#)

Watch for announcements on their website www.clevedonchoralsociety.org.uk

[Nailsea Choral Society](#)

Watch for announcements on their website www.nailseachoral.org.uk

Acknowledgements

The society is affiliated to Making Music, the charity that represents and support amateur choirs, orchestras, and music promoters throughout the United Kingdom.

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