

Portishead
Choral
Society

Portishead Choral Society

Conductor: Jonathan Palmer

Richard Lennox (Piano, Organ)

Newland Ensemble

Christmas Concert

“Musica sacra dall'Italia”

A musical programme for Advent, including

Verdi: *'Ave Maria' & 'Stabat Mater'*

(from 4 Sacred Pieces)

Puccini: *'Salve Regina'*

Vivaldi: *'Magnificat'*

Tchaikovsky, Rutter and Vaughan Williams

Christmas carols for choir and audience

Methodist Church, Portishead, BS20 6EN

Saturday 2 December 2023 at 7.30

To contact us via the website:

www.portisheadchoral.co.uk/contact



Registered Charity No 1039773

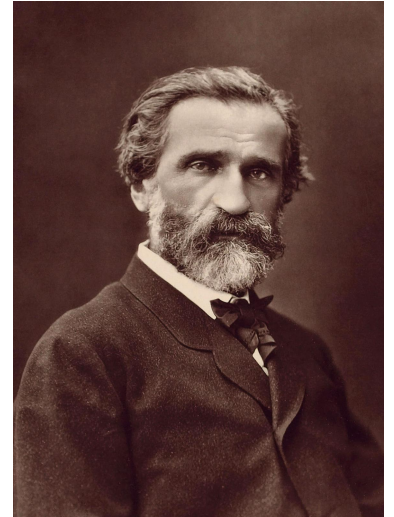
making
music

PROGRAMME

Ave Maria (from 'Four Sacred Pieces', 1898)
Stabat Mater (from 'Four Sacred Pieces', 1898)

Giuseppe Verdi

Verdi's *Quattro pezzi sacri* were written separately during the last decades of the composer's life and with different origins and purposes, they were nevertheless published together in 1898. While they are often performed as a cycle, we are performing the first two movements. The *Ave Maria* uses a scale called the "scala enigmatica", an extremely strange collection of notes which was submitted to a musical journal as a challenge to see if anyone could compose a piece using it. Verdi not only accepted the challenge, but produced a piece that is consonant to listen to and enjoyable to sing! He gives each voice part a fluid, sinuous vocal line, and the interaction of these produces a unique harmonic sound-world which gives the *Ave Maria* an ethereal, timeless quality.



The *Stabat Mater* is a more conventional work. However, Verdi's grounding in operatic writing is very much evident in its dramatic treatment of the words and its large-scale accompaniment. From the ponderous, bare opening chords to the inexorably rising tension of the final passage, it is a piece steeped in the Italian musical tradition. The Latin text is a 13th-century Christian hymn to Mary that portrays her suffering as Jesus Christ's mother during his crucifixion. The vivid imagery of the words provided Verdi with many opportunities for word-painting and musical reflection.

Salve Regina (for Soprano solo and Organ)
(Soprano: Venetia Kelly)

Giacomo Puccini

Although known primarily as an opera composer, Puccini also wrote other instrumental and vocal music that has withstood the test of time. His setting of the familiar Marian antiphon *Salve Regina* is a work that may not have been intended for publication, but was nonetheless published posthumously. Its harmonic shifts and sweeping melodic movement are unmistakably consistent with his rapturous operatic style.



Magnificat (RV 610)

(Sopranos: Miriam Dunn, Venetia Kelly)

Antonio Vivaldi

1. Magnificat (Chorus)
2. Et exultavit (Trio and Chorus)
3. Et misericordia (Chorus)
4. Fecit potentiam (Chorus)
5. Deposuit potentes de sede (Chorus)
6. Esurientes implevit bonis (Duet for two sopranos)
7. Suscepit Israel (Chorus)
8. Sicut locutus est (Chorus, SAB)
9. Gloria patri (Chorus)



Vivaldi was employed as chorus master and director of music at the 'Ospedale della Pietà' in Venice, which was an orphanage for girls. It was for his pupils there that he wrote many of his concertos and almost all his church music. Vivaldi made several versions of the 'Magnificat' canticle, and this one (RV 610) is the best known version. Despite being overshadowed by the famous 'Gloria' which is much favoured among choral societies, the 'Magnificat' contains a number of interesting features, ranging from powerful effects and unison writing to florid duets and unusual harmonic touches. On this occasion, in addition to the organ and strings, the vocal soloists have been chosen from within the choir.

INTERVAL

String Quartet Op. 11 (Andante cantabile)

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

This second movement is certainly one of the most famous pieces Tchaikovsky ever wrote. The melody from the middle section became an "international hit" and has become known through various transcriptions to millions the world over. Tolstoy was said to have been reduced to tears after the first performance. The movement is based on a folksong which Tchaikovsky said he had heard from a carpenter.



Carols

The Truth from Above

Vaughan Williams

The Shepherd's Cradle Song

Karl Leuner (arr. Macpherson)

Myn Lyking (with Organ and String Quartet)

Richard Terry

Nativity Carol

John Rutter

These carols capture various facets of the Christmas tradition. Vaughan Williams' rendition of **The Truth from Above** reflects his commitment to preserving English folk traditions in the early 20th century. Karl Leuner's **The Shepherd's Cradle Song** offers a gentle and contemplative perspective on the nativity. **Myn Lyking** preserves a medieval carol, reflecting the enduring appeal of ancient Christmas music, while John Rutter's **Nativity Carol** is a more modern addition, with its lush harmonies and evocative lyrics. These carols collectively provide a rich and diverse musical backdrop for the start of the Christmas season.

Carols with audience

Ding Dong Merrily on High

We Three Kings of Orient Are

Here We Come-a Wassailing

The Twelve Days of Christmas

"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. In these arrangements, the essential principle 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; they often alternate with the choir and have their 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!"

- Jonathan Palmer

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.

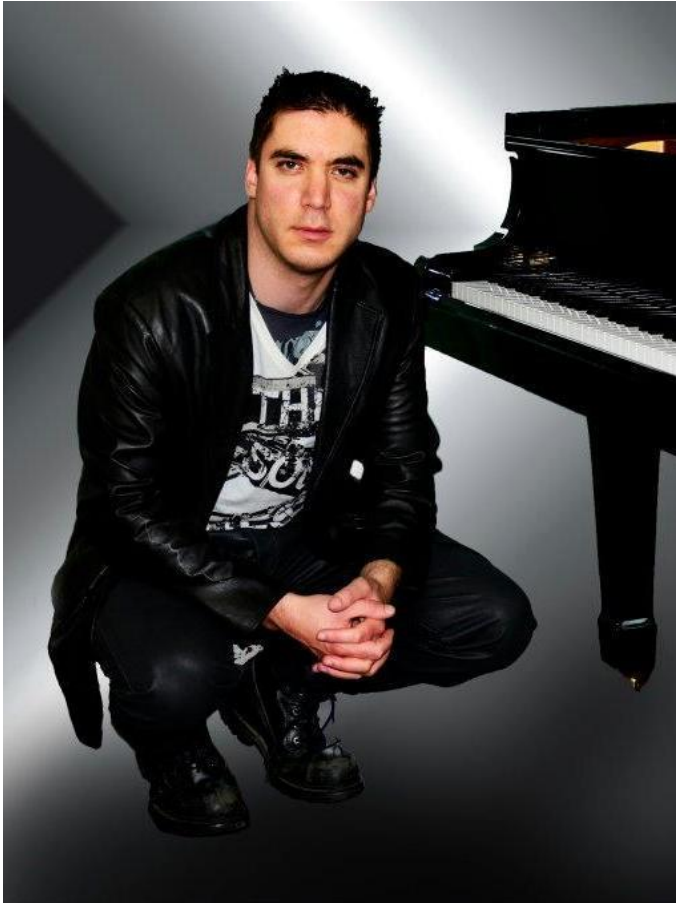
Over the years he has conducted numerous choral societies and orchestras. His choice of repertoire is varied, from Handel, Haydn, Mozart and Schubert to Vaughan Williams, Bernstein, Gershwin, and Rutter. In 1984, he directed performances of Olivier Messiaen's *Trois Petites Liturgies* at Sherborne Abbey 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 withdrew 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 (Piano, 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 internationally 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.

The Newland Ensemble

Lisa Orton (violin)

Julia Smyth (violin)

Janet Dixon (viola)

David Ellery ('cello)

The Newland Ensemble is a flexible group of instrumentalists and one that is gradually evolving. While it includes eight players, and has sub-divisions, the main focus is as a String Quartet.

NEXT CONCERT

ROSSINI Petite Messe Solennelle

Saturday 23rd March 2023 at 7.30

Methodist Church, High Street, Portishead, BS20 6EN

Portishead Choral Society under the direction of Jonathan Palmer and Richard Lennox (Piano) perform Rossini's 'Petite Messe Solennelle'. This delightful setting of a Mass is neither small nor solemn but is composed with a light and operatic flair. At times, it even seems to be a little "tongue in cheek".

A team of distinguished soloists will join the choir:

- Sophie Kirk-Harris (Soprano)
- Rebecca Chellappah (Mezzo Soprano)
- Nicholas Sherwood (Tenor)
- Robert Marson (Bass)

Make a note of the date so you can enjoy the evening experiencing Rossini's last serious work in an intimate setting!



In the last decade of Gioachino Rossini's life, until his death in 1868, the composer settled in Paris. Having retired from opera composition, he and his wife established a salon that became internationally famous. For their weekly salons he produced more than 150 pieces, including songs, solo piano pieces, and chamber works for many different combinations of instruments. He referred to them as his *Péchés de vieillesse* – "sins of old age". This music was not generally intended for public performance, but one of Rossini's few late works that was intended to be given in public was his *Petite Messe Solennelle*, first performed in 1864. Despite its title translating to "Little Solemn Mass," the piece is grand in its scale and emotional depth. Rossini's masterful blending of operatic lyricism with sacred solemnity in this

composition showcased his exceptional musical talent and creativity.

The photograph of Gioachino Rossini in 1865 is by Étienne Carjat (1828–1906), a French journalist, caricaturist and photographer, and restored by Adam Cuerden.

Portishead Choral Society

President: Pamela Rudge, GRSM(Hons), ARCM

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If you would like to become a patron, please contact the General Secretary, Richard Wall, using the contact form on our website, or email contact@portisheadchoral.co.uk.

Future Concerts

ROSSINI Petite Messe Solennelle, Saturday 23rd March 2023 at 7.30, Methodist Church, High Street, Portishead, BS20 6EN.

New members are always welcome, with no audition! For more information, please see our website portisheadchoral.co.uk, contact a member, or email contact@portisheadchoral.co.uk. Rehearsals are at Portishead Methodist Church on Thursday evenings at 7.30pm.

Members of the choir are available to sing at weddings, funerals, and other events – please see our website, contact a committee member, or email contact@portisheadchoral.co.uk.

Clevedon Choral Society – for information, please visit www.clevedonchoralsociety.org.uk

Nailsea Choral Society - for information, please visit www.nailseachoral.org.uk

Acknowledgements

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

The society is grateful for the sponsorship and hosting of our website by 34sp.com, who provide free website hosting for registered UK charities.

Programme notes by Jonathan Palmer.

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