

Portishead  
Choral  
Society

# Portishead Choral Society

Conductor: Jonathan Palmer

Sophie Kirk-Harris (Soprano)

Rebecca Chellappah (Mezzo Soprano)

Nicholas Sherwood (Tenor)

Robert Marson (Bass)

Andrew Kirk (Harmonium)

Richard Lennox (Piano)

## ROSSINI

### Petite Messe Solennelle

Saturday 23rd March 2024 at 7.30

Portishead Methodist Church  
High Street, Portishead, BS20 6EN



Contact us via the website:

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## PROGRAMME

### Petite Messe Solennelle

Gioacchino Rossini (1792 - 1868)

Rossini is remembered primarily for his immense contribution to the Italian operatic repertoire, but he also produced two important pieces of sacred music that are notable, amongst other things, for their overtly operatic style. This incorporation of the music of the opera house into the sacred repertoire may appear to have been a bold innovation, but in terms of dramatic content it was a well-established practice. Most composers who were familiar with the theatre as well as the church used elements of the operatic style in order to give their sacred compositions greater impact. A prime example is Handel, but the tradition goes back to Monteverdi, the first great opera composer, who even borrowed his own overture to *The Coronation of Poppea* for the opening movement of his 1610 *Vespers*. What is original about Rossini's sacred music is not so much its dramatic power, impressive though that is, as its unashamed romanticism.



The 'Petite Messe Solennelle' is the most substantial of the works written during the latter part of Rossini's career, after he had stopped writing operas, and indeed it is one of his most remarkable compositions, demonstrating an ability to write beautiful melodies (often frankly operatic in character), an unfailing sense of colour and drama, and great contrapuntal skill. Its title exemplifies Rossini's characteristic wit, as it is of course neither small nor particularly solemn. The music ranges from hushed intensity to boisterous high spirits, and abounds in the memorable tunes and rhythmic vitality for which Rossini became justly famous.

Initially, the instrumental scoring of the Mass for two pianos and harmonium (in tonight's performance one piano and harmonium) might seem strange, but, given its context as a salon piece (it was first performed at the consecration of a private chapel in March 1864 by a choir of 12 singers, including the four soloists), such instrumentation is not so unlikely; and although Rossini was indeed later persuaded to orchestrate it, the original

version for voices, piano and harmonium is considered by many to be the more effective setting.

Rhythm and modulation play an important part in the opening Kyrie, for the central part of which, the 'Christe eleison', Rossini adopted a deliberately archaic style, echoing the 16th-century church music of Palestrina and his contemporaries. The rhythmic excitement of the Kyrie continues into the Gloria, which is followed by four extended solo movements, operatic arias in all but name. The magnificent tenor solo 'Domine Deus' recalls the 'Cujus animam' from his earlier Stabat Mater. The final section, 'Cum Sancto Spiritu', is an extended fugue and a real tour de force of musical craftsmanship, which reflects the thorough classical training in harmony and counterpoint Rossini received at the Bologna Conservatory. In the Credo Rossini ingeniously uses the word 'credo' as a unifying motif to which he repeatedly returns. This section of the Mass concludes with another brilliant fugue for the chorus, to the words 'Et vitam venturi saeculi. Amen'. There follows an extended instrumental solo, leading to a lyrical Sanctus and Benedictus. The further insertion at this point of a single stanza of 'O salutaris hostia', itself part of a Eucharistic hymn by St Thomas Aquinas and of course not an integral part of the Mass at all, provided the composer with an opportunity to explore the unusual harmonies he was using in the piano pieces among his last 'sins of old age', and which, even today, have a modern sound. A final, luminescent Agnus Dei for contralto and choir brings the work to a dramatic close.

Rossini's inscription in the introduction to the first version of his score reads:

*"PETITE MESSE SOLENNELLE, in four voices with accompaniment of two pianos and harmonium (a small reed organ) composed during my country stay at Passy. Twelve singers of 3 sexes – men, women, and castrati – will be enough for its performance: that is, eight for the chorus, four for the soloists, a total of twelve cherubim. ... Lord, rest assured, that (my cherubim) will sing properly and 'con amore' your praises and this little composition which is, alas, the last mortal sin of my old age."*

He ended the manuscript:

*"Dear God, here it is finished, this poor little Mass. Have I written sacred music or damned music? You well know I was born to write comic opera. It contains scant learning, but all my heart. Praise be to you, and grant me entry into Paradise.  
G Rossini – Passy 1863."*

Whatever his intent, he has left us with a unique work in the religious repertoire.

# PETITE MESSE SOLENNELLE

**Kyrie - Christe** *Soloists and chorus. In ternary (ABA) form, notable for wide-ranging dynamics in its pleas for mercy, but also note sudden a cappella choir in the middle (B) section where there is a double canon: the basses and altos have exactly the same tune but two bars apart, as do the tenors and sopranos. A very old-fashioned device at the time but clever stuff and very moving.*

Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison.  
Kyrie eleison.

Lord, have mercy on us. Christ, have  
mercy on us. Lord, have mercy upon  
us.

**Gloria in excelsis Deo** *Soloists and chorus. Once again a movement of great contrasts: the explosive choral 'Glory to God' is followed by the pianissimo solos of 'and in earth peace'.*

Gloria in excelsis Deo  
Et in terra pax hominibus Bonæ  
voluntatis.  
Laudamus te, Benedicimus te,  
Adoramus te, Glorificamus te,

Glory be to God on high  
And in earth peace, Good will towards  
men.  
We praise thee, We bless thee,  
We worship thee, We glorify thee,

**Gratias agimus tibi** *Terzetto for mezzo soprano, tenor and bass, where the soloists alternately imitate each other and come together on phrases like 'Gloriam Tuam'.*

Gratias agimus tibi  
Propter magnam gloriam tuam

We give thanks to thee  
For thy great glory:

**Domine Deus** *Tenor solo, with competing rhythms, but dominated by the opening phrase stated on the piano, which returns in various forms throughout.*

Domine Deus, Rex cœlestis,  
Deus Pater omnipotens.  
Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe;

O Lord God, heavenly King, God the  
Father Almighty,  
O Lord, the only-begotten Son Jesu  
Christ;

Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris:

O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the  
Father:

**Qui tollis peccata mundi** *Duet for soprano and mezzo soprano, sometimes alternating and sometimes combining in thirds or sixths.*

Qui tollis peccata mundi, Miserere  
nobis;  
Qui tollis peccata mundi, Suscipe  
deprecationem nostram;  
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, Miserere  
nobis.

Thou that takest away the sins of the  
world, Have mercy upon us;  
Thou that takest away the sins of the  
world, Receive our prayer;  
Thou that sittest at the right hand of  
the Father, Have mercy upon us.

**Quoniam tu solus sanctus** *Bass solo, a long, florid solo.*

Quoniam tu solus sanctus, Tu solus  
Dominus,  
Tu solus Altissimus, Jesu Christe

For Thou alone art holy, Thou only art  
the Lord,  
Thou only art the Most High, O Christ

**Cum Sancto Spiritu** Chorus, opens with the same music as the Gloria section but is followed by a long choral fugue (imitative writing built on the strong opening theme). Just when you think it has reached a grand conclusion it sets off again to reach an even more grand conclusion.

Cum Sancto Spiritu,  
In gloria Dei Patris. Amen.

With the Holy Ghost,  
In the glory of God the Father. Amen.

## INTERVAL

**Credo in unum Deum** Soloists and chorus. A dramatic rendition of the creed with choir and soloists alternating. The choir regularly interrupts with the single word 'Credo'.

Credo in unum Deum  
Patrem omnipotentem,  
Factorem cœli et terræ,  
Visibilium omnium et invisibilium.  
Et in unum Dominum Jesum Christum,  
Filius Dei unigenitum,  
Et ex Patre natum ante omnia sæcula.

I believe in one God The Father  
almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth,  
And of all things visible and invisible.  
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
The only-begotten Son of God,  
Begotten of his Father before all  
worlds.

Deum de Deo, Lumen de lumine,  
Deum verum de Deo vero, Genitum,  
non factum,  
Consubstantialem Patri,  
Per quem omnia facta sunt.  
Qui propter nos homines,  
Et propter nostram salutem,  
Descendit de cœlis,  
Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto  
Ex Maria Virgine,  
Et homo factus est.

God of God, Light of Light,  
Very God of very God,  
Begotten, not made,  
Being of one substance with the  
Father, By whom all things were made.  
Who for us men,  
And for our salvation,  
Came down from heaven,  
And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost  
Of the Virgin Mary,  
And was made man.

**Crucifixus** Soprano solo lamenting the crucifixion.

Crucifixus etiam pro nobis Sub Pontio  
Pilato.  
Passus et sepultus est.

And was crucified also for us Under  
Pontius Pilate.  
He suffered and was buried.

**Et resurrexit** Soloists and chorus affirm the resurrection with some of the themes previously used, particularly the 'Credo' interruptions, but it ends with another massive choral fugue and magnificent ending.

Et resurrexit tertia die  
Secundum scripturas,  
Et ascendit in cœlum,  
Sedet ad dexteram Patris:

And the third day He rose again  
According to the Scriptures,  
And ascended into heaven,  
And sitteth on the right hand of the  
Father:

Et iterum venturus est cum gloria,  
Judicare vivos et mortuos,  
Cujus regni non erit finis.

And He shall come again with glory,  
To judge both the quick and the dead,  
Whose kingdom shall have no end.

Et in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum et  
vivificantem,  
Qui ex Patre Filioque procedit,  
  
Qui cum Patre et Filio  
Simul adoratur et conglorificatur,  
Qui locutus est per Prophetas.  
Et unam sanctam  
Catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam.  
Confiteor unum baptisma  
In remissionem peccatorum.  
Et expecto resurrectionem  
mortuorum,  
Et vitam venturi sæculi.  
Amen.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, The  
Lord and giver of Life,  
Who proceedeth from the Father and  
the Son,  
Who with the Father and the Son  
Together is worshipped and glorified,  
Who spake by the Prophets.  
And I believe in one  
Catholic and Apostolic Church.  
I acknowledge one Baptism  
For the remission of sins.  
And I look for the Resurrection of the  
dead,  
And the life of the world to come.  
Amen.

**Preludio religioso** *Piano and harmonium. This is effectively a prelude and fugue with the rhythm of the prelude returning at the end.*

**Sanctus - Benedictus** *Soloists and chorus - the accompaniment falls silent as choir and soloists sing 'Holy, holy, holy'.*

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus,  
Dominus Deus Sabaoth.  
Pleni sunt cœli et terra gloria tua.  
Hosanna in excelsis.  
Benedictus qui venit In nomine Domini.  
  
Hosanna in excelsis.

Holy, Holy, Holy,  
Lord God of Hosts.  
Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is He that cometh In the name  
of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.

**O salutaris hostia** *Soprano solo. This ancient hymn text is not normally part of a mass setting, but the serene character of the text and Rossini's soprano solo setting prepare the listener for the final section.*

O salutaris Hostia,  
Quæ cœli pandis ostium:  
Bella premunt hostilia,  
Da robur, fer auxilium.

O saving Victim, opening wide  
The gate of Heaven to us below;  
Our foes press hard on every side;  
Your aid supply; Your strength bestow.  
*English translation by Edward Caswall  
(1849)*

**Agnus Dei** *Mezzo soprano solo and chorus alternate much of the time with the soloists 'miserere' followed by the choir's 'dona nobis pacem' three times in different keys, before they combine in a fortissimo plea.*

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,  
Miserere nobis.  
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,  
Dona nobis pacem.

O Lamb of God, that takest away the  
sins of the world, Have mercy on us.  
O Lamb of God, that takest away the  
sins of the world, Grant us peace.

## Jonathan Palmer



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



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.

## Andrew Kirk



Andrew Kirk is a freelance organist, accompanist, choral director and composer working mainly in the Bristol and North Somerset area.

From 2003-2023 he held the position of Director of Music and Organist at St Mary Redcliffe Church, Bristol, where he had responsibility for directing several choirs, as well as being custodian of the magnificent Harrison & Harrison pipe organ.

Born and educated in Leicester, he won an Organ Scholarship to Pembroke College, Oxford where he studied organ with David Sanger. He regularly gives organ concerts in Cathedrals, Churches and concert halls. He holds the FRCO Diploma, having gained the Turpin and Durrant prizes for organ playing.



## Sophie Kirk-Harris



Born in Germany, Sophie was a founding member of the Stuttgart Youth Opera, where she sang between 1997 and 2001. It was here that she discovered her love of opera. In 2002 Sophie accepted a place at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, and went on to complete a Master of Music. During her time at the college Sophie performed William Walton's *Façade* for the composer's widow, Lady Susanna Walton, in her home in Italy and appeared as a soloist with the BBC National Chorus of Wales. She has recorded Mansel Thomas' *Requiem* for Radio 3, Radio Cymru and BBC Radio Wales and could also be heard on BBC Radio 4 in 2010 in a live broadcast of *Songs of Worship*. Sophie was the soloist in Keith Tippett's Jazz band as well as performing as a backing vocalist for Rod Stewart at the Millennium Stadium. Operatic roles include Antonia (Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffman*),

Senta (Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*), Michaela (Bizet's *Carmen*), Dorabella (Mozart's *Così fan tutte*), Cio Cio San (Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*) and Alice Ford (Verdi's *Falstaff*).

Sophie has sung with a number of opera companies including Bath Opera, Bristol Opera, Opera in a Box, Tarnhelm and Tessitura. Sophie has also performed internationally in Japan, Abu Dhabi, France, Germany and Italy. In 2018 Sophie co-founded the company Opera Boots ([www.operaboots.co.uk](http://www.operaboots.co.uk)) and has been introducing opera to school children in England and Wales. She also works as a singing teacher.

## Rebecca Chellappah



Bristol based Mezzo soprano Rebecca Chellappah holds a Masters in Music with Distinction from the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM). She works full time as a mezzosoprano and singing teacher.

Rebecca operatic title roles here in the UK include Bizet's *Carmen* which won National Opera and Dramatic Association UK Best Operatic production 2018, Rosina in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, Delilah in Saint-Saëns *Samson and Delilah* and Helene in Offenbach's *La Belle Helene*. Rebecca most recently sang the title role of Anne in the world premiere of Joel Baldwin's opera *FISH* for Bristol Operas Centenary concert

at the Bristol Aerospace Museum under the wings of the Concorde.

An active recitalist, Rebecca has given many well received song recitals in Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, Japan and the UK. She is also in demand internationally as an alto soloist in oratorio. Rebecca specialises in teaching singing technique and runs a successful private teaching studio. She believes that everyone should enjoy the pleasure of singing and loves helping others find the best in their voices. She is very passionate about the promotion of a healthy lifelong singing technique and firmly believes that singing is simply good for the soul.

## Nicholas Sherwood



Following university at Exeter and Trinity, Cambridge, Nick found he was able to enjoy a teaching career at Pangbourne College, Grenville College, Windsor Boys' and Chigwell as well as a parallel career as a professional choral and solo singer, and conductor.

As well as holding a series of organist appointments, Nick sang as a 'dep' at St Paul's, the Abbey, St George's Windsor, All Saints' Margaret Street, and for five years as a Lay Clerk at Brentwood RC Cathedral; he was also an 'Ad Hoc' BBC Singer. Solo work included sacred repertoire all around the Thames Valley, and

operatic roles including Albert in Albert Herring and Don Ottavio in Don Giovanni. In addition to the choirs associated with organist appointments Nick became conductor of the Northam Choral Society, Bracknell Choral Society, the Chigwellian Choral Society, and Brentwood Choral Society. One highlight was singing the principal role in The Dream of Gerontius under the baton of a recent pupil who was studying conducting with George Hurst at the RAM.

Ten years ago Nick moved to the Bristol area, and is organist for the St Monica Trust and President of the Bristol and District Organists' Association. He has been pleased to 'dep' occasionally in the choirs at Wells and Bristol Cathedrals. A particular privilege has been to lead the monthly Choral Evensong Choir at St Mary's, Wotton under Edge over the past couple of years.

# Robert Marson



Robert Marson is thrilled to be performing in this most exaggeratedly operatic piece of sacred music, as it mirrors his own vocal journey from church singer to the opera stage! Robert received his early musical training as a Junior Exhibitioner at the Royal Academy of Music, London. He took up a choral exhibition at Jesus College, Cambridge and later worked as a cathedral singer, including at Wells Cathedral. As an Oratorio soloist he has performed widely, including Handel's "Messiah" in Salisbury Cathedral, Pärt's "Passio" in Wells Cathedral and Dvořák's "Mass in D" in Notre Dame de Paris.

In Opera, he has sung various roles and most recently appeared as Ford in Nicolai's "The Merry Wives of Windsor" for Bristol Opera. Last

summer, he took the haunting role of Il Commendatore in a touring production of Mozart's "Don Giovanni". He is a founder member of Tarnhelm Opera, specialising in performing Wagner's sublime music and drama in lofty churches and cathedrals, which launched in 2019 with a touring production of "Das Rheingold" and in which he appeared as Wotan. Robert is also a member of Opera Boots, a company which brings participatory opera to schools.

He has studied with Nigel Wickens, Mollie Petrie, Nicholas Powell, Cathy Pope, Neil Baker and consultatively with Sir John Tomlinson. Robert has recently taken up the post of musical director of Henleaze Choral Society, for whom he conducted Mozart's Requiem with orchestra last Saturday. He lives in Bristol with his wife and two teenage daughters.

## NEXT CONCERT

### Portishead Choral Society Summer Concert

Saturday June 8th at 7.30pm in the Methodist Church

### 'An evening of music inspired by folk-song'

Vaughan Williams 'In Windsor Forest' and 'Five Mystical Songs'  
with Marcus Evans (Baritone) and the Newland Ensemble  
Irish Jigs and Reels

The premiere of 'Sweet was those Notes' by Jonathan Palmer  
Five Somerset folk song arrangements for mixed voices, solo baritone, choir  
soloists, audience, solo flute, violin, cello and piano

# Portishead Choral Society

President: Pamela Rudge, GRSM(Hons), ARCM

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## Future Concerts

Saturday June 8th at 7.30pm in the Methodist Church, 'An evening of music inspired by folk-song'

New members are always welcome, with no audition! For more information, please see our website [portisheadchoral.co.uk](http://portisheadchoral.co.uk), contact a member, or email [contact@portisheadchoral.co.uk](mailto: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](mailto:contact@portisheadchoral.co.uk).

**Clevedon Choral Society** – for information, please visit [www.clevedonchoralsociety.org.uk](http://www.clevedonchoralsociety.org.uk)

**Nailsea Choral Society** - for information, please visit [www.nailseachoral.org.uk](http://www.nailseachoral.org.uk)

## Acknowledgements



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