

GATES OF MYSTERY



Vox Coelestis

Director: Jeremy Filsell

*Holy Trinity Church, Broadgate, Coventry
7pm Saturday 20th January 2007*

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GATES OF MYSTERY

In the old church calendar, January 19th is celebrated by the Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches as Epiphany – the climax of the Christmas season, and the 12 days of Christmas. Epiphany means “to reveal”, and the visit of the Three Wise Men to the Christ Child is seen as the first time he is revealed to the world. The Christmas Day text “O Magnum Mysterium” (O Great **Mystery**) is often used at Epiphany, as it paints the picture of the animals at the manger, as the Wise Men would have witnessed the scene. Tonight’s music follows the **mystery** of the incarnation to the **mystery** of eternal life – birth to death.



The tangible world fills our modern lives. The foil for this is the spiritual, and that which cannot immediately be understood, and there will always seemingly remain a place for this in human existence. Ever since the story of the Garden of Eden, and the acquisition of ‘knowledge’, **mystery** has been a feature of Christian life and faith. The **mystery** of Christ’s resurrection was a test of the faith of the disciples - except for Thomas, who needed tangible proof. Faith in what we cannot explain or touch is the ultimate test of Christianity. Music provides one of the ways in which spiritual **mysteries** can be approached:

“Music expresses that which cannot be said.....and on which it is impossible to be silent” Victor Hugo

Welcome to tonight’s concert, in aid of the Organ Fund. After the success of the November 2005 concert, we were delighted to be invited back. I owe, once more, a huge debt of gratitude to Jeremy, for his availability within a taxing professional music schedule, and to all my friends - the singers - who turn out as a personal favour to me for a very laudable musical cause. Thanks also goes to Nasima at the Ramada Hotel, a small team of Holy Trinity staff and helpers who have worked so hard to get the church ready, and to Kerry Beaumont for the use of the Cathedral Song School for rehearsing.

Simon Filsell

Part One – The Mystery of Christ’s Incarnation

PLEASE RESERVE YOUR APPLAUSE UNTIL THE END OF EACH HALF

John Tavener (1944 -) The Lamb

Here we are presented with the image of Christ as the “Lamb”, portrayed with innocence at birth, but hinting at the sacrificial lamb at his crucifixion. This work bridges the thematic aspects of this concert – from birth to death.

PROCESSIONAL: “Come thou redeemer of the earth”

Tomas Luis de Victoria (1548 - 1611) O Magnum Mysterium

Francis Poulenc (1899 - 1963) O Magnum Mysterium

These two pieces are traditionally sung in Epiphanytide – expressing, as they do, the mystery of Christ’s birth. “O Great **Mystery**.....that animals see the Lord born, lying in a manger”. Victoria deals with the text in a typically intimate musical style of the period. Poulenc attempts to take you further inside the stable, and makes you feel as though you are standing by the manger, witnessing the event yourself, with some extraordinary (and technically demanding) musical motifs.



ORGAN: J S BACH Canonic Variations 'Von Himmel hoch' BWV 679

Benjamin Britten (1913 - 1976) Hymn to the Virgin

Benjamin Britten wrote this work at the incredible age of just 14. The 2 choirs answer each other in this adoration of Mary, and the **mystery** of the Virgin Birth. The apparent musical simplicity of this piece belies a mature compositional technique for a 14-year-old boy.

ORGAN: Gaston LITAIZE (1909-1991) Épiphanie (1994)

Samuel Barber (1910 - 1981) Twelfth Night

“No night could be darker than this night” begins the Laurie Lee poem used here. Barber takes this text and portrays a dark winter scene where “**never again it seems can green things run**”. The inference that the birth of the ‘Light of the World’ will bring hope comes with “**for men with shepherd’s eyes there are signs in the dark....the sun of heaven, and the son of God**”.

Morten Lauridsen (1943 -) O Nata Lux

The contemporary American composer, Morton Lauridsen, takes the text “born from light of light, Jesus, redeemer of the world”, and again, we have the vision of light in a dark world – the theme of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany.

INTERVAL - 15 MINUTES

Part Two – The Mystery of Eternal Life

Herbert Howells (1892 - 1983) Requiem

Herbert Howells was born in the Gloucestershire town of Lydney in 1892. His father was organist at the Baptist Church. Whilst at Lydney Grammar School, he sang as a choirboy in the local parish church, later becoming assistant organist. Eventually, he had organ lessons from Herbert Brewer, organist of Gloucester Cathedral. [Herbert Brewer had been organist of St Michael's, Coventry, from 1886-1892] The music Howells heard at Gloucester Cathedral, he later admitted as being "life-changing". Howells' output of music, both choral and orchestral, has yet to receive the universal acclaim it deserves. His involvement in the Three Choirs Festivals, brought him into contact with such greats as Elgar, Finzi, Holst and Vaughan Williams. In 1917, he contracted Grave's Disease, and was given 6 months to live. Thanks to an experimental cure, he lived to the age of 90.



In 1935, Howells' son, Michael, died of Spinal Meningitis, at just 9-years old. This had a devastating effect on Herbert, and his personal outpouring of emotion resulted in the Requiem. This remained his private personal tribute to his son until, 45 years later, when he finally agreed to it being published.

The text is the same as Brahms used for his German Requiem – Howells found that Michael had added a note to his father's score of the Brahms, aged six, just three years before his death. The melodies move seamlessly from one part to another, almost as if it were one voice. The complex harmonies sometimes build to as many as ten parts singing simultaneously. The feeling of musical tension is finally released at the end, to the words "they rest from their labours". This is a true masterpiece of the choral repertoire.

1. **Salvator Mundi** *"O Saviour of the world"*
2. **Psalm 23** *"The Lord is my Shepherd"*
3. **Requiem Aeternam (I)** *"Rest eternal"*
4. **Psalm 121** *"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills"*
5. **Requiem Aeternam (II)** *"Rest eternal"*
6. **I heard a voice from heaven**.....*"saying unto me, write: from henceforth, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord. Even so, saith the spirit, for they rest from their labours".*

The Organ Fund

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In addition to **sponsoring a rank of pipes** (of which there 50 available), we will place a commemorative plaque adjacent to the draw-stop on the new console.

If you are interested in helping us in any way, ring 024 76 220418

THE PERFORMERS

Jeremy Filsell

Director



Jeremy preceded his brother Simon as Head Chorister at Holy Trinity. After leaving Coventry for studies at Oxford University and the Royal College of Music, he established an international concert career as one of only a few virtuoso performers as both Pianist and Organist - reflected in numerous recordings made on both instruments. He has performed as a soloist in Russia, the USA and Europe, recording for BBC Radio 3, German and Finland Rundfunk and USA networks. He is Visiting Tutor in Organ Studies at the Royal Northern College of Music, a Lecturer in Academic Studies at the Royal Academy of Music, a piano tutor at Eton College and a Lay Clerk in the choir of St George's Chapel, Windsor. His PhD thesis is a study of the music of Marcel Dupré. Gramophone magazine noted that his recordings of the Dupré Intégrale on 12 CDs were, *"truly distinguished, compelling and unquestionably authoritative performances; Filsell's astonishing interpretative and technical skills make for compulsive listeningthis series is a landmark in the history of organ recordings"*

Patricia Bentley

Soprano

Patricia read music at Royal Holloway College, University of London and was awarded a Choral Scholarship while continuing to study the piano at the Royal Academy of Music. As a choral singer, she has sung with the London Oriana Choir, the Joyful Company of Singers and with Vox Musica, a chamber choir specialising in early music. She is musical director of her local choral society, the Langcliffe Singers.

Jenny Filsell

Soprano

Jenny's musical career developed in the choir of St Luke's, Chelsea - the 'home' of the famous English composer, John Ireland. She now sings with the award-winning Vasari Singers in London and has performed on several recordings on the EMI and Virgin labels, as well as concerts in all the major London venues.

Karen Filsell

Soprano

Karen has sung for the Joyful Company of Singers and Vox Musica, and has performed in concerts and recordings the world over, plus appearances on BBC1, Radio 3 and Classic fm. She has appeared locally as a guest singer with Coventry Cathedral Chapter House Choir, and as a soloist in a concert of Mozart in Hampton Lucy.

Bridget Howarth

Soprano

Bridget graduated with a diploma in Music from Cambridgeshire College of Arts and Technology and continued her studies in London with Sally le Sage. As both a soloist and choir member, Bridget sings with a number of groups including the award winning Joyful Company of Singers. She has sung at the Edinburgh Festival, international choral competitions in France, Spain, Italy and Hungary and festivals in St Petersburg, France, Sardinia and Poland. Her solo work ranges from the Monteverdi Vespers and Bach's Mass in B Minor, through to the contemporary works of Kaaija Saariaho and Roxanna Panufnik.

Anastasia Micklethwaite **Alto**

After attending Chetham's School of Music, Anastasia won a choral scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge where she read music. As a flautist, she was a principal with the National Youth Orchestra and also sang with the National Youth Choir. In London, she sang with numerous choirs, including The Joyful Company of Singers, and spent 8 years as a singer and vocal coach in New York. She has made many commercial recordings and appearances on TV and radio. She is currently Director of Furness Music Centre in Cumbria, and is a flute tutor with the National Children's Orchestra.

Simon Colston **Tenor**

Simon's father was a member of Holy Trinity Choir in the 1940's. Simon was educated at King's School, Worcester and sang in Worcester Cathedral where he eventually became Head Chorister. He furthered his musical education at Trinity College of Music, London. Whilst in London he sang with, BBC Symphony Chorus, the National Youth Choir, the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields Chorus, Holst Singers, Corydon Singers and latterly the Joyful Company of Singers. He now concentrates on singing as a layclerk at St. Albans Cathedral and semi-professional groups such as Vox Musica.

Chris Dell **Tenor**

Chris benefited from strong musical influences at church and at school and was, by the age of 16, running his own choir. He has sung for many years with Fayrfax Consort, Michael Brewer Singers, Vox Musica, Polyphony, Amici and The Brocket Consort. Throughout this time, Chris was organist and choral director of All Saints Edmonton and then Christchurch, Southgate. He has written, arranged and recorded his own compositions. In 2002, Chris and his family moved to Ashbourne, Derbyshire where he is heavily involved in local music, including an experimental reformation of Amici. .

Steve Sanders **Tenor**

Steve studied music at Surrey University and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He worked as a percussionist with many British orchestras, Opera and Ballet companies as well as many West End Musicals. He also worked for a number of years at Leicester Haymarket theatre and was percussionist in residence for one year. He has continued his interest in music through singing with a number of choirs, primarily with the Joyful Company of Singers amongst others. He is also a director of London Musicians, an Orchestral and Musician management company.

Ben Trenchard **Tenor**

Ben was the Head Chorister of Peterborough Cathedral Cathedral Choir in the mid-80's before studying at Bristol University. He returned as a Tenor Layclerk at Peterborough Cathedral, and has been a soloist in various concerts throughout the midlands, as well as on CDs of music by Purcell, Bax and Whitlock.

Richard West **Tenor**

Richard was Head Chorister of St Albans Cathedral Choir under Colin Walsh. After graduating from Durham University, he went on to study singing with Morten Hjelt in Copenhagen, and returned to St Albans as a Tenor layclerk. He currently teaches music at Haberdashers' Aske's Boys Public School in Hertfordshire.

A DVD of highlights of the November 2005 "*Glimpses of Heaven*" concert is available from Holy Trinity bookshop.

Glimpses of Heaven

*Live concert DVD
From
Holy Trinity, Coventry*



£10

All proceeds go to the Organ Fund

Concert lighting: *Gex Clarke*
Programme design & notes: *Simon Filsell*