

THE MUSIC OF CHAMPIONS

Vox Coelestis

Conductor: Nigel Short

Giggleswick School Chapel

Saturday 22 January 2011

7.30pm

PROGRAMME





WELCOME

.....to this beautiful place for tonight's concert. This exceptional 'seat of learning' continues to inspire its pupils towards greatness, and to be true champions in their chosen fields. We are all driven by different motives, but there is usually a great role model who is central to the inspiration of great leaders and champions - from Ayrton Senna for Lewis Hamilton to the Duke of Marlborough for Winston Churchill. As you look around this building, you will see images of great leaders, writers, artists and other inspiring figures. You will also see the phrase "*let us now praise famous men*". This forms the basis for tonight's concert - the qualities of such figures, their struggle and their ultimate end.

We hope that you will be inspired by the music and the place, and celebrate the tremendous work done by the school to set so many boys and girls on their life journeys.

Your support, by attending this concert, will provide the opportunity, through bursaries, for as wide a range of pupils as possible to come here, and we hope that the inspiring music will illustrate the path towards greatness. The music of champions.

Two kind requests:

- **Turn off all mobile electronic devices**
- **Reserve any applause for the end of each section**

We regret to say there are no public toilets here in the chapel. If you have any needs, please make yourself known to one of the stewards at the back of the chapel. Thank you.

PART ONE - "The qualities of champions"



In his play "Twelfth Night", Shakespeare wrote "Be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them". The following works explore some of the personal aspects of this, and the characteristics of those whose journey leads them to become champions.

Veni creator spiritus Tomas Luis de Victoria

This latin text speaks of God's guidance along the **path of life** and is, understandably, used at the consecration of bishops and ordination of priests. It encompasses **speech, illumination, love, strength and guidance** - all facets of true greatness.

*".....true promise of the Father thou,
who dost the tongue with power endow.
Thy light to every sense impart,
and shed thy love in every heart;
thine own unfailing might supply
to strengthen our infirmity.
Drive far away our ghostly foe,
and thine abiding peace bestow;
if thou be our preventing Guide,
no evil can our steps betide"*

Cherubim Song Sergei Rachmaninov

The Assyrian term "karabu", from which cherubim derives, means 'great, mighty'. Cherubim are frequently portrayed as messengers and facilitators - two were placed at the gates of paradise in Genesis - and reminds us that greatness is not always obvious or inextricably linked with fame. In this work, from the Russian Liturgy, the cherubim are heralds of God:

".....that the King of all we may raise on high like a conqueror"



O Living Will Sir Charles Villiers Stanford

Alfred Lord Tennyson deserves a place in this programme as a champion of English prose, and having served 42 years as Poet Laureate, as a successor to William Wordsworth. Stanford offers a very insightful and sympathetic treatment of Tennyson's words about **our deeds, and the disciplines required to use them rightly.**

*O living will that shalt endure
When all that seems shall suffer shock,
Rise in the spiritual rock,
Flow thro' our deeds and make them pure,*

*That we may lift from out of dust
A voice as unto him that hears,
A cry above the conquer'd years
To one that with us works, and trust,*

*With faith that comes of self-control,
The truths that never can be proved
Until we close with all we loved,
And all we flow from, soul in soul.*

Os Justi Anton Bruckner

Although Bruckner was inherently insecure, he had a profound spiritual **faith**, and a persistent **belief** in his own compositional abilities. Although clearly one of the great composers of the 19thC, his extreme **humility** towards other composers led his friend, Gustav Mahler, to describe him “*half simpleton, half God*”. This latin text celebrates God-given **wisdom**.

The mouth of the just is exercised in wisdom, and his tongue will be talking of judgement - the law of God is in his heart

Locus Iste Anton Bruckner (sung by the school's Schola choir)



Giggleswick School and its chapel stand as witnesses to many years of **achievement**. The seeds of many great musicians were sown in the cathedral church and chapel choirs of this country - which are the envy of the world. It is particularly appropriate that the Schola choir should be a part of tonight's concert, as those starting their musical journey.

This place was made by God, a priceless sacrament; beyond reproach.

O Lord Make thy Servant Elizabeth William Byrd

Queen Elizabeth I rose to be one of England's greatest monarchs, after her mother's execution when she was 2 years old, being declared illegitimate, stripped of her title, and imprisoned in the Tower of London. Her eventual reign of 44 years saw one of the greatest periods of growth as a world nation. This work is Byrd's homage to his Queen.

*O Lord, make thy servant Elizabeth our Queen
to rejoice in thy strength;
give her her heart's desire,
and deny not the request of her lips;
but prevent her with thine everlasting blessing,
and give her a long life, even for ever and ever.*

Tu es Petrus Giovanni Palestrina

St Peter was not necessarily a leader, but a crucial part of the continuation of Christ's church. There is greatness in supporting as well as in leading.

*You are Peter,
And upon this Rock I will build My Church:
and the gates of hell shall not overcome it.
And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven*

10-MINUTE BREAK



PART TWO - "The struggle of champions"

Achievement in any aspect of life is not without its associated struggles, battles or tribulations. Any champion or leader will cite a time when they doubted the possibility of their eventual triumph, when matters conspired against them. So often, though, these were turned into motivating points in their journey, and made them more determined. The following works deal with moments and illustrate how they play a part in any path to greatness.

Distant Thunder *Judith Bingham*

This setting of words by Robert Bridges (d.1930) alludes to the gathering darkness that was to become WW1. No matter how undesirable war is, it produces its **leaders, heroes, and deeds of true greatness**. Reflecting on Shakespeare's quote, this is a clear example of where greatness is thrust upon people. This work then segues into the redeeming words of Henry Vaughan (d.1695):

My Soul There is a Country *Hubert Parry*

A work that speaks of vision of hope "*far beyond the stars*". In times of struggle, it can be difficult to see where the path leads, and faith - in whatever form - provides both **assurance and hope** of a place "*above noise and danger*". Listen to the way that Judith Bingham uses the harmonic structures of Parry in a restrained framework, to emphasise the uplift when the transition from her own work into Parry's takes place.

DISTANT THUNDER:

*The evening darkens over, after a day so bright,
The windswept waves discover that wild will be the night.
There's sound of distant thunder.*

*The sea-birds hover along the cliff's sheer height;
As in the memory wander last flutterings of delight,
White wings lost on the white.*

*There's not a ship in sight; and as the sun goes under,
Thick clouds conspire to cover the moon that should
rise yonder.*

Thou art alone, fond lover

(segue)

PARRY:

*My soul, there is a country
far beyond the stars,
where stands a winged sentry
all skilful in the wars:*

*there above noise, and danger,
sweet peace sits crowned with smiles,
and One born in a manger
commands the beauteous files.*

*He is thy gracious Friend,
And – O my soul, awake!
did in pure love descend,
to die here for thy sake.*

*If thou canst get but thither,
there grows the flower of peace,
the Rose that cannot wither,
thy fortress and thy ease.*

*Leave then thy foolish ranges,
for none can thee secure
but one who never changes,
thy God, thy life, thy cure.*



Holy is the True Light William H. Harris

This serene setting again points towards the need for hope in times of 'darkness'. Here is the light of Christ, which is "lending radiance to **them that endured in the heat of the conflict**". Most of us can recall a painting we have seen, where the artist depicts a dark room or place, with a single light source, which radiates the objects or faces of people gathered around it, and the personal sensation that



viewing it generates. Harris' radiating musical treatment of these words can be thought of in the same way.

Holy is the True Light, and passing wonderful, lending radiance to them that endured in the heat of the conflict, from Christ they inherit a home of unfading splendour, wherein they rejoice with gladness evermore. Alleluia!

A Song of St Alban Nigel Short

In 2009, Vox Coelestis performed a concert in St Albans Abbey, and Nigel Short was commissioned to write a work on the subject of Alban's martyrdom. The work received its international premiere in a concert by *Tenebrae* at the Cathedral Basilica of St Louis, USA, later that year.

Alban, a Roman soldier, exchanged robes with a Christian priest, Amphibalus, who was being sought by the Roman Army - knowing that, when the exchange was discovered, he would certainly be sentenced to death. The laying down of life for another is the **ultimate sacrifice**, and the windows around this chapel depict several other martyrs. The words of Lois Clark encapsulate the swift spiritual and physical journey Alban took to his death.

*Put down your sword, and let the bright steel sleep;
the eagle no longer spreads its wings above your heart;
you have another master now and other vows to keep.*

*Take off your cloak, you do not need its weight
to curb the cold winds now, keep off the rain;
your new-spun cloth has stronger folds to blunt the barbs of hate.
And bare your head, your helmet-plumes are grey
with battle dust, the rusty metal dented in the fray;
you have safe protection, now you bow your head to pray.*

*Lay off your life, the new life you have found;
your three-day miracle explodes into eternity, and
flows, rich as a river, on the chosen hill,
scattering crimson roses on the ground.*

Sleep Eric Whitacre



Whitacre, an American composer, has achieved recent acclaim in the UK. He uses the poetry of Charles Silvestri, which was commissioned by a Texas mezzo-soprano, whose parents had died within weeks of each other, after 50 years of marriage. The extraordinarily atmospheric opening superbly reflects the words, which depict the end of a journey:

“The evening hangs beneath the moon, a silver thread on darkened dune.....I know that sleep is coming soon.....then I surrender unto sleep, where clouds of dream give second sight”.

PART THREE - “The victory of champions”

Our final section brings a resolution to the journey undertaken by our champions. Seldom are the rewards the sole aim of truly great people, but become the icons of struggle and victory to others who aspire.

O quam gloriosum Tomas Luis de Victoria

When Victoria wrote his motet in 1572, it was acclaimed by some as “the most perfect motet ever written”. He did not write in a great range of styles, or achieve a large output of compositions, but what he did produce was exquisite and superbly crafted. Less is often more. The text looks towards the **glory of the prize** - salvation.

*O how glorious the kingdom
wherein all the Saints rejoice with Christ;
clothed in white robes
they follow the Lamb wherever He goes*

Valiant for Truth Ralph Vaughan Williams

This setting of words from Pilgrims Progress by John Bunyan, perfectly presents the **journey** undertaken - “I am going to my Father, and though with great difficulty I am got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive where I am”.



It then goes on to pass on the **struggle** to others -
“my sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage.....my marks and scars I carry with me to be a witness.....that I have fought his battles”.

At the triumphant end of the work, **the journey completes** -
“so he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side”.

Hail Gladdening Light Charles Wood plus the Schola Choir

Wood frequently looked to the writings of John Keble for inspiration. This is a translation of his, of a 3rdC text used at the lamplighting ceremony in the catacombs. Wood mixes very intimate harmonies at the “hour of rest” with the most triumphal, uplifting sounds, culminating with “in all the world Thy glories, Lord, they own”. The end of the day, surrounded by lights, signifies the **end of a journey**.

Hail, gladdening light, of His pure glory poured, who is the immortal Father, heavenly, blest, Holiest of Holies, Jesus Christ our Lord!

Now we are come to the sun's hour of rest, the lights of evening round us shine, we hymn the Father, Son and Holy Spirit divine.

Worthiest art Thou at all times to be sung with undefiled tongue, Son of our God, giver of life, alone: therefore in all the world Thy glories, Lord, they own.

Above all Praise and Majesty Felix Mendelssohn

Our final work was written as part of a set of works, “Hymn of Praise”, to celebrate 400 years of printing. The theme centres on the Lord enthroned as a King who “reignest evermore”. A monarch (such as Queen Elizabeth I, who featured earlier) may spend many difficult formative years, but which provide invaluable experience for when they are finally crowned. Mendelssohn’s triumphal work sheds a feeling of completeness and assurance to the ‘journey’.

Above all praise and all majesty, Lord Thou reignest evermore, Hallelujah!

NIGEL SHORT Conductor

Growing up in the Midlands Nigel began his musical life as a chorister at Solihull Parish Church going on to study singing and piano at the Royal College of Music in London. As a young counter-tenor he worked with various opera companies, was in demand as an oratorio and early music soloist, sang at Westminster Cathedral, with the *Tallis Scholars* and various specialist groups.



Photo: Eric Richmond

In 1993, Nigel joined the world-renowned vocal ensemble *The King's Singers*. Whilst touring the world with them Nigel began to seriously consider the possibility of starting up a new choral group which would combine movement around the performance venue as well as considerations of lighting, ambience, time and space. This was realised with the formation of his professional choir - *Tenebrae* - which has since received worldwide acclaim for its stunning live performances, and its recordings.

Nigel is also Director of Music at St Bartholomew the Great, London. He has co-produced *Tenebrae's* own CDs (on the Signum Records label) and has been an occasional chorus-master for the London Symphony and Royal College of Music Choruses. He vocal coaches and teaches singing, runs workshops and masterclasses for schools, small choral ensembles and large choirs. Nigel is married to the soprano Grace Davidson (*who regularly performs with "The Sixteen"*) and together they try to keep up with their overly energetic three year-old Ella and one year-old Josh!

VOX COELESTIS

The choir was formed in 2005 for a one-off concert, consisting of friends of Simon Filsell. The original concert raised funds for the organ appeal at the church where he had been Head Chorister - Holy Trinity, Coventry. Simon got back in touch with fellow former



midlands choirboy, Nigel Short, who generously agreed to conduct, and Simon's brother, Jeremy Filsell, who played the organ.

After the tremendous success of the first concert, the singers were very keen to perform together again, so it was decided to establish the choir as a purely fundraising group, dedicated to using the enjoyment of the highest-quality singing for entirely charitable purposes.

The singers are drawn from the top choirs in the UK, such as the Gabrieli Consort, Royal Opera House Chorus, Joyful Company of Singers, Corydon Singers, Chorus of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields and some of the top cathedral choirs in the country. All our singers very generously give their time free of charge, which has enabled us to raise over £7,000 for charities to date.



Soprano

Amanda Abbitt, Hannah Atherton, Cathryn Caunt, Julie Evans,
Karen Filsell, Bridget Howarth, Louise McPhee,
Dawn Ponniah, Patricia Rees-Jones

Alto

Debbie Alder, Sue Dell, Mara Goldstein, Elaine Gould,
Annika Lindskog, Anastasia Micklethwaite

Tenor
James Atherton, Michael Benn, Chris Dell,
Tom Stockwell



Bass
Joseph Cullen, Simon Filsell, David Ireson,
Rod McPhee, David Rees-Jones, David Tilley

THE FOUNDATION

The Foundation exists to support the provision of high quality education at Giggleswick School.

We aim to provide funds for both capital projects and bursaries over the long term, which cannot be financed by fee income alone.



We hope to communicate the aspirations of the School to alumni, parents, former parents and other friends and organise events to involve everyone in the life of Giggleswick School.

We value every gift of time, expertise or resources. This generous support has helped the school to invest over £13m in new facilities over the past decade, none of which would have been possible without your support. Thank you.

www.giggleswick.org.uk/the-foundation



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- **Patricia Rees-Jones**, for taking care of a multiplicity of practicalities
- **Booths Supermarkets**, for supplies of provisions at the singers' accommodation
- **Our performers**, for giving their time and talents, and for travelling significant distances across the UK to sing here tonight.

This programme was edited, designed and produced by:



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