

The Esterházy Chamber Choir



Directed by David Thomas
with Nicholas Houghton (organ)

Feast of St Cecilia

St Michael's Church, Lewes
Saturday 18 November 2006, 7.30

The Choir

Sopranos: Sarah Bridgland, Jinny Bryant, Dilys Goggins, Leanne Holmes, Jancis Ham, Alison Jeffery, Lucy Morgan-Jones, Joanna Stephens, Andrea Thomas, La Vigar

Altos: Maria Birch, Claire Champness, Denise Jones, Janet Ormerod, Joyce Phillips, Liz Webb, Kinga Woodward, Karen Zeff

Tenors: Michael Bulman, Robert Carpenter, John Carroll, Chris Thompson, Thomas Whalley

Basses: John Astbury, John Burns, Derek Froud, Clive Osgood, Alan Poppleton, Matthew Spencer, Andrew Simpson

About The Esterházy Chamber Choir

The Esterházy Chamber Choir was founded in 1993 and is based in Lewes, East Sussex. Comprising up to 30 singers from a wide variety of backgrounds, the choir aims to perform to a professional standard whilst remaining firmly rooted in the fine English tradition of amateur music making. The choir's repertoire spans four centuries of sacred and secular music with an emphasis on *a cappella* singing.

New singers (all voices) are welcomed. Entry is by audition, usually held following one of our regular rehearsals on a Wednesday evening.

The Conductor

David Thomas began his musical training as a chorister at Magdalen College, Oxford, under Dr Bernard Rose. At the age of 13 he began organ lessons with Malcolm Archer and in 1983 became Organ Scholar of The Queen's College, Oxford, studying organ with James Dalton and Kimberly Marshall and singing with Margaret Philpot as well as reading for a degree in Music. After appointments at The Leys School, Cambridge, and The King's School, Canterbury, he moved to Edinburgh to become Director of Music at Fettes College. Since 2001 he has been Headmaster of Reigate Grammar School, an independent day school in Surrey.

To contact the Choir

To support the choir, to audition or to enquire about hiring the choir for weddings and other special events, please email choir@esterhazy.org.uk. To prevent your email from being identified as spam, please include the word **choir** in the subject box.

Programme

This evening's programme is built around two themes: firstly, a celebration of St Cecilia, the patron saint of music; and secondly, the 350th anniversary of the death of Thomas Tomkins.

St Cecilia's status as the patron saint of music is shrouded in obscurity. She is thought to have been beheaded for her Christianity in Rome in AD 230, but her connection with music seems to be based mainly on a mistranslation of a Latin text. However, she was well-established in this role by the early years of the sixteenth century, and many composers have written music in her honour. Her feast day occurs next week on November 22nd – which, coincidentally, also happens to be the birthday of Benjamin Britten. His *Hymn to St Cecilia* therefore seemed an obvious choice for this programme, and is followed by the same composer's *Rejoice in the Lamb*. Each half of the programme begins with another work in honour of St Cecilia, one by the Elizabethan English exile Peter Philips, and one by Bernard Rose.

Between these celebrations, we shall perform music by Thomas Tomkins - whose death in 1656 marked the end of the flowering of music with took place under the first Elizabeth - and by his teacher, William Byrd.

Cecilia Virgo

Peter Philips (c.1561-1628)

Peter Philips' career was spent largely in Antwerp, after fleeing the persecution of Catholics in the early years of the reign of Elizabeth I. He is one of the least familiar of Tudor composers, yet he composed the largest body of Latin motets by any English composer except Byrd. *Cecilia Virgo*, an invocation to St Cecilia on behalf of all musicians, was published in 1613 and is set for eight voices divided into two choirs, one high and one low. The ending (which uses techniques which would later resurface with the minimalist school) is an evocative cry for help: Saint Cecilia, pray for us.

*Cecilia Virgo, tuas laudes universa
concinunt musicorum turba, et tuis meritis
supplices a Deo exaudiri possint.*

Virgin Cecilia, all musicians celebrate thy praises, and through thy merits, supplicants can be heard by God.

*Juncta voce et uno corde tuum nomen
invocant, ut luctum mundi in paradisi
gloriam mutare digneris;*

With one voice and one heart they call on thy name, that thou mayest deign to change the world's mourning into the glory of paradise;

*Tuosque pupilos, tutelarum Virgo
aspicere velis, piam Dominam
inclamantis et semper dicentes: Sancta
Cecilia, ora pro nobis.*

And be willing, O protecting Virgin, to look upon thy wards, calling upon the pious lady, and always saying: Saint Cecilia, pray for us.

***When David heard
O sing unto the Lord a new song***

Thomas Tomkins (1572-1656)

A recently published book of essays on Tomkins refers to him as ‘the last of the great Elizabethans’. He spent most of his career as organist of Worcester Cathedral, composing a large volume of music for the Anglican service, as well as madrigals, consort and keyboard music. He was of the same generation as Gibbons and Weelkes, but lived on for some 40 years after the death his contemporaries, becoming in the process something of an anachronism. To put him further into context, this composer of music in a firmly Renaissance style died some thirteen years *after* that pioneer of the Baroque, Claudio Monteverdi.

Our survey of a sample of Tomkins’ output begins with his most famous composition. *When David heard* is a masterpiece of expressive writing, in which he handles the change from narrator to protagonist through the careful use of dissonance, texture and harmonic flux, building towards David’s anguished cry of ‘Absalom, my son’. By way of contrast, *O sing unto the Lord* is a celebratory piece, a kaleidoscope of changing textures resulting from seven interwoven parts, concluding with a highly syncopated ‘Alleluia’. It also demonstrates the expressive dissonance known as the *false relation* (to which Tomkins was particularly attached) in which two melodic lines meet with clashing accidentals (e.g. a sharp against a natural), which was a feature of Tudor music in England.

When David heard that Absalom was slain,
he went up to his chamber over the gate, and wept;
and thus he said: O my son Absalom!
Would God I had died for thee! O Absalom, my son! (II Samuel 18: 33)

O sing unto the Lord a new song:
Let the congregation of saints sing praise unto him.
Let Israel rejoice in him that made him:
And let the children of Sion forever sing Alleluia. (Psalm 149: 1-2)

Organ: *A Fancy for Two to Play*

Thomas Tomkins

This work is the earliest surviving example of a keyboard duet by any composer. ‘Fancy’ was the English equivalent of the Italian Fantasia, and was an occasional piece with no set form. The two players are used much as Philips used the choirs in our first piece: alternating and contrasting, then joining together for the louder sections. The rhythms become more complex as the work progresses.

O Lord, make thy servant Elizabeth

William Byrd (1540-1623)

William Byrd's place at the centre of music throughout the Elizabethan era needs no affirmation. The pupil of Tallis, organist of the Chapel Royal, holder of the patent to print music, favourite of the Queen herself (despite his adherence to the Catholic faith), he was one of the most prolific composers of sacred music in both English and Latin. *O Lord, make thy servant*, is a reflective piece, praying for God's protection for Byrd's royal patron, and concluding with a beautifully expressive 'Amen'.

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 prevent¹ her with thine everlasting blessing
And give her a long life, even for ever and ever. Amen.

Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis (The Fifth Service)

Thomas Tomkins

Like all his contemporaries, Tomkins wrote a large amount of music for the Anglican liturgy, including six complete settings for both Morning and Evening Service. His Fifth Service is a 'Verse' service, in which full sections alternate with solos or ensembles. Tomkins' liking for playful word-setting can be found in the running scales of 'and the rich he hath sent empty away', while the soprano duet at 'As he promised' has an elegant simplicity. The mood becomes more reflective at the beginning of the *Nunc dimittis*, but Tomkins' exuberance soon reasserts itself at 'To be a light', leading to the final Gloria.

Magnificat

My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden.
For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath magnified me; and holy is his name.
And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations.
He hath shewed strength with his arm.
He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seat; and hath exalted the humble and meek.
He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away.
He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel;
As he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed, forever.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen. (Luke 1: 46-55)

¹ prevent = 'go before'

Nunc dimittis

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace: according to thy word.
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
To be a light to lighten the Gentiles; and to be the glory of thy people Israel.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen. (Luke 2: 29-31)

Soloists: Alison Jeffrey, Lucy Morgan-Jones, Janet Ormerod, Liz
Webb, Robert Carpenter, Alan Poppleton

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom O God, the proud are risen against me

Thomas Tomkins

The director of the Tallis Scholars, Peter Phillips, writes that Tomkins was ‘exceptional in a number of ways. His technique as a contrapuntalist was second to none, as can be heard in the anthem *O God, the proud are risen against me*, and in this respect alone he was the composer who most obviously continued Byrd’s achievement.’² In addition to his love of elaborate polyphony, often in five or more parts, he was also forward-looking: listen to the final ‘Amen’ of *Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom*, with its use of the whole-tone scale, or the quiet middle section of *O God, the proud*, which could almost be mistaken for the music of Stanford.

Tomkins’ career was cut short in 1649 by the declaration of the Commonwealth and the resultant suppression of the Anglican Church. Worcester was a Royalist stronghold and it saw the final battle of the Civil War in 1651. For eleven years, music in England stood still, and it was only with the Restoration and the emergence of a new generation of composers led by Henry Purcell that Tomkins’ legacy became apparent, aided by the publication in 1668 of his collected works under the title *Musica Deo Sacra*. They stand as a monument to one of England’s most unjustly neglected composers.

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom,

Which knowst our necessities before we ask, and our ignorance in asking:
We beseech thee to have compassion on our infirmities,
And those things, which for our unworthiness we dare not,
And for our blindness we cannot ask, vouchsafe to give us,
For the worthiness of thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Book of Common Prayer)

² Peter Phillips *English Sacred Music 1549-1649* (Gimell, Oxford, 1991)

O God, the proud are risen against me: and the assembly of violent men,
Which have not thee before their eyes, seek after my soul.
But thou, O Lord, art a pitiful God, and a merciful God:
Slow to anger, and great in goodness and truth. (Psalm 86: 14-15)

INTERVAL

Drinks will be served during the interval

A Feast Song for St Cecilia

Bernard Rose (1916-1996)

It is appropriate to follow the music of Tomkins with a piece by Dr Bernard Rose, who as well as a distinguished career as Organist and *Informator Choristarum* (Master of the Choristers) at Magdalen College, Oxford, was the editor of Tomkins' collected works *Musica Deo Sacra* as published by Stainer and Bell, and a champion of his music. His own compositions were mainly choral, and include this fine setting of word by the composer's son, Gregory.

Feast Song for St Cecilia

When the sun with great flashes of grandeur breaks over the edge of the earth,
Cecilia, nine trumpets blazing at her side,
Glides over sea and land, rousing great organs and voices to join in song.
Sing precious music, sing to the Creator, as this great Saint sang in her heart.

When midday heat beats on working heads,
Cecilia, with strings and horns,
Stirs the will in man and urges him to do great things.
Sing precious music, sing to the Creator, as this great Saint sang in her heart.

When cool evening breezes calm weary folk, inviting them to rest,
Cecilia, plucking harp strings,
Entreats flutes to play, lulling her people to calm rest.
Sing precious music, sing to the Creator, as this great Saint sang in her heart.
(Gregory Rose)

Soloists: Andrea Thomas, Janet Ormerod, Michael Bulman

The composition of choral music is a thread that runs throughout Britten's career, from his first major success with *A Boy was born*, Op.3 (broadcast in 1933 when the composer was only 19) to his final composition, the *Welcome Ode*, Op.95, composed in the year of his death. Even when, at the height of his career, he was predominantly occupied with opera, he continued to produce pieces of both sacred and secular choral music.

The two works in tonight's programme date from the years of the Second World War, when Britten was becoming established but was not yet at the height of his fame. Both works are masterpieces in their own right, and demonstrate the composer's gift for word-setting. Britten shared his birthday with the feast day of the patron saint of music (22nd November), and it is therefore likely that W.H. Auden's poem was intended as a birthday present for his friend. Britten completed *A Hymn to St Cecilia* whilst sailing from the United States in 1942. The poem is overlaid with a variety of meanings, some very obscure, but the sense of lost innocence (which occurs frequently in Britten's music) is self-evident. Each of the three sections ends with the same refrain, which, as in the Peter Philips work with which our concert began, is an invocation to the saint on behalf of all musicians.

I.

In a garden shady this holy lady
 With reverent cadence and subtle psalm,
 Like a black swan as death came on
 Poured forth her song in perfect calm:
 And by ocean's margin this innocent virgin
 Constructed an organ to enlarge her prayer,
 And notes tremendous from her great engine
 Thundered out on the Roman air.
 Blonde Aphrodite rose up excited,
 Moved to delight by the melody,
 White as an orchid she rode quite naked
 In an oyster shell on top of the sea;
 At sounds so entrancing the angels dancing
 Came out of their trance into time again,
 And around the wicked in Hell's abysses
 The huge flame flickered and eased their pain.

*Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
 To all musicians, appear and inspire:
 Translated Daughter, come down and startle
 Composing mortals with immortal fire.*

II.

I cannot grow;
 I have no shadow
 To run away from,
 I only play.
 I cannot err;
 There is no creature
 Whom I belong to,
 Whom I could wrong.
 I am defeat
 When it knows it
 Can now do nothing
 By suffering.
 All you lived through,
 Dancing because you
 No longer need it
 For any deed.
 I shall never be Different. Love me.

*Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
 To all musicians, appear and inspire:
 Translated Daughter, come down and startle
 Composing mortals with immortal fire.*

III.

O ear whose creatures cannot wish to fall,
O calm of spaces unafraid of weight,
Where Sorrow is herself, forgetting all
The gaucheness of her adolescent state,
Where Hope within the altogether strange
From every outworn image is released,
And Dread born whole and normal like a beast
Into a world of truths that never change:
Restore our fallen day; O re-arrange.
O dear white children casual as birds,
Playing among the ruined languages,
So small beside their large confusing words,
So gay against the greater silences
Of dreadful things you did: O hang the head,
Impetuous child with the tremendous brain,
O weep, child, weep, O weep away the stain,
Lost innocence who wished your lover dead,
Weep for the lives your wishes never led.

O cry created as the bow of sin
Is drawn across our trembling violin.
O weep, child, weep, O weep away the stain.
O law drummed out by hearts against the still
Long winter of our intellectual will.
That what has been may never be again.
O flute that throbs with the thanksgiving
breath
Of convalescents on the shores of death.
O bless the freedom that you never chose.
O trumpets that unguarded children blow
About the fortress of their inner foe.
O wear your tribulation like a rose.

*Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
To all musicians, appear and inspire:
Translated Daughter, come down and startle
Composing mortals with immortal fire.*

(W H Auden)

Soloists: Sarah Bridgland, Leanne Holmes, Maria Birch,
Robert Carpenter, Alan Poppleton

Organ: *Rhapsody, Op.17 No.1*

Herbert Howells

Herbert Howells was the pre-eminent composer of church music between Stanford (under whom he studied) and Britten. His Evening Services and various anthems are in the repertoire of every cathedral and collegiate choir, but he was nearly as prolific a composer of organ music. The first of his four rhapsodies was composed in 1915 and is an austere evocation of Gloucester Cathedral, where the composer spent his formative years as assistant organist.

Rejoice in the Lamb

Benjamin Britten

Britten's cantata *Rejoice in the Lamb* was composed in 1943, a year after the *Hymn to St Cecilia*, for St. Matthew's Church, Northampton, at the request of the Rector, Walter Hussey (later Dean of Chichester) and has remained a favourite work in the repertoire of many choirs since. The text is by the seventeenth century poet Christopher Smart, a man of great religious fervour who spent much of his life in and out of lunatic asylums, but whose finest lines reflect a command of imagery rarely found in sacred writings. He sees God in the animal kingdom (particularly his cat, Jeoffry), in the flowers and in the instruments of music. The emotional heart of the work is the section beginning "For I am under the same accusation with my Saviour", in which he likens his sufferings to those of Christ.

Rejoice in the Lamb

Chorus:

Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues; give the glory to the Lord, and the Lamb.
Nations, and languages, and every Creature, in which is the breath of Life.
Let man and beast appear before him, and magnify his name together.

Let Nimrod, the mighty hunter, bind a Leopard to the altar, and consecrate his spear to the Lord.

Let Ishmael dedicate a Tyger, and give praise for the liberty in which the Lord has let him at large.

Let Balaam appear with an Ass, and bless the Lord his people and his creatures for a reward eternal.

Let Daniel come forth with a Lion, and praise God with all his might through faith in Christ Jesus.

Let Ithamar minister with a Chamois, and bless the name of Him, that cloatheth the naked.

Let Jakim with the Satyr bless God in the dance.

Let David bless with the Bear, the beginning of victory to the Lord, the perfection of excellence.

Hallelujah from the heart of God, and from the hand of the artist inimitable, and from the echo of the heavenly harp in sweetness magnificent and mighty. Hallelujah.

Soprano Solo:

For I will consider my Cat Jeoffry.

For he is the servant of the Living God, duly and daily serving him.

For at the first glance of the glory of God in the East he worships in his way.

For this is done by wreathing his body seven times round with elegant quickness.

For he knows that God is his Saviour.

For God has blessed him in the variety of his movements.

For there is nothing sweeter than his peace when at rest.

For I am possessed of a cat, surpassing in beauty, from whom I take occasion to bless Almighty God.

Alto Solo:

For the Mouse is a creature of great personal valour.

For - this a true case - Cat takes female mouse - male mouse will not depart,
but stands threat'ning and daring:

"If you will let her go, I will engage you, as prodigious a creature as you are."

For the Mouse is a creature of great personal valour.

For the Mouse is of an hospitable disposition.

Tenor Solo:

For the flowers are great blessings.

For the flowers have their angels even the words of God's Creation.

For the flower glorifies God and the root parries the adversary.

For there is a language of flowers.
For flowers are peculiarly the poetry of Christ.

Chorus:

For I am under the same accusation with my Saviour - for they said, he is besides himself.
For the officers of the peace are at variance with me, and the watchman smites me with his staff!
For Silly fellow! Silly fellow! is against me and belongeth neither to me nor to my family.
For I am in twelve HARSHIPS, but he that was born of a virgin shall deliver me out of all.

Recitative (Bass Solo) and Chorus:

For H is a spirit and therefore he is God.
For K is king and therefore he is God.
For L is love and therefore he is God.
For M is musick and therefore he is God.
For the instruments are by their rhimes.
For the shawm rhimes are lawn fawn moon boon and the like.
For the harp rhimes are sing ring string and the like.
For the cymbal rhimes are bell well toll soul and the like.
For the flute rhimes are tooth youth suit mute and the like.
For the bassoon rhimes are pass class and the like.
For the dulcimer rhimes are grace place beat heat and the like.
For the Clarinet rhimes are clean seen and the like.
For the trumpet rhimes are sound bound soar more and the like.
For the TRUMPET of God is a blessed intelligence and so are all the instruments in HEAVEN.
For GOD the father Almighty plays upon the HARP of stupendous magnitude and melody.

For at that time malignity ceases and the devils themselves are at peace.
For this time is perceptible to man by a remarkable stillness and serenity of soul.

Chorus:

Hallelujah from the heart of God, and from the hand of the artist inimitable, and from the echo of the heavenly harp in sweetness magnificent and mighty. Hallelujah.
(Christopher Smart)

Soloists: Leanne Holmes, Liz Webb, Michael Bulman, Alan Poppleton

Programme notes © David Thomas 2006

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Saturday 17th March 2007, 7:30pm, St John sub Castro, Lewes

MUSIC FOR A SUMMER EVENING

including music by Vaughan Williams, Wilbye, Weelkes, Sullivan and Delius
Saturday 16th June 2007, 7:30pm, Ringmer Parish Church