

The Esterházy Chamber Choir



Directed by David Thomas  
with Nicholas Houghton (organ)

# *Lobet den Herrn*

German motets from the 16th to 19th centuries

St John sub Castro, Lewes  
Saturday 17 March 2007, 7.30 pm

## The Choir

**Sopranos:** Sarah Bridgland, Cesca Eaton, Fran du Corbier, Dilys Goggins, Leanne Holmes, Jancis Ham, Alison Jeffery, Judy Mackerras, Lucy Morgan-Jones, Joanna Stephens, Andrea Thomas

**Altos:** Maria Birch\*, Claire Champness, Denise Jones, Janet Ormerod, Grainne Sinclair, Liz Webb, Karen Zeff

**Tenors:** Michael Bulman, Robert Carpenter, John Carroll, Thomas Whalley

**Basses:** John Astbury, John Burns, Chris Dixon, Derek Froud, Clive Osgood, Matthew Spencer, Andrew Simpson

\* Language coach

### 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](mailto: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 traces the development of the German motet from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup>. For any pedants in tonight's audience, we have treated the words 'German' and 'motet' fairly liberally – some of the works are not in German, but in Latin, not all the composers were German, and not all are strictly motets, but all are sacred, non-liturgical works by Germanic composers.

Each piece in this evening's programme influenced, or was influenced by, at least one other work. We start and finish with two motets by J.S. Bach, whose six motets represent the high point of the genre, and whose church music so inspired the 19<sup>th</sup> century trio of Mendelssohn, Brahms and Bruckner. Bach himself was influenced by his predecessors Schütz and Hassler, both of whom studied in Venice with the Gabriellis. We have also included some solo motets by Schütz and chorale preludes for organ by Bach and Brahms.

For those more interested in vocal textures than music history, the works we have chosen for this concert demonstrate a wide range of sonorities, from simple four-part unaccompanied chorus, through music for six, seven or eight voices, to full double choir with organ. Echo effects, antiphonal writing (where one choir answers the other) and complex counterpoint are all in evidence, contrasted with some solo works and organ music, and resulting (we hope) in a programme full of variety and interest.

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### ***Der Geist hilft unsrer Schwachheit auf* (BWV 226)**

**Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)**

Bach's six motets were mostly composed in the late 1720s, during his time at St Thomas's, Leipzig, and were occasional works – that is, they were written to mark particular occasions, rather than as part of the liturgy. Unlike the cantatas which Bach was required to compose for every Sunday in the church's year, there was no place for the motet in the Lutheran service. This explains why Bach's surviving output includes over 200 cantatas, but only six motets. Four of the six were written for funeral or memorial services, while one was probably to mark the birthday of the Elector of Saxony. Four are scored for double choir with continuo. As so often with Bach's music, they mark the culmination of the genre up to this period, containing some of Bach's most enchanting choral writing.

*Der Geist hilft* was composed for the funeral of Johann Ernesti, the rector of St. Thomas's School and professor at the university, in October 1729. The text is taken from Romans and from the third stanza of the Lutheran hymn *Komm, heiliger Geist*. Despite the occasion, the music is lively, suggesting that Lutheran funerals were perhaps rather more jolly occasions than Anglican ones.

*Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf, denn wir wissen nicht, was wir beten sollen, wie sich's gebühret; sondern der Geist selbst vertritt uns aufs beste mit unaussprechlichem Seufzen.*

*(Alla breve) Der aber die Herzen forschet, der weiß, was des Geistes Sinn sei; denn er vertritt die Heiligen nach dem, das Gott gefällt.*

*(Chorale) Du heilige Brunst, süßer Trost  
Nun hilf uns, fröhlich und getrost  
In deinem Dienst beständig bleiben,  
Die Trübsal uns nicht abtreiben.  
O Herr, durch dein Kraft uns bereit  
Und stärke des Fleisches Blödigkeit,  
Dass wir hie ritterlich ringen,  
Durch Tod und Leben zu dir dringen.  
Halleluja, halleluja.*

The Spirit doth help our weakness, for we do not know what we should pray for or what is proper; rather, the Spirit himself interceeds for us, ineffably sighing.

He who seeks the heart's intention will know the Spirit's will; because he interceeds for the saints as God approves.

O thou holy flame, sweet comfort,  
Now help us, joyful and content  
To bide forever in thy service,  
That sadness may not cast us out.  
O Lord, through thy might prepare us;  
Make strong the weakness of our flesh,  
That here we gallantly may strive  
Through death and life to reach thy presence. Hallelujah.

(Rom. 8:26-27; Martin Luther)

## ***Dixit Maria***

## **Hans Leo Hassler (1564-1612)**

An unfamiliar name to most audiences today, Hans Leo Hassler was one of the leading German composers of the late sixteenth century. He studied with Andrea Gabrieli in Venice, and was strongly influenced by Lassus, who spent the latter years of his life in Munich. This is the earliest work in tonight's programme, published in 1591, when Hassler was employed by a wealthy patron in Augsburg, before moving to Nuremberg and finally to Dresden to be organist to the Elector of Saxony. His music was extremely popular in its day, and this is a fine example of it, demonstrating a gentle, almost secular style, with simple four-part writing employing counterpoint.

*Dixit Maria ad angelum:*

*Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.*

(Luke 1: 38)

Then said Mary unto the angel:

Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.

Three motets:

Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672)

*Erhöre mich, wenn ich rufe* (SWV 289)

*Ich liege und schlafe* (SWV 310)

*Lobet den Herren* (SWV 293)

Although today we understand the term ‘motet’ to mean a choral work, it has also been used in other contexts. These three short psalm settings for one or two voices and continuo demonstrate the ‘solo motet’ based on the Italian monodic style which Schütz heard during his time in Venice. They were published in a collection called *Kleine geistliche Konzerte* (‘Little Sacred Concertos’) in 1636, when, as a result of the ‘Thirty Years’ War, both singers and instrumentalists would have been in short supply. The works are scored respectively for two sopranos, a bass, and two altos.

*Erhöre mich, wenn ich rufe, Gott meiner Gerechtigkeit, der du mich tröstest in Angst; sei mir gnädig und erhöre mein Gebet. Vernimm mein Schreien, mein König und mein Gott.*

Hear me when I call, O God of my righteous-ness: thou hast set me at liberty when I was in trouble; have mercy upon me, and hearken unto my prayer. O hearken thou unto the voice of my calling, my King, and my God.

(Psalm 4 v.1, Psalm 5 v.2)

Soloists: Leanne Holmes, Lucy Morgan-Jones

*Ich liege und schlafe und erwache; denn der Herr hält mich. Ich fürchte mich nicht vor viel Hunderttausenden, die sich umher wider mich legen. Auf Herr, und hilf mir, mein Gott; denn du schlägst alle meine Feinde auf den Backen und zerschmetterst der Gottlosen Zähne. Beidem Herren findet man Hülfe, und deinen Segen über dein Volk. Sela.*

I laid me down and slept; I awakened, for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about. Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongeth unto the Lord: thy blessing is upon thy people. Selah<sup>1</sup>.

(Psalm 3, vv.5-8)

Soloist: Chris Dixon

*Lobet den Herren, der zu Zion wohnet; verkündigt unter den Leuten sein Tun! Denn er gedenkt und fragt nach ihrem Blut; er vergisset nicht des Schreiens der Armen.*

O praise the Lord which dwelleth in Sion: declare his deeds amongst the people. For when he maketh vengeance for blood, he remembereth them; and forgetteth not the complaint of the poor.

(Psalm 9, vv.11-12)

Soloists: Janet Ormerod, Liz Webb

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<sup>1</sup> Selah – a Hebrew word, similar in meaning to Amen. It occurs several times in the Psalms.

Like Hassler, Heinrich Schütz studied in Venice, but with the younger Giovanni Gabrieli, and his music shows the influence of the Venetian polychoral style that had developed. Much of Schütz's music is for two or more choirs, with or without brass, and this style in turn influenced Bach's double-choir motets. Schütz spent most of his life at the court in Dresden, where he was encouraged both to compose and publish: this setting of Psalm 100 was included in his first publication, the *Psalmen Davids* of 1619. It is set for two choirs, with the second choir echoing the first throughout.

*Jauchzet dem Herrn alle Welt.  
Dienet dem Herrn mit Freuden: kommt  
vor sein Angesicht mit Frohlocken.  
Erkennt, dass der Herr Gott ist: er hat  
uns gemacht, und nicht wir selbst, zu  
seinem Volk und zu Schafen seiner  
Weide.  
Gehet zu seinen Toren ein mit Danken:  
zu seinen Vorhöfen mit Loben. Danket  
ihm, lobet seinen Namen.  
Denn der Herr ist freundlich und seine  
Gnade währet ewig und seine Wahrheit  
für und für.  
Ehre sei dem Vater und dem Sohn und  
auch dem heiligen Geiste; wie es war im  
Anfang, jetzt und immerdar, und von  
Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit. Amen.*

O be joyful in the Lord all ye lands.  
Serve the Lord with gladness: come before  
his presence with singing.  
Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he  
that hath made us, and not we ourselves;  
we are his people, and the sheep of his  
pasture.  
Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and  
into his courts with praise: be thankful unto  
him, and bless his name.  
For the Lord is good; his mercy is  
everlasting; and his truth endureth to all  
generations.  
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.

(Psalm 100)

### **Chorale Preludes for Organ:**

***Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland (BWV 659)***

***Wir glauben all' an einen Gott (BWV 680)***

**Johann Sebastian Bach**

Lutheran services in Bach's day included several hymns, which the organist would have used as the basis for music at other points in the liturgy. Some of these 'Chorale Preludes' serve as contemplative pauses in the service, others as introductions to the hymns themselves, or as uplifting postludes. *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* is one of three settings of this Advent hymn found in the miscellaneous set known as 'The Eighteen', while *Wir glauben all' an einen Gott* is the German version of the Creed, and is taken from part three of the *Clavier Übung*.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the music of Bach and earlier generations of German composers was largely unknown outside church congregations. The symphonies of Beethoven, the songs of Schubert and the operas of Weber were regarded as the pinnacle of German musical achievement, leaving little room for cantatas or motets. However, the years that followed saw a revival of interest in early music, and Mendelssohn was at the forefront of this movement, including conducting a seminal performance of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in 1829.

The effect of such interest can be found in Mendelssohn's own music. He wrote a surprisingly large volume of church music, much of it demonstrating the influence of earlier composers. Although published posthumously as *Sechs Sprüche*, his Op.79 motets were not, in fact, designed as a set, and were written at different times during the 1840s. We have therefore chosen to perform the first four only, in the order that they occur in the church's year. They are all for eight unaccompanied voices, and each ends with an 'Hallelujah!'. They clearly demonstrate the influence of both Schütz and Bach, but particularly the former, relying as they do on chordal sonorities for their effect, rather than counterpoint.

**1. Weihnachten**

*Frohlocket, ihr Völker auf Erden, und preiset Gott! Der Heiland ist erschienen, den der Herr verheissen. Er hat seine Gerechtigkeit der Welt offenbart. Hallelujah!*

**Christmas**

Rejoice, ye people of the earth, and praise God! The redeemer is come, whom the Lord has promised. He has revealed his justice to the world. Hallelujah!

**2. Am Neujahrstage**

*Herr Gott, du bist unsre Zuflucht für und für. Ebe denn die Berge worden, und die Erde und die Welt erschaffen worden, bist du Gott von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit. Hallelujah!*

**On New Year's Day**

Lord God, you are our refuge for evermore. You are our God from age to age, from before the mountains were made, and the lands and the world were created. Hallelujah!

**3. In der Passionszeit**

*Herr, gedenke nicht unsrer Übelthaten, und erbarme dich unseres Elends. Herr, der du unser Heiland bist, stehe uns bei, erlöse uns und vergieb uns unsere Sünden um der Herrlichkeit deines Names willen. Hallelujah!*

**At Passiontide**

Lord, remember not our wrongdoings, and have mercy on us in our afflictions. Lord, who is our saviour, help us, redeem us and pardon our sins, for the sake of your glorious name. Hallelujah!

**4. Am Himmelfahrtstage**

*Erhaben, o Herr, über alles Lob, über alle Herrlichkeit, herrschest du von Ewigkeit. Hallelujah!*

**On Ascension Day**

O Lord, you rule sublime for all eternity, above all praise and majesty. Hallelujah!

## INTERVAL

Drinks will be served during the interval

### Three motets

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

*Ach, arme Welt* (Op.110, No.2)

*Geistliches Lied* (Op.30)

*O Heiland, reiß die Himmel auf* (Op.74, No.2)

Like Mendelssohn, Brahms also felt a strong affinity with his musical past, and was constantly looking to earlier music for inspiration. He rejected the innovations of contemporaries such as Wagner, preferring (for example) to compose traditional genres (symphonies) using established structures (sonata form), and even employing 'archaic' forms, such as the passacaglia which ends the Fourth Symphony. His harmonic invention, whilst highly expressive and Romantic, never verges on the experimentalism of Wagner, and he often seemed happier composing on a smaller canvas.

These three motets show different facets of his style. *Ach, arme Welt* is a short, mainly homophonic setting in three verses, more like a hymn than a genuine motet. The beautiful *Geistliches Lied* (Sacred Song) dates from 1856 and conveys an air of spiritual serenity which hides its contrapuntal ingenuity: it is a double canon at the ninth (i.e. the soprano is echoed by the tenor at the interval of the ninth, and likewise the alto and the bass), a technique which may owe something to Bach's 'Art of Fugue'. A clearer debt to Bach can be found in *O Heiland, reiß die Himmel auf*, in which the chorale melody is treated to four different variations, culminating in a highly contrapuntal *Amen*.

*Ach, arme Welt, du trügest mich,  
ja, das bekenn ich eigentlich,  
und kann Dich doch nicht meiden.*

Ah, poor world, thou dost deceive me,  
Yea, that I do acknowledge  
And yet cannot ignore thee.

*Du falsche Welt, du bist nicht wahr,  
Dein Schein vergeht, das weiss ich zwar,  
mit Weh und großem Leiden.*

False world, thou art not true,  
Thou wilt pass away, I know full well,  
in sorrow and great suffering.

*Dein Ehr, Dein Gut, Du arme Welt,  
im Tod, in rechten Nöten fehlt,  
Dein Schatz ist eitel, falsches Geld,  
dess hilf mir, Herr, zum Frieden.*

Thine honours and thy wealth, poor world,  
in death, my final distress, will fail me,  
Thy treasures are but fool's gold,  
So help me, Lord, to peace.

(H von Laufenberg, d.1460)

### **Geistliches Lied**

*Lass dich nur nichts dauren mit Trauen,  
Sei stille, wie Gottes fügt,  
So sei vergnügt mein Wille.*

*Was willst du heute sorgen auf morgen?  
Der Eine steht allem für,  
Der gibt auch dir das Deine.*

*Sei nur in allem Handel ohn' Wandel,  
Steh' feste, was Gott beschleusst  
Das ist und heisst das Beste.  
Amen.*

### **O Heiland, rei die Himmel auf,**

*Herab, herauf vom Himmel lauf,  
Rei ab vom Himmel Tor und Tr,  
Rei ab, was Schloss und Riegel fr.*

*O Gott, ein' Tau vom Himmel gie,  
Im Tau herab o Heiland flie,  
Ihr Wolken, brecht und regnet aus,  
Den Knig ber Jakobs Haus.*

*O Erd, schlag aus, schlag aus o Erd,  
Da Berg und Tal grn alles werd,  
O Erd, herfr dies Blmlein bring,  
O Heiland, aus der Erden spring.*

*Hie leiden wir die grte Not,  
Vor Augen steht der bitter Tod,  
Ach komm, fhr uns mit starker Hand  
Von Elend zu dem Vaterland.*

*Da wollen wir all danken dir,  
Unserm Erlser fr und fr,  
Da wollen wir all loben dich,  
Je allzeit immer und ewiglich.  
Amen.*

Be not sorrowful,  
But be calm, as God provides,  
So be content, my spirit.

Why worry this day about the morrow?  
One God cares for all,  
And he will give you what is yours.

Be steadfast then in all endeavours,  
Stand firm, what God ordains,  
That is and shall be called the best.  
Amen.

(Paul Flemming, 1609–40)

O Saviour, rend the heavens asunder,  
Flow down to us from heaven above;  
Pull down heaven's gate and door,  
Tear off every lock and bolt.

O God, a dew from heaven send;  
In the dew, O Saviour, downward flow.  
Break, O clouds, and rain down  
The king on Jacob's house.

O earth, burst forth, burst forth, O earth,  
That hill and vale shall be green;  
O earth, bring forth this little flower;  
O Saviour, spring forth out of the earth.

Here we suffer in great distress;  
Before our eyes stands bitter death.  
Come, lead us with your powerful hand  
From this misery to our Father's land.

There shall we all thank you,  
Our Redeemer for ever and ever.  
There shall we all praise you  
At all times and forever more.  
Amen.

(F S von Langenfeld, 1591-1635)

**Chorale Prelude for Organ:**  
*Herzliebster Jesu* (Op.122, No. 3)

*Herzlich tut mich verlangen* (Op.122, No.7)

**Johannes Brahms**

Brahms' eleven chorale preludes were his last works, composed after the *Four Serious Songs*, and prompted by the death of his friend Clara Schumann. The hymns that Brahms chooses are amongst those set by Bach in his *St. Matthew Passion* and point to the fact that the failing Brahms found inspiration in Bach to express his last intense and spiritual creations. They are amongst his most heartfelt and moving compositions, and deserve to be better known.

**Three motets**

**Anton Bruckner (1824-1896)**

*Ave Maria*

*Locus iste*

*Christus factus est*

Bruckner's reputation today rests largely on his symphonies. However, he spent some thirteen years as organist of Linz Cathedral, and church music punctuated his whole composing career, from his first mature composition (the seven-part *Ave Maria* with which we open this group of three motets) to the final years of his life. Unlike his symphonies, the motets are succinct, combining an understanding of polyphonic technique with his own chromatic and colourful harmonies. Bruckner draws a greater range of sonorities from the choir than even his contemporary Brahms, from the simplicity of the four-part *Locus iste* to the multi-layered *Ave Maria*.

Unlike most of the other music in tonight's programme, Bruckner was composing for the Roman Catholic church rather than the Lutheran one, and the depth of his own faith shines through the motets, not least *Ave Maria*, which can be counted amongst the finest settings of this familiar text. *Locus iste* was composed for the dedication of a new chapel at Linz in 1869, while *Christus factus est* (the gradual for Maundy Thursday) dates from 1884.

*Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum; benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus. Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen.*

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

*Locus iste a Deo factus est, inaestimabile sacramentum, irreprehensibilis est.*

This place was made by God, a priceless mystery; it is without reproach.

*Christus factus est pro nobis  
obediens usque ad mortem, mortem  
autem crucis. Propter quod et Deus  
exaltavit illum et dedit illi nomen, quod  
est super omne nomen.*

Christ became obedient for us unto death,  
even to the death on the cross.  
Therefore God hath exalted him and given  
him a name which is above all names.

### ***Lobet den Herrn (BWV 230)***

**Johann Sebastian Bach**

This, the shortest of Bach's extant motets, is of unknown provenance. It may be the earliest of the motets, possibly before 1723, and may have been composed for a Reformation feast. The independent (and essential) organ continuo part has led some scholars to wonder whether it was actually part of a larger work, such as a cantata, since lost. However, the self-contained text, setting the whole of the only two verses of the shortest of all the psalms, seems to suggest a whole work. It is in three sections: a lively, contrapuntal opening, followed by a quieter and more reflective section, ending with an exuberant *Alleluja*.

*Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden, und  
preiset ihn, alle Völker! Denn seine  
Gnade und Wahrheit waltet über uns in  
Ewigkeit. Alleluja.*

Praise ye the Lord, all ye nations, and  
honour him, all ye peoples! For his grace  
and truth have power over us for  
evermore. Alleluia.

(Psalm 117, vv.1-2)

Programme notes © David Thomas 2007

## **Forthcoming Events**

### **'FAIRE IS THE HEAVEN'**

*One hour of English music from Byrd to Britten  
given as part of the Brighton Festival Fringe*

Saturday 19th May, 6.00 pm, Brighton College Chapel

### **'DRAW ON, SWEET NIGHT'**

*Music for a Summer Evening*

*including works by Vaughan Williams, Wilbye, Weelkes, Sullivan and Delius*

Saturday 16th June 2007, 7:30 pm, Ringmer Parish Church

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