



The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music

Gala Concert
Saturday 19 May 2018, 7.30pm
St Pancras Parish Church

“Loss and Lamentation”

The Choir of The Queen's College, Oxford
Owen Rees

pre-concert talk at 7pm

Programme

I.

Douglas Guest
1916 – 1996

For the Fallen

Cecilia McDowall
1951 –

The Lord is Good

Robert Ramsey
? 1590s – 1644

How are the mighty fallen

David Allen
1986 –

In Flanders Fields

Herbert Howells
1892 – 1983

Requiem

- i. Salvator Mundi
- ii. Psalm 23: The Lord is my shepherd
- iii. Requiem æternam I
- iv. Psalm 121: I will lift up mine eyes
unto the hills
- v. Requiem æternam II
- vi. I heard a voice from heav'n

INTERVAL

II.

William Harris
1883 – 1973

Holy is the true light

William Walton
1902 – 1983

A Litany

John Tavener
1944 – 2013

Song for Athene

David Bednall
1979 –

from Three Songs of Remembrance

- i. 1914 IV: The Dead
- ii. May, 1915

William Harris

Faire is the heaven

Edward Elgar
1857 – 1934

They are at rest

Notes

Tonight's concert highlights composers' responses to loss and the need for remembrance: remembrance of the great conflicts of modern times, of course, but also the marking of personal loss in texts going back to Biblical times.

We begin with **Douglas Guest's** movingly simple treatment of the famous stanza beginning "They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old", from Laurence Binyon's poem *For the fallen*, published in 1914.

Cecilia McDowall's *The Lord is Good* is a haunting treatment for two soprano soloists and choir of text from the Book of Lamentations. The work was shortlisted for a British Association of Songwriters, Composers and Authors Award in 2012.

Robert Ramsey's *How are the mighty fallen* likewise sets an Old Testament text from the Book of Samuel in which David mourns for his friend Jonathan, but the actual subject of Ramsey's lament – as of other works belonging to a cluster of English settings of such Biblical texts – is likely to have been the untimely death in 1612 of the young Prince of Wales, Henry, in whom had been invested hopes of an English Renaissance.

Of *In Flanders Fields* **David Allen** writes:

In Flanders Fields was composed in 2014 in association with the Sospiri Choir's *A Multitude of Voices* project to commemorate the centennial of the outbreak of the World War I. Lt Col John MacCrae's iconic poem has become one of the most recognised and well-known symbols of World War I – not just in war poetry but also in the remembrance poppy tradition that it inspired. After a close friend was killed during the Second Battle of Ypres in 1915, MacCrae composed the work while sat in the back of an ambulance on the day after the funeral, noting how quickly poppies grew around the graves of those who had fallen. The poem gained tremendous popularity and in 1918 inspired the American Legion to adopt the poppy as a memorial symbol, before the Royal British Legion followed suit in 1921, sparking a tradition that was rapidly embraced across the Empire. This reflective setting meditates on the surreal serenity evoked by the text's pastoral opening, mixed with the sombre voice of 'the Dead' as they solemnly sing their own epitaph. As with the poem itself, this piece was inspired by the image of beautiful poppy fields – incongruous amidst a brutal reality – ever-blooming long after the battle is over. The poignant recurring melody meanders, fragile and carefree, like a flower blowing gently in the wind. It reflects upon the tragic loss of those who inevitably never return from war, bringing to mind the endless peace of eternal rest and the gentle reassurance of everlasting remembrance.

Herbert Howells created a distinctive musical language of seemingly endless soaring melody, poignant and vividly coloured harmony tinged with modal effects, and rhythmic fluidity which is heard at its most intense in his *Requiem*, a work which he came to associate strongly with the death of his son Michael in 1935 at the age of nine, although it was composed before Michael's death and was inspired by Walford Davies's *A Short Requiem*, composed in 1915 in remembrance of the dead of the war. From this earlier work Howells took the idea of alternating texts from the Psalms, the Requiem Mass, and the Burial service. The relative simplicity and declamatory treatment of the psalms contrasts with the evocation of eternity in the ravishingly and poignantly spun-out settings of the Requiem movements.

William Walton was a fifteen-year-old chorister at Christ Church, Oxford, when in 1917 he produced the first version of *A Litany*, his heart-rendingly powerful response to Phineas Fletcher's hymn *Drop, drop, slow tears*, which begins shockingly with a dissonance and builds to a colossal climax at "drown all my faults and fears".

John Tavener's *Song for Athene* was composed in memory of Athene Hariades, a young friend killed in a cycling accident, but the work became famous through its performance in 1997 at the conclusion of the funeral service in Westminster Abbey for Diana, Princess of Wales. The text combines words from the Orthodox funeral service and from Hamlet, and its setting achieves a sense of serenity and timelessness typical of much of Tavener's writing.

David Bednall's *Three Songs of Remembrance* were, like *In Flanders Fields*, commissioned as part of Sospiri's project to mark the centenary of the outbreak of World War I. The two items from the work which we perform tonight are settings of poems by Rupert Brooke and Charlotte Mew respectively, the former treated with a direct simplicity which allows the poetry to speak expressively, and the latter employing poignant ostinato repetitions of the opening words "Let us remember Spring will come again".

Our programme closes with **Edward Elgar's** nobly solemn *They are at rest*, with poetry by Cardinal Newman. The work was written for a commemorative service for Queen Victoria, and received its first performance at the Royal Mausoleum in 1910.

Performer Biographies

The Choir of The Queen's College, Oxford

Soprano Lucy Cox Pandora Dewan Caroline Halls
Olivia Hugh-Jones Rebecca Lea Rosie Miller
Elspeth Piggott Melissa Talbot Hannah Wight

Alto Helena Bickley Lauren Burke Stephanie Franklin
Sarah Mattinson Kate Meurer Anna Thomas

Tenor Jacob Alston Jacob Clark Andrew Doll Gareth Smith Alistair Walker

Bass Matthew Buchan Esmond Cordingley-Poole Laurence Cummings
Charles Day Laurence John Christian Smith James Tomlinson

The Choir of The Queen's College, Oxford is among the finest and most active university choirs in the United Kingdom. Its extensive concert schedule involves appearances across the UK and abroad, including work with such professional ensembles as the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, the Brook Street Band, and the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra. It regularly tours abroad, and recent concert tours have included Taiwan, China, the USA, Sri Lanka, Italy, Sardinia, Portugal, Spain, France, the Low Countries, and Germany.

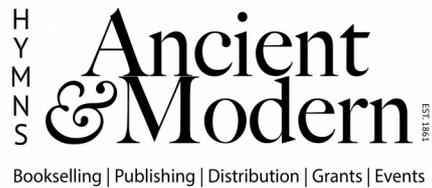
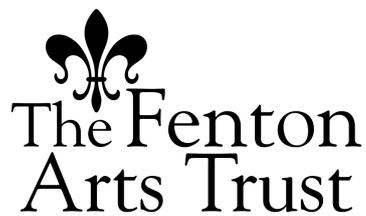
The choir's wide-ranging repertory, on recordings and in concerts and services, includes a rich array of Renaissance and Baroque music and contemporary works, including annual commissions. The group broadcasts regularly on BBC Radio, and during the academic year it provides the music for regular services in the splendid Baroque chapel of The Queen's College. The choir's recent CD releases are on the Signum and Avie labels. 2013 saw the release of a CD of *Dixit Dominus* settings by Handel and Alessandro Scarlatti, which was hailed as "a disc of unusually high calibre" by Early Music Review and awarded five stars by *Choir and Organ*. *Carols from Queen's* enjoyed nine weeks in the Specialist Classical Charts, was "Drive Featured Album of the Week" on Classic FM, and was a Telegraph Christmas pick. The choir's last disc, *A New Heaven*, released 2017 and including several premiere recordings, went straight to number one in its first week of sales, and BBC Music Magazine commented that the recording shows "the singers at their radiant best". The choir has also recorded for film at the famous Abbey Road Studios, and appears on the Grammy-nominated soundtrack of the Warner-Brothers film *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*.

Owen Rees

Owen is Professor of Music at the University of Oxford, and Fellow in Music and Organist (Director of Music) at The Queen's College. He directs the Choir of The Queen's College and also conducts the professional early music choir Contrapunctus. His work as a conductor has taken him to many parts of the world, including the USA, China, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, France, Norway, and the Netherlands, and he is much in demand internationally as a leader of choral workshops.

His recordings have three times been shortlisted for the Gramophone Early Music Award, have been selected as Editor's Choice in Gramophone and Choral and Song Choice in BBC Music Magazine, and featured in the "20 Classical Recordings of the Year" 2015 in The Sunday Times. His recordings with Queen's and other choirs, on the Signum, Hyperion, and Avie labels, encompass a remarkably wide variety of choral repertory from the Renaissance to contemporary works. BBC Music Magazine recently hailed his interpretations of choral music as "revelatory and even visionary". He has brought to the concert hall and recording studio substantial repertoires of magnificent Renaissance music, particularly from Portugal, Spain, and England, including many previously unknown or little-known works which he himself has discovered and edited. His interpretations of these repertoires have been acclaimed as "rare examples of scholarship and musicianship combining to result in performances that are both impressive and immediately attractive to the listener", and he has been described as "one of the most energetic and persuasive voices" in this field.

As a scholar, Owen has published widely on many of the foremost Renaissance composers, including Josquin, Morales, Guerrero, Victoria, and Byrd. He is renowned as one of the world's foremost authorities on Portuguese Renaissance music, and appears regularly on BBC Radio 3 in discussions of early music. His next major book, to be published by Cambridge University Press, is a study of Victoria's famous *Requiem* of 1603 and of the whole genre of polyphonic Requiem music in the late Renaissance and early Baroque.



The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music was founded in 2002 with the aim of showcasing contemporary liturgical music in both service and concert. Now in its seventeenth year, the LFCCM has grown to include more than 50 events, dozens of composers, hundreds of performers and thousands of audience members, both live and online.

The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music is a Registered Charity, No. 1133802

www.lfccm.com