



HITCHIN THESPIANS

present



Choral Classics

at St Mary's

Conductor - Alan Childs

Organist - Richard Sands

Saturday 30th May 2009 - 7.30pm

St. Mary's Church, Hitchin

(by kind permission of the Vicar and Church Wardens)



Financially supported by the Arts Council for North Hertfordshire





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Choral Classics

Psalm 150 (O Praise God In His Holiness)

César Franck (1822-1890)

César Franck was born at Liège, Belgium, the son of a banker. Franck achieved early fame as a virtuoso pianist, but, by the age of 30, had turned his attentions to the church organ. For 40 years from 1858 he was organist at St Clotilde, Paris. Despite being hailed as one of the great hopes of French music he was considered to be unimaginative as a composer and it was not until after his death in 1890, as a result of complications following a car accident, that his music became popular.

Franck composed his festive setting of Psalm 150 for the inauguration in 1883 of the 34-stop Cavaillé-Coll organ at the Institute for the Blind in Paris.

Franck captures both the joy and intensity of the text through his trademark chromaticism and long lyrical melodies. Following the initial antiphonal outbursts of "hallelujah" by all voices of the choir, the bass voices deliver the first verse of text in a haunting melody. When the other voices join the basses Franck shows his mastery of harmony and counterpoint with exhortations to "Praise the Lord" with trumpets and other festive instruments. All four voices join together in unison to repeat the initial melody sung by the basses. This miniature masterwork concludes with a chorus of exuberant "hallelujahs".

Mass in D Major (Op 86)
Antonín Dvorák (1841-1904)

Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Benedictus, Agnus Dei

Soloists

<i>Soprano</i>	<i>Lucy Miller-White</i>
<i>Alto</i>	<i>Lilian Dixon</i>
<i>Tenor</i>	<i>Richard Cowling</i>
<i>Bass</i>	<i>Charlie Wakely</i>

Dvorák was born near Prague in the modern Czech Republic (at that time part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), the son of a butcher, innkeeper, and professional player of the zither. Dvorák started his musical career as an orchestral viola player, but in 1871 he gave up playing in the orchestra in order to compose.

When Dvorák wrote his Mass in D in 1887, he was already a successful and established composer. His large-scale symphonic and choral works, with their elements of Czech folksongs, were in great demand at major international festivals and his chamber works were widely performed.

In marked contrast to all this, the Mass in D was commissioned by a friend, Josef Hlávka, to inaugurate the private chapel at his castle in Luzany. Due to the constraints of the performance space, the Mass was written for relatively small

forces (a choir, organ, and four soloists) and unlike most masses by 19th century composers, its premiere was not in the form of a public concert, but took place in the context of a private Mass.

The work's intimate character is beautifully expressed in Dvorák's melodic lines, which invoke pastoral Czech melodies and the call and response form of Slavic folksong.

The Mass in D shows Dvorák exploiting the constraints of the text and forces available to him to produce an extraordinary and large range of expressive effects. This small mass manages to invoke everything from the meditative, imitative lines of Renaissance mass to the organism of a Baroque choral masterwork, from the balance of classical structures to dramatic moments of Romantic expressionism, before ending simply and movingly in a quiet prayer for peace.

Interval



PART TWO

Psalm 48: Great Is The Lord (Op 67)

Sir Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

Great Is The Lord, which sets the text of Psalm 48, was composed in 1910 and first performed in Westminster Abbey in 1912. It is often considered to be Elgar's sacred masterpiece. Echoes of the Violin Concerto, completed in 1910, can be heard in Great Is The Lord, two of whose themes are virtually quotations from the concerto's first and last movements

Prelude (Suite, Op 5) - for organ

Maurice Duruflé (1902-1986)

Maurice Duruflé studied with Louis Vierne in Paris and later with Eugène Gigout, the composer of our other organ piece this evening. Duruflé actually composed very little, his best known works being his Requiem from 1947 and the Prélude et fugue sur le nom d'Alain.

The Opus 5 Suite is Duruflé's longest work for organ. It is also perhaps his best known, in particular for the final Toccata. Tonight we hear the opening movement, Prelude, from the Suite. The Prelude is marked as Lento. It begins with long slow notes that steadily build up into more animated music. The music has a complex, unsettled feel due to the large number of time signature changes. A massive climax subsides into a recitative section and the music becomes reflective before the end of the movement is reached.

Cantique de Jean Racine (Op 11)
Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Fauré's musical talent was recognised early and at the age of 9 he was sent to study at the Ecole Niedermayer in Paris. The Ecole Niedermayer was primarily a training school for church organists so this early conditioning probably had a great influence on Fauré's later work.

The Cantique de Jean Racine was an early work, written at the age of 19 while Fauré was still at the Ecole Niedermayer. Originally scored with harmonium and string quartet accompaniment, it was dedicated to César Franck. The text is one of the "Cantiques Spirituels" written by the 17th century French dramatist Jean Racine when in his later years he turned to austere moral and theological concepts, none of which, however, compromises the charm of Fauré's setting.

Toccata in B Minor - for organ
Eugène Gigout (1844-1925)

Eugène Gigout was a pupil of Camille Saint-Saëns and served as the organist of the Saint-Augustin Church in Paris for 62 years until his death in 1925. He became widely known as a teacher and although his output as a composer was considerable he was far better known as an organist and improviser than as a composer. The imaginative Toccata is probably Gigout's best-known work and was composed in 1890 as part of his "10 Pièces Pour Orgue".

Psalm 29: Give Unto The Lord (Op 74)
Sir Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

Give Unto The Lord is an exuberant work which sets the text of Psalm 29. It was commissioned for a festival to mark the two hundredth anniversary of the Sons of the Clergy at St Paul's Cathedral in 1914. The work features some grand, noble passages, but ends in a more subdued fashion with the words, "the Lord shall give the blessing of peace."

Psalms 48 and 29 sung tonight were written at a time when Elgar's music was phenomenally successful and he was the foremost composer of the British Empire.

Winchester Te Deum
John Rutter (1945 -)

John Rutter was born in London in 1945 and educated at Clare College, Cambridge. His early work was with groups at King's College Chapel, Cambridge as well as the Bath Choir and Philharmonic Orchestra. Since 1979 he has been closely associated with the Cambridge Singers as their director.

Rutter wrote the *Winchester Te Deum* for the installation of a new Dean of Winchester Cathedral in March 2006.

This is a glorious work which sets the traditional words of the Te Deum in a bright and joyful way and with a real sense of ceremony. A buoyant work, it features dancing rhythmic motifs, moments of reflection and soaring vocal lines that highlight the text. The final "Alleluias" bring the composition to a thrilling conclusion with the sopranos soaring up to a final long-held top B.



Singing is good for you and proven to relieve stress. We are a friendly group who meet on Tuesday evenings at Woodside Hall in Hitchin. If you would like to join us, we will make you very welcome. For more information please contact the Secretary or ask any member of the choir.

Conductor - ALAN CHILDS

Alan trained at the Royal Academy of Music, London where he gained the GRSM(Hons) degree, the LRAM and ARCO diplomas. He was also the recipient of the C H Trevor Prize and Frederick Keene Prize for Organ and the Peter Latham Prize for Musicology.

As an organist, Alan has held various posts, including that of Cathedral and City Organist in Perth, Scotland and is currently Director of Music here at St Mary's Parish Church, Hitchin.

Alan spent many years as a preparatory school Director of Music but is at present pursuing a variety of musical activities such as instrumental teaching, choir direction and examining both at home and abroad for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music.

Organist - RICHARD SANDS

Offered an organ scholarship at Girton College, Richard Sands began reading engineering at Cambridge in 2005. Having spent three years as Organ Scholar at Bromley Parish Church, London and a year as Director of Music at St. Paul's, Crofton, he has enjoyed many opportunities to accompany and direct choirs, and has toured Rome, Tallinn and New York, as well as Singapore and Australia. Richard studied organ with Henry Fairs, and has participated in master classes with virtuosos such as François-Henri Houbart and Thierry Mechler. He now has lessons with Martin Ennis.

Over the past few years, Richard has conducted premières of two of his orchestral works as well as performing one of his compositions in London to an audience of over 2000.

A former chorister at the Savoy Chapel, London, Richard was also a choral exhibitor at Girton College. He has enjoyed playing with several choral societies and choirs outside the University in Cambridge, including Choir 2000 and Collegium Laureatum.

Sopranos

Anna Carter, Gill Cheaney, Joanna Chugg, Margaret Coxall, Christine Fox, Ellie Fryer, Lesley Greasley, Wendy Hazelwood, Jane Homer, Michelle Marple, Lucy Miller-White, Susan Osbourn, Melanie Plowman, Sheila Soothill, Pat Staff, Jane Tunesi, Lindsey Waghorn, Rosamunde Ward, Rhian Watkins, Kate Webb.

Altos

Gillian Clough, Lilian Dixon, Alex Evans, Pauline Gimson, Judith Harrison, Helen Hodge, Carolyn Kisby, Sheila Mole, Keryle Rutherford, Julia Skinner, Vivienne Tadman, Melanie Troiano, Kay Watts.

Tenors

Fred Ardron, Andrew Carmichael, Alan Dickinson, Peter Gordon, James Hamilton, Andy Johnson, Charles Langford, Howard Roberts, Iain Rutherford, Mark Savage, Jonathan Smith.

Basses

John Beal, Ron Burton, Eddie Cullum, Matt Hallas, Trevor Hiorns, Jack Lardent, Nick Morgan, Mike Steele, Chris Waghorn, Charlie Wakely.

Acknowledgements

<i>Rehearsal Pianists</i>	<i>Audrey Jenkins and Matt Hallas</i>
<i>Choral Manager</i>	<i>Susan Osbourn</i>
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<i>Programme Editors</i>	<i>Sandra Page and Susan Osbourn</i>
<i>Lighting</i>	<i>Alan Bailes & team</i>

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