

programme 5p

Assembly Hall - Tunbridge Wells

Sunday April 13 1975 - 3 pm

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS

CHORAL SOCIETY

BEDFORDSHIRE SYMPHONY

ORCHESTRA - leader John Shayler

Anthony Smith-Masters : organ

Conductor - DEREK WATMOUGH

Coronation Te Deum - Walton

The Hymn of Jesus - Holst

interval - 10 mins.

Four Sacred Pieces - Verdi

The National Federation of Music Societies supports this Concert with funds provided by the Arts Council, as does the Tunbridge Wells District Council.

CORONATION TE DEUM

Walton

Walton has contributed music for two coronations. In 1937, for George VI, he wrote the Crown Imperial March, and this was followed in 1953, for the Queen's coronation, by the Orb and Sceptre March and the Te Deum which was sung at the Coronation Service in Westminster Abbey.

The score displays the stirring irregular rhythms and the incisiveness and steely brilliance known from *Belshazzar's Feast* but it also contains the contrasting sections which the text demands.

Two choruses and two semi-choruses are employed, together with a large orchestra and organ. As befits the occasion the orchestral writing includes some fanfare-like passages.

Before 'O Lord, save thy people' the main key returns, and with it some of the music of the opening, and this link establishes a sense of structural cohesion. The last 'Let me never be confounded' is very subdued. The ultimate cadence in the main key underlines the work's strong feeling of tonality.

THE HYMN OF JESUS

Holst

This performance of one of Holst's most famous works is intended to commemorate last year's centenary of the composer's birth.

Holst began the composition of *The Hymn of Jesus* in 1917; he himself conducted the first performance in 1920. Although the work was written shortly after *The Planets* its musical language pursues quite a different direction.

There is some significance in Holst's choice of a non-scriptural sacred text. The words come from the Apocryphal Acts of St John, and Holst undertook some detailed Greek studies which were to enable him to provide a translation of his own. The work made a tremendous impact - notably on Tovey and Vaughan Williams - and was hailed as a decisive departure from conventional sacred music. This is not contradicted by the fact that the opening Prelude goes back to the oldest traditions of church music. Two ancient plainchants, *Pange Lingua* and *Vexilla Regis*, are intoned, first by instruments, then by the voices. Both tunes recur later, embedded in different textures. Likewise, the *Glory to Thee* which introduces the actual Hymn is resumed at the end, and throughout the work, the semi-chorus intersperses their strangely remote *Amens*.

Within a ternary overall design the middle section - *Divine Grace* - stands out in marked contrast.

The imaginative scoring, perhaps the chief link with *The Planets*, combined with an adventurous harmonic idiom establishes the esoteric atmosphere of the music which matches the mystical thoughts of the text.

FOUR SACRED PIECES

Verdi

I. Ave Maria II. Stabat Mater III. Laudi alla
Vergine Maria IV. Te Deum

The Quattro Pezzi Sacri were published in 1898, but the Ave Maria and the Stabat Mater were completed before Falstaff, i.e. before 1892. The Ave Maria was omitted in the first performances which took place in Paris and Turin in 1899. The conductor of the Italian premiere was the young Arturo Toscanini.

Both the Ave Maria and the Laudi are unaccompanied; the Laudi are set for a 4-part female chorus.

Verdi was a profound admirer of Palestrina whom he regarded as the father of Italian music, as Bach was for him the father of German music (letter to Hans von Bülow).

In writing for unaccompanied chorus - Palestrina's medium - he refrained from imitating the old master's style and idiom: he preferred to achieve in his own way the dignity and serenity which he found in Palestrina.

The Ave Maria is based on an enigmatic scale which had been published in an Italian music magazine; Boito, the librettist of Otello and Falstaff, had challenged Verdi to use it. The result is a somewhat unorthodox harmonic idiom which brings Verdi, to a certain extent, in line with late Liszt and even with Debussy's innovations. In spite of its "external" inspiration the Ave Maria is not to be dismissed as a mere experiment: it fits in with the other Pezzi Sacri and especially with the Laudi.

Verdi took the text of the Laudi from the last canto of Dante's Paradiso. His setting conveys a celestial vision. It has a certain reticence; climaxes are used but sparingly, and the music seems to float with unearthly weightlessness.

A few passages recall Desdemona's prayer.

The Stabat Mater, a more extensive piece, achieves conciseness by avoiding any repetition of words. Here, the style is more dramatic, and the music conjures up the vista of a Pieta. The passages which refer to the Crucifixion and the Day of Judgement evoke echoes of the Requiem, and the vision of Paradise generates an ultimate climax.

The Te Deum is Verdi's last composition, the work of an octogenarian. It is undoubtedly the greatest of the four pieces, summing up with supreme maturity much of the essence of his creative achievement.

Like Holst, Verdi begins with traditional plainchant, followed by utterly subdued invocations. Into these, the Sanctus bursts in chords of overwhelming majesty. In its conciseness, this awe-inspiring setting surpasses by far that in the Requiem. The lyrical theme which ensues, first in the orchestra, seems akin to many a tune from the operas, a "typical Verdi", yet it is, by an almost incredible metamorphosis, derived from the plainchant.

The abrupt juxtaposition of powerful climaxes and quietly devout passages continues throughout the work, and everything is treated with the same conciseness which Verdi had reached in his last and greatest two operas. This juxtaposition of contrasts is maintained to the very end where the choir's final outburst is denied the last word: this comes only with the quietest of orchestral postludes.

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ASSEMBLY HALL, THURSDAY 15th MAY 1975

8 p.m.

THE AMADEUS STRING QUARTET

For your diary

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS CHORAL SOCIETY

Sunday NOVEMBER 9th 1975

ORFF

"CARMINA BURANA"

BACH

"PEASANT CANTATA"

" DECEMBER 14th 1975

CAROLS

" APRIL 11th 1976

BACH

"B MINOR MASS"

All concerts at the Assembly Hall at 3 p.m.