

ASSEMBLY HALL
ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Sunday, 18th April, 1971

at 3 p.m.

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS
CHORAL SOCIETY

(Founded 1904)

Chorus Master: **DEREK WATMOUGH**

DONA NOBIS PACEM

(Vaughan Williams)

BRAHMS' REQUIEM

Valerie Heath-Davies *Soprano* **Thomas Allen** *Baritone*

ORCHESTRA

Leader: **Richard England**

Conductor: **TREVOR HARVEY**

The National Federation of Music Societies, to which this Society is affiliated, gives support towards the cost of these Concerts with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain. Support is also given by the Corporation of Royal Tunbridge Wells.

Programme 5p

The National Anthem for Chorus and Orchestra (1969)

arr. Arthur Bliss

(first performance in Tunbridge Wells)

PROGRAMME NOTES

DONA NOBIS PACEM

The only Latin words you will hear in this work are the three that form its title! (Though they are used to great effect.) For the rest, Vaughan Williams has gone to Walt Whitman and to the Bible; the exception is part of a speech by John Bright in the House of Commons in 1855 during the Crimean War. (Vaughan Williams characteristically remarked that he believed he was the only composer to have set a speech by an M.P.!) The first performance was by the Huddersfield Choral Society in 1936 (soloists Renée Flynn and Roy Henderson,) conducted by Albert Coates; the first London performance opened the Royal Philharmonic Society's 1938 season (Elsie Suddaby and Redvers Llewellyn,) with Sir Malcolm Sargent conducting.

Dona Nobis Pacem was in those days intentionally propagandist: and propagandist music can become a bore or, what is more important to us in 1971, totally irrelevant. Neither of these criticisms obtains if the piece happens also to be a fine work of art. After all, Beethoven was setting a text about all mankind being brothers in the 1820's, yet we still sing the 9th Symphony because its musical magnificence is so overwhelming. (Nor have we yet achieved its aim.) More recently than Vaughan Williams, Britten has taken up precisely the same theme in his War Requiem (and as V.W.'s biographer, Michael Kennedy, has pointed out, the words of 'Reconciliation,' with its picture of the soldier and his dead enemy, "a man divine as myself," is surely a progenitor of Owen's 'Strange Meeting': and Britten has, in his work, broken the Latin text of the Requiem with settings of Owen's poems.)

The message remains, whether from Beethoven, Vaughan Williams or Britten — the passionate message for peace. Vaughan Williams's cry is often frantic but since it is a work of great art, it has movements of utter beauty, while the final impression you should get (if we sing it well!) is of sheer joyous conviction that sometime or other, peace will prevail. In the 1930's Vaughan Williams's message failed, but, again quoting Michael Kennedy, "taking the widest view, who shall say that its optimism will not finally be justified?"

It is perhaps of interest that in the last few years, *Dona Nobis Pacem*, has been by far the most often performed of all V.W.'s choral works in the United States.

TH

DONA NOBIS PACEM

R. Vaughan Williams 1936

I

*Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi
Dona nobis pacem.*

II

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!
Through the windows—through the doors—burst like a ruthless force,
Into the solemn church, and scatter the congregation,
Into the school where the scholar is studying;
Leave not the bridegroom quiet—no happiness must he have now with
his bride,
Nor the peaceful farmer any peace, ploughing his field, or gathering his
grain,
So fierce you whirr and pound you drums—so shrill you bugles blow.

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!
Over the traffic of cities—over the rumble of wheels in the streets;
Are beds prepared for the sleepers at night in the houses? No sleepers
must sleep in those beds,
No bargainers' bargains by day—would they continue?
Would the talkers be talking? would the singer attempt to sing?
Then rattle quicker, heavier drums—you bugles wilder blow.

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!
Make no parley—stop for no expostulation,
Mind not the timid—mind not the weeper or prayer,
Mind not the old man beseeching the young man,
Let not the child's voice be heard, nor the mother's entreaties,
Make even the trestles to shake the dead where they lie awaiting the hearses,
So strong you thump O terrible drums—so loud you bugles blow.

III

RECONCILIATION

Word over all, beautiful as the sky,
Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly lost,
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly, softly, wash
again and ever again this soiled world;
For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead,
I look where he lies white-faced and still in the coffin—I draw near,
Bend down and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin.

IV

DIRGE FOR TWO VETERANS

The last sunbeam
 Lightly falls from the finished Sabbath,
 On the pavement here, and there beyond it is looking
 Down a new-made double grave.
 Lo, the moon ascending,
 Up from the east the silvery round moon,
 Beautiful over the house-tops, ghastly, phantom moon,
 Immense and silent moon.
 I see a sad procession,
 And I hear the sound of coming full-keyed bugles,
 All the channels of the city streets they're flooding
 As with voices and with tears.
 I hear the great drums pounding,
 And the small drums steady whirring,
 And every blow of the great convulsive drums
 Strikes me through and through.
 For the son is brought with the father,
 In the foremost ranks of the fierce assault they fell,
 Two veterans, son and father, dropped together,
 And the double grave awaits them.
 Now nearer blow the bugles,
 And the drums strike more convulsive,
 And the daylight o'er the pavement quite has faded,
 And the strong dead-march enwraps me.
 In the eastern sky up-buoying,
 The sorrowful vast phantom moves illumined,
 'Tis some mother's large transparent face,
 In heaven brighter growing.
 O strong dead-march you please me!
 O moon immense with your silvery face you soothe me!
 O my soldiers twain! O my veterans passing to burial!
 What I have I also give you.
 The moon gives you light,
 And the bugles and the drums give you music,
 And my heart, O my soldiers, my veterans,
 My heart gives you love.

WALT WHITMAN.

V

The Angel of Death has been abroad throughout the land; you may almost hear the beating of his wings. There is no one as of old to sprinkle with blood the lintel and the two side-posts of our doors, that he may spare and pass on.

JOHN BRIGHT.

Dona nobis pacem.

We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of health, and behold trouble!

The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan; the whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones; for they are come, and have devoured the land and those that dwell therein

The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. . . .

Is there no balm in Gilead?; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?

'O man greatly beloved, fear not, peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong.'

'The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former and in this place will I give peace.'

VI

'Nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

And none shall make them afraid, neither shall the sword go through their land.

Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven.

Open to me the gates of righteousness, I will go into them.

Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled; and let them hear, and say, it is the truth.

And it shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues.

And they shall come and see my glory. And I will set a sign among them and they shall declare my glory among the nations.

For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, so shall your seed and your name remain for ever.'

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men.

INTERVAL

REQUIEM

BRAHMS 1866—Op. 45

I. Chorus

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

They that sow in tears shall reap joy.

Who goeth forth and weepeth, and beareth precious seed, shall come again rejoicing, and bring his sheaves with him.

II. Chorus

Behold, all flesh is as the grass, and all the glory of man is as the flower of the field. The grass is withered, and the flower thereof is fallen.

Now therefore be patient, O my brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. See how the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, till it receive in time the early and the latter rain. So be ye patient.

Behold all flesh is as grass, etc.
But yet the Lord's word standeth for evermore.

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return again, and come with singing unto Zion. Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads alway, gladness and joy everlasting shall they obtain, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

III. Baritone Solo and Chorus

Lord, let me know mine end, and number of my days: let me know how frail I am, that I be made sure how long I have to live.

Surely, Thou hast made my days as an handbreadth before Thee: And my lifetime is as nothing to Thee: Verily every man living is altogether vanity.

For surely man walketh as a shadow: and he disquieteth himself in vain, yea, all in vain: his riches, he knoweth not who shall gather them.

Now, Lord, what then do I hope for? My hope is in Thee.

But the righteous souls are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them.

IV. Chorus

How lovely are Thy dwellings fair, O Lord of hosts!

My soul longeth, yea longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord.

My heart and flesh ring out their joy unto the living God.

Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house: they praise Thee, Lord, evermore.

V. Soprano Solo and Chorus

Ye now have sorrow: but I will again behold you, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy shall no man take from you.

Thee will I comfort, as one whom his mother comforts.

Now behold me, ye see how for a little while labour and toil were my lot, yet have I found much rest.

VI. Baritone Solo and Chorus

For we have here no abiding city, but yet we seek that to come.

Behold, I shew you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the sound of the last trumpet: for behold, the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?

Worthy art Thou, Lord, of praise and glory, honour and power: for Thou, Almighty, hast created all things, and because of Thy will they were, and were created.

VII. Chorus

Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: even so, saith the Spirit: for they rest from their labours; and their works follow after them.

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