

ASSEMBLY HALL, TUNBRIDGE WELLS

SUNDAY APRIL 10, 1983

3.00 pm

PUCCINI
MESSA DI GLORIA

SCHUBERT
MASS IN A FLAT

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS CHORAL SOCIETY

LINDA ANNE MARSHALL, Soprano

SUSAN LOFTHOUSE, Mezzo-Contralto

GERALD PLACE, Tenor

JONATHAN ROBARTS, Bass

LEADER OF THE ORCHESTRA

JANE PAMMENT

conducted by
DEREK WATMOUGH

MESSA DI GLORIA

Giacomo Puccini

(1858-1924)

Kyrie
Gloria
Credo
Sanctus
Agnus Dei

Puccini's family were, for four generations, organists at the Cathedral Church of St Martin in Lucca, Giacomo himself succeeding his father at the age of six (by one of those Italian masterpieces of bureaucracy). In 1878 at the age of twenty, Puccini had his first public success as a composer with two pieces he wrote in honour of the patron saint of Lucca—St Paul. Two years later he incorporated those two pieces into a Mass for four voices and its public performance at least convinced a grand-uncle that there was sufficient talent in his young relation to finance study at Milan Conservatoire.

Once at the Conservatoire, young Giacomo quickly discovered the attractions of opera and his early successes in that field no doubt pushed religious music into the background. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Mass for four voices remained unknown until discovered in Puccini's papers in 1951. Editorial attention then gave the work its present day title, and it received the first modern performance in Chicago in 1952.

The Mass is a first revelation of Puccini's theatrical and lyrical abilities, so amply demonstrated later in *Boheme*, *Butterfly* and *Manon Lescaut*. Some of the chorus work is also reminiscent of Verdi's chorus writing, and there is little doubt that Puccini heard that great opera master's work. However, although the Mass remained unknown for many years, Puccini did not forget it, and whole pages are incorporated in the later operas. It is a work best listened to than spoken about and it is now finding its way increasingly into the repertoire of choral societies.

INTERVAL 15 MINUTES

MASS IN A FLAT

Franz Schubert

(1797-1828)

Kyrie
Gloria
Credo
Sanctus
Benedictus
Agnus Dei

As with the *Messa di Gloria*, the words of the Mass are traditional, the only difference being that Schubert, as with all his Masses, left out the words "Et in unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam" ("and (I believe) in the one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church"). This must have come from some deep inner conviction, though his editors have always tried to remedy the omissions. Possibly his years as a choir boy may have led to some disillusion with the Church.

Schubert wrote six Masses in all, four in his teens and two in his short maturity. The *A flat Mass* is the penultimate one, and his most successful, possibly because he took the most trouble over it, making many sketches over a three-year period. Four of his other Masses are largely failures, and are rarely performed. The *A flat Mass* is, however, as Arthur Jacobs says, "one of his golden dreams, ravishing the senses with its melodies and its endearing harmonic twists". It was not performed in his lifetime: Salieri's successor at the Archduke's Court rejected it as "too difficult". Anthony Hopkins suggests that it is currently rejected by choral societies "because they object to paying for four soloists who have such little solo work to do"!

As was then the custom, Schubert alternates a quartet of soloists with the choir, and the voices imitate each other. There are snatches of Bach—as in the orchestral bass in the *Gloria* and later in the *Crucifixus* where there is a chromatic passage describing Christ's death and descent into the tomb. The only unsuccessful part of the Mass is in the fugal development of the *Gloria*. Fugal writing was not Schubert's forte and he seems to have realised this for he later wrote a shorter version, which is the one we shall be singing this afternoon. The whole work is, however, gloriously singable and linked, as it is, with Puccini's equally tuneful masterpiece, makes an afternoon of Masses seem as if Heaven had already arrived!

LINDA ANNE MARSHALL studied for five years at the Royal College of Music with Margaret Cable and Marion Studholme. She appeared as soloist with the Bach Cantata Choir and Early Music Group at the R.C.M. and has given recitals and concerts in London. More recently she has specialized in Oratorio, singing with many choral societies in the South of England. She also teaches singing in the Tunbridge Wells area.

SUSAN LOFTHOUSE studied in London at the Marchesi Singing Academy, with the late John Wills, and with Otakar Kraus. She has travelled widely in England and Wales, not only as a recitalist and oratorio soloist, but also as a member of The Phoebus Trio. She has made several appearances in London's Wigmore Hall and South Bank Concert Halls, and is a member of the New English Singers.

GERALD PLACE was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he held a choral scholarship. At the end of his first year he was invited to join the choir of King's College, where he sang for two years.

Whilst at Cambridge he studied singing with Ian Partridge. During this time he gave many recitals of lieder and of early music, and appeared as the soloist in many oratorio performances. He also took part in a number of operas, taking the title roles in *Orfeo* by Monteverdi and *Mavra* by Stravinsky.

After two years in Oxford as a lay-clerk at Christ Church, he moved to London to join the B.B.C. Singers, with whom he has sung for three-and-a-half years. As a member of the Singers he has made numerous solo broadcasts in music ranging from Purcell to Beethoven and Walton.

He has sung for many choral societies, and given recitals for a number of universities and music clubs. Abroad, he was one of a small group chosen from the B.B.C. Singers to undertake an extended tour of the Middle East, and he has featured as a soloist at the Flanders Festival in a programme of English and French music.

In 1978 he formed the Gesualdo Consort, which he directs, and which has established a formidable reputation for itself. He has studied with David Johnston and Arthur Reckless, and is at present working with Jack Irons.

JONATHAN ROBARTS was born in Edinburgh in 1949 and began his musical and singing studies at school there. In 1968 he won an Open Choral Scholarship to King's College, Cambridge, and from the following year he sang in the famous choir there, then under the directorship of David Willcocks. During his three years in Cambridge he read successfully for an honours degree in French, German and Music. At this time also he was studying singing with the late Wilfred Brown.

On leaving Cambridge, he was awarded a Merchant Taylor's Company Scholarship for postgraduate study at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. For two years he studied there with Arthur Reckless and achieved particular success in opera, where he undertook many varied roles, including the Count in *The Marriage of Figaro* and Sarastro in *The Magic Flute*. While at the Guildhall School he obtained further awards from the Countess of Munster Musical Trust and the Vaughan Williams Trust.

Jonathan Robarts has performed widely in oratorio engagements in many parts of the country, and he has given several solo recitals, in which he has shown particular affection for German Lieder. Of special note were his performances of Bach's *St John Passion* with Peter Pears and of the Brahms *Requiem* and Fauré *Requiem* with David Willcocks.

Currently a B.B.C. Singer, Jonathan last appeared with the Society in April 1978 singing the bass solos in Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*.

OUR 80th SEASON

Currently, and during the last few seasons, we have introduced a number of new works into our repertoire. Mozart's *C Minor Mass*, Poulenc's *Gloria*, Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, together with the works in today's concert illustrate just how far we have moved away from the traditional repertoire of *Messiah*, *Elijah*, et al. However, that repertoire still has much to offer, despite the current over-emphasis on "modern" works. It is six years since we last sung *Gerontius*, so we shall start our 80th birthday year with a performance of Elgar's masterpiece on Sunday November 13 1983. *Carols* will follow on Sunday 11 December.

But we are not relying on the traditional repertoire only during our 80th year. On 8 April 1984 (our "official" birthday) we shall commence the programme with a suitably festive overture, follow with Bruckner's *Mass No 3 in F Minor* and complete the programme with another "first" for Tunbridge Wells—Beethoven's *Choral Fantasia*. We last sang the Bruckner in March 1966, so we cannot be accused of over exposing the work. We have never sung the *Choral Fantasia*: it has a commanding piano part and we hope to engage a well known soloist for this part, as well as four singing soloists for the *Mass* and *Fantasia*.

Those of you who regret the "passing" of the old favourites need not despair. 1985 is the 300 anniversary of the birth of Bach and Handel, as well as being European Music year. The *B Minor Mass* or *Messiah* may well appear then, though some co-ordination with other societies will be essential if those and similar works are not to be flogged to death.

GREEN ROOM MUSIC CLUB

Sunday 17 April 1983

3.00 pm

Assembly Hall

The Smetana Quartet will play Schubert's E flat Quartet, Smetana's Quartet No 2 in D minor, and Janacek's Second Quartet (Intimate Letters).

THE ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS CHORAL SOCIETY

79th SEASON

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We are most grateful for the support of Patrons and Vice Presidents, and new ones are always welcome. Please ring or write to the General Secretary, G.D. Stredder, Vine Cottage, Camden Park, Tunbridge Wells TN2 4TN (0892) 25790.

The Choir rehearses on Monday evenings from September to April. New members are always welcome. There is a simple and private audition. Please ring the General Secretary (as above) if you are interested in becoming a singing member.

The National Federation of Music Societies to which the Society is affiliated, give support towards the cost of concerts with the funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain. The Tunbridge Wells Borough Council also provides guarantees.

The Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society is a registered charity.