

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS CHORAL SOCIETY

78th SEASON

Bach's Christmas Oratorio

Assembly Hall, Tunbridge Wells

SUNDAY, 13th DECEMBER, 1981

3 p.m.

ELIZABETH RITCHIE (Soprano)

SUSAN MASON (Alto)

MICHAEL GOLDTHORPE (Tenor)

WILLIAM SHIMELL (Bass)

WILMARC ELLMAN (Harpsichord)

Orchestra led by **JANE PAMMENT**

Conductor: DEREK WATMOUGH

TICKETS : Balcony £2.75 (Senior Citizens and Children £2.00)

Stalls £2.00 (Senior Citizens and Children £1.00)

From Assembly Hall Box Office (Tunbridge Wells 30613)

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS CHORAL SOCIETY

78TH SEASON



BACH'S CHRISTMAS ORATORIO

ELIZABETH RITCHIE.....SOPRANO
SUSAN MASON.....CONTRALTO
MICHAEL GOLDTHORPE.....TENOR
WILLIAM SHIMELL.....BARITONE
MATTHEW MORLEY.....TREBLE
WILMARC ELLMAN.....HARPSICHORD
JANE PAMMENT.....LEADER OF THE ORCHESTRA
THE ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS CHORAL SOCIETY
DEREK WATMOUGH.....CONDUCTOR

ASSEMBLY HALL, TUNBRIDGE WELLS

SUNDAY DECEMBER 13TH 1981

3.00PM.

PROGRAMME 25PENCE.

The Soloists

Elizabeth Ritchie studied singing and the piano at the Royal Academy. With awards from the Vaughan Williams' Trust and the Worshipful Company of Musicians, she continued her studies at the Salzburg Mozarteum and with Joy Mammen and Audrey Langford. In 1978 Elizabeth joined the Glyndebourne Chorus and since then has sung various principal roles including Echo in Strauss' "Ariadne auf Naxos" and Countess Almaviva in Glyndebourne's touring "The Marriage of Figaro".

Susan Mason last sang with the Society in Vivaldi's "Gloria" in November 1980. Indisposition prevented her appearance in Verdi's "Requiem" in April last, and we are very pleased to welcome her back today. Susan won first prize in the 1979 Tunbridge Wells Young Artists' Competition, has been winner or runner up in other competitions since then and was an I S M Young Recitalist for the 1981 Lunchtime Recital series.

Michael Goldthorpe was, like Susan Mason, born in York. He gained a Choral Exhibition to Trinity College, Cambridge where he graduated in English. He studied at the Guildhall School of Music and subsequently with Alexander Young and Eduardo Asquez. He made his debut in 1970 and since then has followed an active freelance career.

He is very well known on the Oratorio platforms of this country and is a notable Evangelist in the Bach Passions. He sang the role of Evangelist in the Society's performance of St. John Passion in April 1974.

William Shimell made his debut with the ENO as Masetto in "Don Giovanni" in 1980 and he has since become a regular company member, and it is with the ENO's permission that he appears today. He last appeared with the Society in Handel's "Messiah" in November 1979. William Shimell was born in Essex and educated at Westminster Abbey Choir School and St Edward's School, Oxford. Subsequently he studied at the Guildhall School of Music and at the National Opera Studio, London. He has been a regular member of Kent Opera and has appeared several times in performances in this Hall.

The Conductor

Derek Watmough has been the Society's Musical Director and Principal Conductor since 1974, though he was Musical Director from 1967 to 1974 when Trevor Harvey or Myer Fredman were Principal Conductors. Derek was educated in Halifax and played the violin in the National Youth Orchestra. He gained a State Scholarship to Durham University where he read Classics, but after one year switched to music in which he gained his BA. His first teaching appointment was in High Wycombe where Richard Hickox was one of his pupils. He later became Head of Music at Skinners' School and is currently Head of Music at Crowborough Beacon School. Derek is an active supporter of several local choirs, singing as both choral member and soloist. He also leads a string quartet and frequently reports on musical events for "The Courier".

The Work

The *Christmas Oratorio* is made up of six cantatas, designed to be sung on the various feast days between Christmas and the Epiphany. While there is no firm evidence that Bach ever performed the work as a whole, there is little doubt that he had this in mind, since the manuscript score bears the title *Oratorium Tempore Nativitatis Christi* in the composer's own hand. Nearly all the music was 'borrowed' and adapted by Bach from other compositions - mainly little-known secular cantatas; but those unfamiliar with the work may be surprised by the early appearance of the familiar chorale melody which recurs throughout the *St Matthew Passion*.

The text is based on the infancy narratives in St Matthew and St Luke, which are mostly set as accompanied recitatives for the tenor soloist, while the choir and the other soloists reflect on the great central mysteries of Incarnation and Redemption; but the choir occasionally 'participates', taking the part of the shepherds and the Magi respectively in the choruses "Let us even now go to Bethlehem" and "Where is the new-born King?", and of the "multitude of the heavenly host" in "Glory to God".

Bach and Handel lived in different spiritual worlds, and comparisons between them can be extremely misleading. But Bach's approach in this last-named chorus differs so interestingly from Handel's in *Messiah* that one can hardly resist a brief comment. Handel's setting is essentially pictorial and dramatic, laid on with broad brushstrokes. Bach treats us to a display of his contrapuntal skill at its most impressive: an elaborate structure built on several themes, often overlapping in close canon, and with a fine imaginative contrast at the words "And peace on earth". (Angels, presumably, take this sort of thing in their stride, but the shepherds would surely have been astounded!)

Other 'landmarks' include a splendid bass aria "Mighty Lord" with trumpet *obbligato* in Part 1; and in Part 2, in quieter mood, the Pastoral Symphony and the most beautiful contralto aria "Slumber beloved". Part 3 begins (and ends) with a glorious clatter of trumpets and drums in the chorus "Hear, King of angels" (in the text the voices are said to 'falter'; but the music never does). "Come and thank Him", with which Part 4 opens, is in contrasting mood and style: an extended, broadly melodic, homophonic chorus, with horns burbling away in a warm relaxed F major. The skill of the choir is severely tested in the *vivace* chorus "Glory be to God" at the beginning of Part 5, as is that of the soprano soloist in the aria "Naught against the power" (part 6) - reputed to be one of the most difficult arias Bach ever wrote. The work ends with the 'Passion Chorale' heard once again, but this time ornamented with brilliant orchestration and a most exhilarating trumpet tune.

Even the most thorough-going Bach enthusiast will admit that six full-length cantatas is too much for one sitting; and fairly extensive cuts have been made in the performance to be given this afternoon. But nearly all the best music has been retained: music of great inspiration, variety and attractiveness, suffused with the warmth and light and joy of Christmas.

PART 1.

<i>Chorus</i>	...	...	<i>Christians, be joyful</i>
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>Now it came to pass</i>
<i>Air</i>	...	...	<i>Prepare thyself, Zion</i>
<i>Choral</i>	...	...	<i>How shall I fitly meet Thee</i>
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>And she brought forth her first-born Son</i>
<i>Choral & Recit</i>	...	...	<i>For us to earth He cometh poor</i>
<i>Air</i>	...	...	<i>Mighty Lord and King all glorious</i>
<i>Choral</i>	...	...	<i>Ah! dearest Jesus</i>

PART II.

<i>Symphony</i>	...	...
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>And there were shepherds</i>
<i>Choral</i>	...	...	<i>Break forth, O beauteous, heavenly light</i>
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>And the Angel said</i>
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>And this is the sign to you</i>
<i>Choral</i>	...	...	<i>Within yon gloomy manger</i>
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>O haste ye then</i>
<i>Air</i>	...	...	<i>Slumber, beloved</i>
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>And suddenly</i>
<i>Chorus</i>	...	...	<i>Glory to God in the highest</i>
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>'Tis right that Angels thus should sing</i>
<i>Choral</i>	...	...	<i>With all Thy hosts</i>

PART III.

<i>Chorus</i>	...	...	<i>Hear, King of Angels</i>
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>And when the Angels</i>
<i>Chorus</i>	...	...	<i>Let us even now go to Bethlehem</i>
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>He bids us comfort take</i>
<i>Choral</i>	...	...	<i>The Lord hath all these wonders wrought</i>
<i>Duet</i>	...	...	<i>Lord, Thy mercy</i>
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>And they came with haste</i>
<i>Air</i>	...	...	<i>Keep, O my spirit</i>
<i>Choral</i>	...	...	<i>Thee with tender care</i>
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>And the shepherds returned</i>
<i>Choral</i>	...	...	<i>Rejoice, and sing</i>
<i>Choral</i>	...	...	<i>Hear, King of Angels</i>

INTERVAL - 15 MINUTES

PART IV.

<i>Chorus</i>	...	...	<i>Come and thank Him</i>
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>And when eight days were fulfilled</i>
<i>Air</i>	...	...	<i>Ah! my Saviour</i>
<i>Choral</i>	...	...	<i>Jesus, who didst ever guide me</i>

PART V.

<i>Chorus</i>	...	...	<i>Glory be to God</i>
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>Now when Jesus was born</i>
<i>Chorus & Recit</i>	...	...	<i>Where is the new-born King</i>
<i>Choral</i>	...	...	<i>All darkness flies</i>
<i>Air</i>	...	...	<i>O Lord, my darken'd heart enlighten</i>
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>And when Herod the King</i>
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>And gathering together</i>
<i>Choral</i>	...	...	<i>This proud heart</i>

PART VI.

<i>Chorus</i>	...	...	<i>Lord, when our haughty foes</i>
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>Then Herod called the wise men</i>
<i>Air</i>	...	...	<i>Nought against the power</i>
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>And they, when they had heard</i>
<i>Choral</i>	...	...	<i>Beside Thy cradle</i>
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>And being warned of God</i>
<i>Recit</i>	...	...	<i>O'er us no more shall fears of hell</i>
<i>Choral</i>	...	...	<i>Now vengeance hath been taken</i>

Forthcoming Concerts in the Assembly Hall

Sunday January 18th.1982.	3.00pm.	The Green Room Club. Concert by the winners of the International Young Concert Artists Competition.
Sunday February 7th.1982.	3.00pm.	Royal Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestra with Carl Pini (violin) and Roger Smith (cello). Conductor: Barry Wordsworth.
Sunday April 18th 1982.	3.00pm.	Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society.Poulenc "Gloria". Vaughen Williams "A Sea Symphony". Philippa Dames-Longworth(Soprano), John Hancorn (Bass) Conductor: Derek Watmough.

THE ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS CHORAL SOCIETY

78TH 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 (Tunbridge Wells (0892) 25790).

The Choir rehearses on Monday evenings from Sept. 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 and South East Arts, to which the Society are affiliated, give support towards the cost of concerts with 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.