

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS CHORAL SOCIETY

84th SEASON

ASSEMBLY HALL, TUNBRIDGE WELLS

SUNDAY 27th MARCH 1988

3.00 p.m.

PETITE MESSE SOLENNELLE

ROSSINI

Pamela Kuhn	<i>Soprano</i>
Christine Botes	<i>Mezzo Soprano</i>
Neville Ackerman	<i>Tenor</i>
William Mackie	<i>Bass</i>

Organ played by **WILMARC ELLMAN**

Orchestra led by **JANE PAMMENT**

Conducted by

DEREK WATMOUGH

PETITE MESSE SOLENNELLE – ROSSINI

Gioacchino Rossini (1792–1868) was almost exclusively an opera composer, writing nearly forty of the genre, mostly comic operas of great wit, freshness and sparkle with lilting orchestration. He lived in Paris from 1824 until his death in 1868 (apart from a few breaks when revolutions made work there more difficult) but during the latter half of his life he wrote virtually nothing apart from the *Stabat Mater* (1842) and some instrumental “divertissements”. However, in 1863 he decided to compose an extended setting of the Mass as an offering to God, which by showing how to write for the human voice would be the culmination of his life’s work.

Rossini’s tongue-in-cheek title “Short Solemn Mass” like his “Sins of Old Age” is a complete misnomer and typical of his humorous but not irreverent approach to music, and quite consistent with a man who wrote a delightful duet for two cats!

The Mass was originally scored for two pianos and harmonium as it was anticipated that Church performances would not be countenanced because of the use of female choral singers, and concert halls did not always have an organ. However, following the very successful first performances in Paris in 1864 Rossini was persuaded to rescore the music for full orchestra thus adding to the excitement and drama especially in the double fugue, *Cum Sancto Spiritu*. The work is not overtly operatic but Rossini was incapable of writing music which did not have a lyrical line with melodies flowing continuously.

The *Kyrie* opens quietly and seriously enough despite a persistent little bass theme bubbling underneath and the chorus emerges from the shadows with contrasts of light and shade. The *Christe Eleison* section must have come as a surprise in mid-nineteenth century Paris because Rossini uses the unaccompanied voices in an antique contrapuntal style (of centuries earlier) before reverting to his opening *Kyrie* with its unexpected harmonies. The movement dies away and the *Gloria* has a majestic fanfare punctuated with dramatic silences then the chorus bursts forth triumphantly. The mood changes to one of contemplation as the soloists sing praise and blessing and there is a muted ending.

The next four sections are all solo items (shades of the opera house?), the *Gratias* being a delightful trio for the lower voices which continues in the gentle vein of gratitude. By contrast the *Dominus Deus* is an exuberant tenor aria which swaggers along with supreme self confidence in a joyful way. The following soprano and contralto duet *Qui Tollis* is much more peaceful, an expression of gratitude that Christ takes away the sins of the world, with subtle shifts of harmony especially in the *Miserere*. The orchestral introduction to the *Quoniam* brings us back to earth as the tempo changes to a march and the bass strides forward in a very positive manner, assured that “Thou only art holy”.

The climax of the first half of the Mass is the *Cum Sancto Spiritu* which is a glorious double fugue for chorus. The same opening fanfare as in the *Gloria*, a short orchestral interlude and the sopranos launch the main theme of the fugue. The other voices sing an Amen counter subject and everything dances along with tremendous vitality and drama. The forward momentum scarcely ceases and *Amens* ring out until it becomes an Amen Chorus. The original *Cum Sancto Spiritu* theme reappears in each vocal part, there is a false ending before a coda of *Amens* concludes this half of the work.

The *Credo* begins dramatically with a firm declaration of belief by the chorus followed by a hymn-like passage leading to the soloists' section. Melodic lines and block harmony, chorus and soloists, are juxtaposed throughout the movement to a triumphant ending before the orchestra whispers the final chords. The *Crucifixus* is a poignant soprano solo showing resignation rather than bitterness at the crucifixion and leads straight into the *Et Resurrexit* which is justifiably exhilarating. The movement falls into two parts, the first being more harmonic, soloists interspersed with chorus in cries of jubilation at the resurrection and repeating the word *Credo*. A slight pause and *Et Vitam Venturi* commences: another massive and glorious double fugue with an Amen counter-subject. The music drives forward relentlessly, the *Et Vitam* theme reappears out of the Amens and there is a final utterance of *Credo*.

At this point Rossini took the unusual step of inserting an offertory played on the organ. In his student days he was familiar with the works of J S Bach and the *Preludio Religioso* amounts to a four-part invention with rich and varied modulations. The *Sanctus* follows for unaccompanied voices and is reverent though rather austere until the *Hosanna* climax. The hymn *O Salutaris Hostias* (O Saving Victim) is another unusual insertion and is a graceful soprano aria.

The final section *Agnus Dei* is really a contralto aria with gentle comments from the chorus. The orchestral accompaniment refers back to the opening *Kyrie* and the atmosphere is suitably peaceful. Towards the end the mood changes from that of pleading for peace to a radiantly confident climax that peace will be granted and the so-called solemn mass finishes on a note of assurance.

DHP

PART 1

<i>Kyrie-Christe</i>	Chorus & Soloists
<i>Gloria-Laudamus</i>	Chorus & Soloists
<i>Gratias</i>	Contralto, Tenor, Bass
<i>Domine Deus</i>	Tenor
<i>Qui tollis</i>	Soprano, Contralto
<i>Quoniam</i>	Bass
<i>Cum Sancto</i>	Chorus & Soloists

INTERVAL

PART 2

<i>Credo</i>	Chorus & Soloists
<i>Crucifixus</i>	Soprano
<i>Et resurrexit</i>	Chorus & Soloists
<i>Preludio religioso</i>	Organ
<i>Sanctus</i>	Chorus & Soloists
<i>O Salutaris</i>	Soprano
<i>Agnus Dei</i>	Contralto & Chorus

PAMELA KUHN (Soprano) was born in Oregon USA, graduating with a music degree from the State University. She developed a wide vocal repertoire in art song and Lieder and after touring in the USA continued her studies in London. She made her Wigmore Hall debut in 1984 with Graham Johnson and has appeared at a Purcell Room recital. She has been a finalist in various international singing competitions and taken part in the Edinburgh Festival's production of Oberon (1986). Future engagements include The Brahms' Requiem and various recitals in London and Nottingham.

CHRISTINE BOTES (Mezzo Soprano) studied at the Royal Northern College of Music and the National Opera Studio. She has since performed with Glyndebourne Festival and Touring Operas, Scottish and Kent Operas as well as abroad. Concert engagements include the Edinburgh Festival and St John's, Smith Square. She made her Wigmore Hall debut as a winner of the South East Arts Young Musicians' Platform and has sung with Crowborough Choral Society at Mayfield. She has won many international prizes and a Scholarship to study in Paris.

NEVILLE ACKERMAN (Tenor) turned to professional singing after working in industry for some years. Subsequently he joined the Welsh National Opera with whom he has sung a wide range of roles from Pollione in Norma to Rev Adams in Peter Grimes and he is particularly sympathetic to Italian opera. He has toured extensively in England and Wales both in opera and on the concert platform. Abroad he has performed in Zurich, Lisbon and Barcelona.

WILLIAM MACKIE (Bass) was born and bred in Scotland and whilst a student at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music won many major singing competitions. He then joined Scottish Opera as a principal, touring in Europe as well as nearer home, including Covent Garden, Welsh National Opera and Kent Opera. Roles have included Alidoro in La Cenerentola and Fasolt in Das Rheingolt and many others. He has recently sung in Handel's Messiah and Elgar's Dream of Gerontius and other oratorios and recitals. Future engagements will include Verdi's Requiem and Bach's B Minor Mass.

FORTHCOMING CONCERTS
AT THE ASSEMBLY HALL
AT 3.00 p.m.

1988

Sunday	10 April	Royal Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestra
Sunday	22 May	International Young Concert Artists' Gala Concert (7.30 p.m.)
Sunday	13 November	Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society – Elijah
Sunday	11 December	Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society – Carols

1989

Sunday	9 April	Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society – B Minor Mass, <i>Bach</i>
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The Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society acknowledges a generous donation from The Television South Charitable Trust and financial assistance from the South East Arts Association. The Borough of Royal Tunbridge Wells also assists the Society financially.



JANE PAMMENT has led our orchestra for more than ten years but has indicated she wishes to relinquish this position. The Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society would like to take this opportunity of thanking her for her valuable contribution to our concerts over the years.

**THE ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS
CHORAL SOCIETY
84th SEASON**

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We are most grateful for the support of Patrons and Vice Patrons, and new ones are always welcome. Please ring or write to the General Secretary, Mr L. A. Lee, 233 Greggs Wood Road, Tunbridge Wells (Tunbridge Wells 21937).

The Choir rehearses on Monday evenings from September to April. New members are always welcome. There is a simple and private audition. Please contact the General Secretary (as above) in the first instance – we shall be pleased to have you join us.