

Guildford Borough Council Concerts



**WAR
REQUIEM**

BENJAMIN BRITTEN



NAVE B 90p

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This concert is promoted by Guildford Borough Council
with Arts Council support

Saturday 8th March 1975 at 7.30 p.m.

Guildford Cathedral

(By kind permission of the Dean and Chapter)

Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra

Leader JOHN LUDLOW

Southern Sinfonia

Leader HUGH BEAN

Philharmonic Choir

Bigshotte Boys' Choir

Sally Le Sage

Alexander Oliver

Christopher Keyte

John Forster

Vernon Handley

SALLY LE SAGE

Sally Le Sage, one of this country's outstanding singers, began her career in 1967 after winning the highest award at the famous international singing competition in S'Hertogenbosch, Holland. She has since been invited back to fulfill engagements with the Brabants Orchestra and recitals for the Netherlands radio. In 1968 she was awarded a Beecham Foundation Scholarship to study Lieder and French song in Paris with Pierre Bernac. She now sings with most of the leading Concert Societies and Festivals in the British Isles, and broadcasts frequently for the BBC. She has also sung in many European Festivals, and appeared on TV in Paris and Cologne.

In addition to her Oratorio and Recital work, Miss Le Sage has sung in several Operas, and made several LP recordings.

ALEXANDER OLIVER

Alexander Oliver has established himself as one of this country's most gifted tenors, both in concert and opera. He has sung with all the major British Opera Companies, and is now making major appearances abroad.

Alexander Oliver was born and educated in Scotland. After studying for five years with Margaret Dick at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music, he won the Richard Tauber Scholarship and went to Vienna for further study. He now studies with Rupert Bruce-Lockhart.

This year he will appear in the Camden Festival, and also in a concert performance of Mahogany with the ORTF in Paris. In May 1975 Alexander Oliver will make his debut in Houston with the Houston Symphony Orchestra, doing three performances of the St Matthew Passion with Lawrence Foster.

CHRISTOPHER KEYTE

Christopher Keyte was born in Kent in 1935, son of a professional singer, and educated at Alleyn's School, Dulwich and King's College, Cambridge, where he was a choral scholar. He studied singing privately and has steadily gained a reputation as a scholarly and musicianly interpreter of pre-classical and renaissance music, as well as the classical repertoire.

He has appeared at all the major Festivals in the British Isles, as well as Flanders Festival and the Gulbenkian Festival in Lisbon. He has made more than twenty recordings, ranging from Purcell's 'Indian Queen' under Charles Mackerras and Monteverdi Songs with Raymond Leppard, to the Stravinsky Mass under Colin Davis. In broadcasting he has covered an equally wide field from a fifteenth century St Luke Passion to the first performance of 'Cain and Abel' by John Tavener. He has sung with many small groups and ensembles, primarily the Purcell Consort of Voices.

BIGSHOTTE BOYS' CHOIR

The Bigshotte Boys' Choir is made up of boys from Bigshotte School, Wokingham, and is trained by Colin Howard, the Director of Music. Last year they sang the boys' parts in Britten's St Nicolas with the Fleet Choral Society.

They are joined by some members of the choir from Wellington College for this performance, and the help and co-operation of Jared Armstrong, the Director of Music, is gratefully acknowledged.

PHILHARMONIC CHOIR

The Philharmonic Choir is the larger of the two choirs under the conductorship of the Musical Director, who acknowledges with thanks the help he has received in training the choir from Mr. Kenneth Lank, and accompanists Miss Mary Rivers, Miss Patricia Finch and Mrs. Prudence Smith.

SOUTHERN SINFONIA

The Southern Sinfonia was formed in 1974, and all the players involved are young players under the age of thirty. The aim of this orchestra is to provide a platform for young soloists, and it is the Southern Sinfonia's intention not only to perform full scale symphony orchestra concerts but to be available for chamber orchestra concerts and chamber music.

JOHN FORSTER

John Forster was born in Yorkshire in 1950, and began to learn the piano at the age of eight. On entering grammar school, he received violin and viola tuition. In 1968 he entered the Royal College of Music where his tutors were the late Cyril Smith, Felix Kok and Harvey Phillips. He gained an Honours ARCM Diploma in pianoforte performing, and the same year was awarded the Tagore Gold Medal and the Peter Morrison Prize for the most talented male student of the year. The following year he won the Worshipful Company of Musicians Medal. In the field of conducting he was awarded a Sir Adrian Boult Scholarship, the Stier Prize, and was assistant conductor to Harvey Phillips on the RCM Chamber Orchestra's tour of Europe.

During his time as a student, he conducted concerts with all the College Orchestras, and as violinist was Leader of one orchestra for two years. He now conducts a Chamber Orchestra in Surrey as well as the Southern Sinfonia and is Musical Director of an Operatic Society, in addition to playing regularly with the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra. John Forster is at present studying conducting with Vernon Handley.

VERNON HANDLEY

Vernon Handley has been Guildford's Musical Director for twelve years. He is now one of the busiest British Conductors broadcasting with all the BBC Regional Orchestras, about 30 concerts a year, and appearing regularly as guest Conductor with the London Philharmonic and Royal Philharmonic Orchestras. He is one of the few British Conductors who will have as many as six records made or released within 1974. His recent record of music by Vaughan Williams and Tippett, with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, has received wide acclaim. He is particularly noted for his championship of British music and was this year voted Conductor of the Year 1973 by the Composers' Guild of Great Britain.

Programme Notes

by John Andrews (*author's copyright*)

War Requiem, Op. 66 ... Benjamin Britten (born 1913)

'My subject is War, and the pity of War.

The Poetry is in the pity . . .

All a poet can do today is warn.'

These words, written by Wilfred Owen in a preface intended for a volume of poems composed in the trenches during the first world war, are inscribed on the first page of the autograph full score of WAR REQUIEM. Owen was killed seven days before the armistice while crossing his men over the Sambre canal. Two decades later, Coventry bore terrible witness to the way in which his warning was heeded. Two decades later still, the new St. Michael's cathedral was built and dedicated—as remarkable an example of the unquenchable faith of man as the destruction was of man's stupidity.

Faced with a commission to write a large-scale work to celebrate the dedication, it was a stroke of poetic inspiration, akin to Owen's own, that gave Britten the idea of setting alongside the solemn ritual consolations of the Requiem Mass, Owen's bitter and savage war poems—poems that are frequently anti-authoritarian, sometimes anti-clerical, but always deeply Christian and imbued with pity and a sense of humanity.

Musically, the work is built on three different planes: the chorus and soprano solo sing the Latin text of the Mass and are accompanied by the main orchestra; the tenor and baritone solos, accompanied by the chamber orchestra, sing the English poems; while the boys' choir, accompanied by a chamber organ, provide a distant, impersonal element. The cardinal idea expressed by the music is the anguish of grief (represented throughout the work by the uncomfortable interval of the tri-tone F Sharp—C natural) and its final resolution in acceptance and resignation. The tritone is heard at the beginning of the first movement as a solemn tolling of bells above the muttered prayer of the chorus: 'Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine', to the same notes.

A rising 'dotted' motif on the orchestra forms the main subject, which eventually gives way to a more consolatory second subject distantly changed by the boys' choir. This is a twelve-note theme beginning on the C natural and ending on the F sharp of the same tritone, first sung by the trebles and answered in inversion by the altos.

The return of the 'dotted' motif and prayer of the chorus is roughly interrupted by the solo tenor, accompanied by chamber orchestra in a parody of the first subject, fiercely demanding: 'What passing bells for these who die as cattle?' and supplying his own ironic answer.

The Kyrie, instead of being accorded a movement of its own, as in most masses, is here used as a coda of three short series of chords, the last of which resolves the tritone, which throughout the whole movement has preserved the tension by an uneasy ambiguity of key, into an unambiguous chord of F major; a deeply moving solution of unexpected simplicity.

The above description of the way in which the composer has carried out his literary-poetic idea of Latin text and English commentary in the music of the first movement is just one example of the musical treatment that he has applied to the whole work. The simple G major triad with which the trombone introduces ominously quiet fanfares at the start of the *Dies Irae*, becomes, after the climax of the 'Tuba mirum', the motif sung by baritone solo to the words 'Bugles sang . . .' in Owen's sad poem *Voices*. And, much later in the movement, the 7/8 rhythm of the *Dies Irae* is retarded to provide a choral accompanying figure for the *Lachrymosa*, sung by solo soprano. The *Lachrymosa* is interspersed with quasi-cinematic 'flashbacks' to a scene after battle, with the tenor solo singing some of Owen's most compassionate verses: 'Move him into the sun. . . .' The justification for this unusual treatment is the vividness of the picture it gives of one man's personal sorrow for his recently slain friend thrown into relief against the more formal background of general lamentation of soprano solo and chorus.

The music of the Offertorium, introduced by a plainsong-like recitative from the boys' choir, is eventually established as a gay fugue to the words 'Quam olim Abrahæ promisisti et semini ejus'. Again the composer uses the weapon of musical parody to point the story of Abraham and Isaac and its grim sequel. The movement is completed by a return to the choral fugue, but this time chastened into a submissive *pianissimo*.

A cadenza for soprano solo begins the Sanctus; this is supported by a carillon of all the pitched percussion instruments on F sharp and C natural. This finally evolves into a movement in simple ternary form, A—B—A, a form suggested by this section of the Mass: Hosanna—Benedictus—Hosanna. The optimism of the final Hosanna is shattered by the desolate pessimism of the poem which succeeds it, a mood that has to wait until the end of the last movement for its contradiction, for in the 'Agnus Dei' the Lamb of God, of whom the chorus is asking forgiveness, is crucified anew in this war (the poem linked with the *Agnus Dei* is entitled: 'At a Calvary near Ancre'). The musical structure of this arietta-like movement is of the utmost simplicity: the descending melody of the tenor solo is accompanied by an ostinato composed of a descending and ascending scalic phrase, the former starting on F sharp, the latter on C natural—the by now familiar *tritonus diabolus*.

A remarkable, but meaningful, interpolation in the Latin text occurs in the final bar, where the tenor solo sings on a quietly rising phrase: '*Dona nobis pacem*', words which do not appear at all in the Requiem Mass. The significance of this phrase is further underlined by its being the only occasion in the entire work on which either tenor or baritone sings in Latin.

The final movement is a vast apotheosis to the whole work. It falls into three main sections: A prayer, 'Libera me', builds slowly up into the most passionate climax of the work. This is followed by a duet of reconciliation of enemies in death in Owen's poem *Strange Meeting*, which leads most simply and naturally into the divine peace and resignation of 'In paradisum'. At the end, the tritone is once more heard in the distance and is quietly resolved in the final chords of the chorus.

There will be no interval during this performance.

I. REQUIEM AETERNAM

Chorus

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine: et lux perpetua luceat eis.

Boys

Te decet hymnus, Deus in Sion: et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem;
exaudi orationem meam, ad te omnis caro veniet.

Chorus

Requiem . . .

Tenor solo

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries for them from prayers or bells,
Nor any voice or mourning save the choirs—
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.
What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of good-byes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of silent minds.
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

Chorus

Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison. Kyrie eleison.

II. DIES IRAE

Chorus

Dies irae, dies illa.
Solvat saeculum in favilla:
Teste David cum Sibylla.
Quantus tremor est futurus,
Quando iudex est venturus,
Cuncta stricte discussurus!
Tuba mirum spargens sonum
Per sepulchra regionum,
Coget omnes ante thronum.
Mors stupebit et natura.
Cum resurget creatura,
Judicanti responsura.

Baritone solo

Bugles sang, saddening the evening air,
And bugles answered, sorrowful to hear.
Voices of boys were by the river-side,
Sleep mothered them; and left the twilight sad.
The shadow of the morrow weighed on men.
Voices of old dependency resigned,
Bow'd by the shadow of the morrow, slept.

Soprano solo and chorus

Liber scriptus proferetur,
In quo totum continetur,
Unde mundus judicetur.
Judex ergo cum sedebit
Quidquid latet apparebit:
Nil inultum remanebit.
Quid sum miser tunc dicturus?
Quem patronum rogaturus
Cum vix justus sit securus?
Rex tremendae majestatis,
Qui salvandos salvas gratis,
Salva me, fons pietatis.

Tenor and baritone solos

Out there, we've walked quite friendly up to Death;
Sat down and eaten with him, cool and bland—
Pardoned his spilling mess-tins in our hand.
We've sniffed the green thick odour of his breath—
Our eyes wept, but our courage didn't writhe.
He's spat at us with bullets and he's coughed
Shrapnel. We chorused when he sang aloft;
We whistled while he shaved us with his scythe.
Oh, Death was never enemy of ours!
We laughed at him, we leagued with him, old chum.
No soldier's paid to kick against his powers.
We laughed, knowing that better men would come,
And greater wars; when each proud fighter brags
He wars on Death—for Life; not men—for flags.

Chorus

Recordare Jesu pie,
Quod sum causa tuae viae:
Ne me perdas illa die.
Quaerens me, sedisti lassus:
Redemisti crucem passus:
Tantus labor non sit cassus.
Ingemisco, tamquam reus:
Culpa rubet vultus meus:
Supplicanti parce Deus.
Qui Mariam absolvisti,
Et latronem exaudisti,
Mihi quoque spem dedisti.
Inter oves locum praesta,
Et ab haedis me sequestra,
Statuens in parte dextra.
Confutatis maledictis,
Flammis acribus addictis,
Voca me cum benedictis.
Oro supplex et acclinis,
Cor contritum quasi cinis:
Gere curam mei finis.

Baritone solo

Be slowly lifted up, thou long black arm,
Great gun, towering toward Heaven, about to curse;
Reach at that arrogance which needs thy harm,
And beat it down before its sins grow worse;
But when thy spell be cast complete and whole,
May God curse thee, and cut thee from our soul!

Soprano solo and chorus

Dies irae . . .
Lacrimosa dies illa,
Qua resurget ex favilla
Judicandus homo reus:
Huic ergo parce Deus.

Tenor solo

Move him into the sun—
Gently its touch awake him once,
At home, whispering of fields unsown.
Always it woke him, even in France,
Until this morning and this snow.
If anything might rouse him now
The kind old sun will know.
Think how it wakes the seeds—
Woke, once, the clays of a cold star.
Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides,
Full-nerved—still warm—too hard to stir?
Was it for this the clay grew tall?
—O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
To break earth's sleep at all?

Soprano and chorus

Lacrimosa . . .

Chorus

Pie Jesu Domine, dona eis requiem. Amen.

III. OFFERTORIUM**Boys**

Domine Jesu Christe, Rex gloriae, libera animas omnium fidelium defunctorum de poenis inferni, et de profundo lacu: libera eas de ore leonis, ne absorbeat eas tartarus, ne cadant in obscurum.

Chorus

Sed signifer sanctus Michael repraesantet eas in lucem sanctam: quam olim Abrahae promisisti, et semini ejus.

Tenor and baritone solos

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,
And took the fire with him, and a knife.
And as they sojourned both of them together,
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,
And builded parapets and trenches there,
And stretched forth the knife to slay his son.
When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad.
Neither do anything to him. Behold,
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.
But the old man would not so, but slew his son—
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

Boys

Hostias et preces tibi Domine laudis offerimus: tu suscipe pro animabus illis, quarum hodie memoriam facimus: fac eas. Domine, de morte transire ad vitam.

Chorus

Quam olim Abrahae . . .

IV. SANCTUS

Soprano solo and chorus

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua.
Hosanna in excelsis. Sanctus . . .
Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
Hosanna in excelsis. Sanctus . . .

Baritone solo

After the blast of lightning from the East,
The flourish of loud clouds, the Chariot Throne;
After the drums of Time have rolled and ceased,
And by the bronze west long retreat is blown,
Shall life renew these bodies? Of a truth.
All death will He annul, all tears assuage?—
Fill the void veins of Life again with youth,
And wash, with an immortal water, Age?
When I do ask white Age he saith not so:
'My head hangs weighed with snow'.
And when I hearken to the Earth, she saith:
'My fiery heart shrinks, aching. It is death.
Mine ancient scars shall not be glorified,
Nor my titanic tears; the sea, be dried'.

V. AGNUS DEI

Tenor solo

One ever hangs where shelled roads part.
In this war He too lost a limb,
But His disciples hide apart;
And now the Soldiers bear with Him.
Near Golgotha strolls many a priest,
And in their faces there is pride
That they were flesh-marked by the Beast
By whom the gentle Christ's denied.
The scribes on all the people shove
And bawl allegiance to the state,
But they who love the greater love
Lay down their life; they do not hate.

Chorus

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi: dona eis requiem.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi: dona eis requiem sempiternam.

Tenor solo

Dona nobis pacem.

VI. LIBERA ME

Soprano solo and chorus

Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna, in die illa tremenda:
Quando coeli movendi sunt et terra:
Dum veneris iudicare saeculum per ignem. Tremens factus sum ego, et
timeo, dum discussio venerit, atque ventura ira. Dies illa, dies irae,
calamitatis et miseriae, dies magna et amara valde.

Tenor and baritone solos

It seemed that out of battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites where titanic wars had groined.
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes.
Lifting distressful hands as if to bless.
And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.
'Strange friend', I said, 'here is no cause to mourn'.
'None', said the other, 'save the undone years',
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
Was my life also: I went hunting wild
After the wildest beauty in the world,
For by my glee might many men have laughed,
And of my weeping something had been left,
Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,
The pity of war, the pity war distilled.
Now men will go content with what we spoiled,
Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.
They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress,
None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.
Miss we the march of this retreating world
Into vain citadels that are not walled.
Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels
I would go up and wash them from sweet wells.
Even from wells we sunk too deep for war,
Even the sweetest wells that ever were.
I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold,
Let us sleep now . . .'

Boys' soprano solo and chorus

In paradisum deductant te Angeli: in tuo adventu suscipiant te Martyres,
et perducant te in civitatem sanctam Jerusalem. Chorus Angelorum te
suscipiat, et cum Lazaro quondam paupere aeternam habeas requiem.

Boys

Requiem aeternum dona eis, Domine: et lux perpetua luceat eis.

Chorus

Requiescant in pace. Amen.

The poems of Wilfred Owen are reprinted by permission of Mr. Harold Owen and Chatto & Windus Ltd.