



LET THE
VOICES
SING

VOX COELESTIS

CONDUCTED BY
NIGEL SHORT

CONCERT PROGRAMME

Saturday 23 November 2024 at 7pm

Holy Trinity Church, Broadgate, Coventry

BEFORE THE CONCERT STARTS - A FEW POLITE REQUESTS!

Please **don't take any video or photos** during the performance itself - we don't have the licence to broadcast this music, and cameras & phones are distracting for the performers, who'd rather see your faces!

Reserving your applause until the end of each half would be much appreciated. It's lovely to receive, but can knock back the concert atmosphere and also make the concert longer. Pews aren't always comfortable for everyone!

Thank you - much appreciated

LET THE VOICES SING



Thank you very much for attending tonight and supporting the future of the music of this important church community and its historic building.

There are many choral works which give the listener a wonderful audio experience. However, many of those **can be technically very difficult for singers to perform**. This can be for a variety of reasons, including rhythm, phrasing or what is known as 'tessitura' - the average range which each voice has to sing within a piece. There are many composers who, as a singer, you sense were probably not singers themselves or maybe relied heavily on the piano for creating the core of the composition. Those who compose for orchestras need to understand what each instrument can achieve. Organ composers need to have played the organ to understand its capabilities, and that of an organist.

Voices are distinct from instruments in that each note has to be formed from human muscles. Pressing a key on a Steinway piano

will produce a note of exquisite tone. Achieving the same with **the human voice is a different mechanical discipline** and has the added complexity of forming words by constantly changing the shape of the mouth and holding sufficient breath to maintain the vibration of the vocal cords.

The re-arrangement of Samuel Barber's beautiful orchestral work "Adagio for Strings" (used in many film scores) for voices, using the Agnus Dei text, presents singers with significant challenges. The merits of the simple conversion of a composition from instrumental to choral are, perhaps, questionable. Apart from the vocal ranges required in each part, the breath control and several other vocal techniques push singers and their voices to their limits.

Scientists note that **singing uses all parts of the brain at the same time - a rare human occurrence**. Performing music which layers on additional complexities requires singers who are highly-trained, are able to nurture and care for their voices, and can learn music to a level which enables less reliance on reading the notes on the page whilst singing.

The works chosen for tonight's concert will hopefully showcase the human voice as they enable the singers to perform with a greater mental and physical freedom. Beautiful choral effects from composers who understand the voice.

Simon Filsell

PROGRAMME

Kerry Andrew (b.1978) O Nata Lux

A simple plainsong-like opening by the sopranos sends the music into different parts of the building, before it reaches the listener. The remaining singers then layer on harmonies which complement the beautiful soprano lines.

Frei Manuel Cardoso (1566-1650)

Missa Pro defunctis - Kyrie

The slowly-shifting harmonies of this piece are mixed with cascading lines which give a sense of purpose and constant movement within each section.

Giovanni de Palestrina (c. 1524-1594)

Missa Papae Marcelli – Gloria

Musically-innovative, it was one of the first ever works where 6 voices were all heard together. Imagine the scene in St Peter's Rome, as the memorial service in 1556 for the papacy of Pope Marcellus commenced with this music.

Giacomo Carissimi (1605–74) Plorate from Jephthe

This final movement of Carissimi's oratorio is one of the most moving Baroque works, yet relatively unknown. A tragic biblical story about Jephthe's daughter which is captured musically by Carissimi with great skill and creation of scene. In the Plorate, the sorrow of his daughter's companions is palpable.

William Byrd (1540-1623)

Ne Irascaris Domine & Civitas sancti tui

The first part of this double-motet paints the picture of the Israelites' exile into Babylon. Whilst it is a plea for mercy, Byrd

gives it a spaciousness and simplicity which hints at optimism through their trust in God. *Civitas Sanctis* deals with the empty city of Jerusalem but, again, there is a sense that all is not hopeless, and a shift into the final section where successive voices enter and weave around each other.

Francisco Guerrero (1528-1599) Duo Seraphim

Although Guerrero is rather less well-known, he and Tomás Luis de Victoria were probably the two greatest Spanish composers of their generation. Interestingly, he was taught by his brother, who was himself a singer. This 3-choir 12-part motet cleverly hands the musical baton from choir to choir. When all the voices come together for “plena est omnis terra” it is difficult not to consider a similar moment in Thomas Tallis’ epic 40-part motet ‘Spem in Alium’, composed in 1570 - about 20 years before Guerrero’s work.

Tomás Luis de Victoria (1548- 1611) O Quam Gloriosum

A favourite of many singers, this speaks of the glories of the heavenly Kingdom and the saints who rejoice with Christ. After a majestic start, it eases into the image of the saints in white robes - “Amicti stolis albis” - before its glorious finish.

Giovanni de Palestrina (c. 1524-1594) Tu es Petrus

This is the 6-part version of his setting of these words. The pillars of sound clearly point to St Peter as the ‘rock’, and the whole work has a reassuring feel. Listen for the musical emphasis on “claves regni” - the “keys of heaven”.

INTERVAL
(15 minutes)

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) Wo ist ein so herrlich Volk

Brahms held positions as a choral conductor with a variety of choirs from the age of 24 onwards and that experience culminated in his masterpiece, the German Requiem, in 1866. The sense of constant musical flow harks back to the Cardoso and Byrd from the first half, culminating with one of the great settings of the "Amen".

Josef Rheinberger (b.1839-1901) Abendlied

In 1877 he became responsible for the music of the Royal Chapel in Germany and wrote 14 Masses. Abendlied - "Bide with us, for evening shadows darken, and the day will soon be over" - was written when he was aged just 16. It is one of the gems of the choral repertoire.

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943) Bogoroditse Dyevo

This is one of sixteen pieces making up his "All-Night Vigil" (also known as the "Vespers"), written in 1915. The Russian language lends itself to beautiful vocal sounds by its round and open vowels, encouraging the singer to open the throat and allow more breath across the vocal cords. From the tremendously atmospheric pianissimo opening, through a thrilling fortissimo towards the almost imperceptible closing chords, this is a favourite of many singers.

Ēriks Ešvalds (b.1977) Stars

Ešvalds sang in the State Choir of Latvia until 2011 and fully understands the human singing voice. This incredibly atmospheric piece starts with chords played on wine glasses. The words are from Sara Teasdale's 1920 poem - "Alone in the night on a dark hill, with pines around me, spicy and still. And a heaven full of stars....."

Stephen Paulus (1949-2014) The Road Home

Paulus' output numbers more than 600 works and is best known for his operas and choral music. This simple hymn-like piece has gained popularity in recent years, opening the gateway to his full repertoire.

John Tavener (1944-2013) Funeral Ikos

Being rooted in the Orthodox tradition, his choral output reflects the absence of instruments in its liturgy - "an instrument cannot enunciate a word" and that is central to their worship. This serene work is a simple statement of the reward in Paradise for Righteous Souls. The choral 'conversation' between the upper and lower voices, verse by verse, is brought together in each "Alleluia" to greatest choral effect.

Francis Pott (b.1957) Ubi Caritas

Francis Pott was a Layclerk in Winchester Cathedral Choir for a number of years, and his brother is a professional singer. In this setting of a well-known text, he takes a typical complex musical approach, yet manages to achieve an innate sense of simplicity of line, reflecting the purity of the words - "where charity & love are, God is there".

Adrian Peacock (b.1962) Veni Emmanuel

Adrian Peacock is a professional singer and record producer, beginning his career as a chorister in Lichfield Cathedral Choir. Whilst the sense of the piece is complex, it is cleverly written to enable the singers to achieve the effect intended - the excited expectation of the coming of Christ.

NIGEL SHORT

Award-winning conductor Nigel Short has earned widespread acclaim for his recording and live performance work with leading orchestras and ensembles across the world. A former member of renowned vocal ensemble The King's Singers, in 2001 Nigel formed Tenebrae, a virtuosic choir that combines the passion of a cathedral choir with the precision of a chamber ensemble. Under



his direction, Tenebrae has collaborated with internationally acclaimed orchestras and instrumentalists and now enjoys a reputation as one of the world's finest vocal ensembles. As well as performing at some of the world's most prestigious venues and festivals, including the BBC Proms, Wigmore Hall, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, and Sydney Festival, Nigel has vast recording experience having conducted for many of the world's major labels, as well as having contributed to a number of high-profile film soundtracks. In 2018, he received a Grammy nomination in the category of 'Best Choral Performance'. As a Gramophone award-winning producer, Nigel works with many of the UK's leading professional choirs and vocal ensembles and has conducted Vox Coelestis since it was established in 2005.

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VOX COELESTIS

The group began as a one-off collaboration back in 2005, between Nigel Short, Simon Filsell and some singing friends, to raise funds for charitable causes. The singers come together each year, and are drawn from top cathedral, collegiate and chamber choirs from across the UK. They sing without a fee, funding their own travel and accommodation costs. Requests to perform have taken us

across the UK to such places as Portsmouth, Wells, Gloucestershire, London, St Albans, Coventry, Yorkshire and Scotland.



SOPRANO - Cathryn Caunt, Julie Evans, Karen Filsell, Jenny Hasnip, Dawn Herbert, Catharine Jessop, Louise McPhee, Patricia Rees-Jones

ALTO - Elizabeth Atkinson, Mara Goldstein, Elaine Gould, Debbie Johnstone, Annika Lindskog, Anastasia Micklethwaite

TENOR - Paul Gudgin, Mark Johnstone, Steve Jones, Adrian Salmon, Rory Wilson

BASS - Kevin Bailey, Simon Filsell, Jonathan Lane, Rod McPhee, David Rees-Jones, Tom Stockwell, Christopher Williams, David Williams

ACCOMPANIST & WINE GLASS CONDUCTOR: Alex Norman

www.voxcoelestis.co.uk

VOX COELESTIS

"Beautiful choral music in beautiful spaces, solely for charitable benefit"

Our next concert - our 20th Anniversary - will be in Lavenham Church
in Suffolk for their 'Tower 500' celebrations
Saturday 31 May 2025



HOLY TRINITY COVENTRY ORGAN APPEAL

Please consider making a donation to our Organ Appeal raising funds to install the exceptional Harrison & Harrison organ which we have acquired.

- Many already donate by Standing Order. Please consider joining these loyal supporters.
- Make a bequest in your will.
- The Organ Appeal bank details are:
 - Sort Code 40-18-17 and the Account Number is 11405845.
 - The account is Holy Trinity Development Trust . Cheques should be made payable to this account, please.
- Use the card machine at the Welcome desk.

