

Writtle Singers

Conductor: Christine Gwynn

Cello: Alastair Morgan

Percussion: Chris Brice and Nathan Gregory

TO THE FIELD OF STARS

All Saints' Church, Writtle
Sunday 20 November 2016
7pm



TO THE FIELD OF STARS

~ PROGRAMME ~

Tomás Luis de Victoria
O quam gloriosum

Officium Defunctorum
Requiem 1605

~ INTERVAL ~

Gabriel Jackson
To the Field of Stars

Welcome to our 2016 autumn concert, which takes its title from Gabriel Jackson's colourful and deeply imaginative evocation of the pilgrimage experience.

Programme planning for a choir can be something of a journey, often involving highways and byways, a few dead ends, surprising discoveries and, on a good day, a generous measure of serendipity.

The planning of tonight's programme involved journeys from three unconnected starting points. We last performed Victoria's extraordinary 1605 *Requiem* a decade ago and the time seemed right for the choir to revisit this renaissance jewel, putting it at the head of our 2016-17 shortlist. Two years ago, we had the delight of performing with young professional cellist Alastair Morgan and, keen to develop that association, have been keeping a look out for repertoire for chamber choir and cello. Last autumn our attention was drawn to a festival of a *cappella* music at St John's, Smith Square, for which the featured composer was Gabriel Jackson. Hearing several of his choral works performed by the excellent choirs prompted further research. And so came the discovery of *To the Field of Stars* scored for chamber choir, cello and 2 percussionists — a glorious and appealing work which, to boot, had been commissioned to mark the 400th anniversary, in 2011, of the death of Victoria!

One further piece of serendipity occurred when, a few weeks into term, two choir members had heard that Sunday's BBC Essex Radio broadcast in which Bishop Stephen, our diocesan bishop, was interviewed at the outset of his own Camino, as the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage route is often known. As our rehearsals progressed, we enjoyed following his blog of on-the-ground experiences — blisters and hostel snorers mingling with beautiful photos and gentle insights. Not a bad parallel for the work of musicians as we roll up our sleeves in the nitty-gritty of preparation, ever hopeful of conveying something above and beyond the notes...

CHRISTINE GWYNN - Conductor



Christine read music at Southampton University and subsequently studied piano and conducting at the Guildhall with Norman Beedie, laying the foundations for a very varied freelance career involving many facets and styles of music. Christine has been Musical Director of Writtle Singers since 1997; together they have recorded three CDs, given radio broadcasts and toured in the UK and abroad.

A focus on vocal technique is key to the choir's work and gives a platform for exploring a rich and diverse array of music. In addition to an extensive choral repertoire, Christine's conducting activities embrace orchestral direction and music theatre — from *Dido & Aeneas* to *West Side Story* and contemporary pieces — a variety of experience that she brings to bear on her work in the choral field.

Christine is co-founder of Arbutus Music, which seeks to encourage and enhance participation in group singing within the community; she also leads workshops for pianists and is conductor of Valentine Singers and Jericho Ensemble.

CHRIS BRICE - Percussion

Chris Brice is a young freelance drummer and percussionist who graduated from the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in 2014. This summer saw Chris perform at 18 major music festivals across the UK and Europe.



Highlights included Glastonbury festival with The Brass Funkies and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe with acclaimed composer Anna Meredith. Chris has also been seen on stage recently with a variety of ensembles such as Resolution 88, The Red Bull Music Academy, Two Ways Home, Lyves and Daisy Chute.

As well as being busy on stage, Chris has found himself in the recording studio a lot more and can be heard performing on the new BBC 3 television show *Class*. Notable previous performances include the Rugby World Cup Final and a month-long run of *Ultimate Broadway* at Shanghai's Culture Square. Chris is very much looking forward to being on stage with Writtle Singers.

ALASTAIR MORGAN - Cello



Alastair made his debut as a concerto soloist at the age of fifteen, playing the Saint-Saëns *Cello Concerto* with Sutton Youth Symphony orchestra. He has since performed Tchaikovsky's *Variations on a Rococo Theme* with the Sutton Symphony orchestra and has given recitals both in the UK and New Zealand. Alastair has studied and participated in master classes with many distinguished cellists, including Leonard Elschenbroich, Leonid Gorokhov and Alexander Baillie in the UK and Wolfgang Boettcher in Liechtenstein; he was awarded a scholarship to study at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

As principal cellist of the Jericho Ensemble Alastair's roles have included the solo quartet in Benjamin Britten's *Canata Misericordiam* and continuo in JS Bach's *St Matthew Passion*. With the Amina Khayyam Dance Company he has performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and on tour in Holland in *Yerma*, a tale told in Indian neoclassical dance with ensemble of tabla, cello and vocals. In his spare time Alastair has organised several charity recitals for residential homes and cancer care groups in his local area. He currently enjoys an eclectic career, performing both as a soloist and in various ensembles. He plays on a French cello from 1929 made by George Apperut.

NATHAN GREGORY - Percussion



Nathan Gregory trained as a percussionist at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He has performed in a multitude of settings and venues across London, including the Barbican, The Royal Festival Hall, LSO St. Luke's and The Linbury Studio Theatre, with orchestras, ensembles and bands alike.

Nathan is a percussionist with *Showstopper! The Improvised Musical* which has taken him to the West End's Apollo Theatre as well as the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. He also regularly performs with Melos Sinfonia, with whom he has toured twice to St. Petersburg as a musician and actor, and has toured to China with the London Arte Chamber Orchestra.

making music Writtle Singers

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"A group of people who care about how they sing and not just what they sing."

Ghislaine Morgan, international vocal coach and teacher

Musical Director: Christine Gwynn

Soprano:

Jane Atkinson
Glyn Buckmaster
Jenny Haxell
Gwendoline Johnston
Abby Morton
Jean Rose
Helen Sismey
Mary Whitford

Alto:

Audrey Cassidy
Josephine Gordon
Frances Quintrell
Sophie Richards
Elizabeth Tiplin

Tenor:

Martin Atkinson
Peter Brisley
Graham Frankel
Martin Mason

Bass:

Clive Beale
Chris Bradbury
John Buckmaster
Martin Clarke
Peter Quintrell
Andrew Taylor

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O quam gloriosum

Tomás Luis de Victoria 1548-1611

O how glorious is the kingdom in which all the saints rejoice with Christ.

Clad in robes of white they follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

Tomás Luis de Victoria was born in 1548 in Ávila, some fifteen miles north-west of Madrid. Spain was at the height of El Siglo de Oro, its Golden Age, a time of renaissance in music, poetry and art - in colourful contradiction to the strictures of the Reformation. It was a time of Catholic revival, mysticism, conquistadors and inquisitions...

As a choirboy at Ávila Cathedral, the young Victoria had the opportunity to study with leading musicians – and to be befriended by the famous mystic, Teresa (later St Teresa) of Ávila. Her colourful, emotional mysticism struck a deep chord that resonated throughout Victoria's compositional output – an output of entirely sacred music. Startling harmonic colours and changes, reflecting a deep emotional connection with the text, characterise his extraordinary music.

When, at 17, Victoria's voice broke, such was his talent and renown that the King, Philip II of Spain, paid a very large sum for him to continue his studies in Rome, at the Jesuit German College, where he initially enrolled as a singer in 1565. Victoria achieved success as composer, singer and organist and was later offered a teaching post at the Collegio. In 1574 he entered the priesthood; the callings of musician, priest and mystic remained central to his being and work.

Rome was the place to gain an international reputation. Victoria sent his published music to many European cathedrals, in Germany, Austria, Poland and Spain, as well as to Mexico, Lima and Bogota. There were conquistadors in his family and he would have been well aware of this exotic New World where exports such as his fine music would be traded for gold, silver, spices and the precious cocoa bean. Rearrangements for solo voice and lute of his motets, including *O quam gloriosum*, facilitated the spread of his music beyond the church and enabled performances of this glorious repertoire by just one or two musicians.

between movements but also woven into the polyphony throughout.

The mass is prefaced by a motet *Taedet animam meam*, a setting of verses from Job, and concludes with a funeral motet *Versa est in luctum*. The Responsary - *Libera me* and *Kyrie* - forms the Absolution that followed the requiem mass.

Victoria published the *Requiem* two years later, in 1605, a time when new ideas, new ways of writing music and of setting text were being vigorously explored in Italy by such innovators as the Gabriellis and Monteverdi. Although he lived a further 6 years, it is the last work that Victoria published and was probably his final composition, regarded by many to be a memorial, also, to an era in Spanish history and to the great music of the European renaissance.

Officium Defunctorum Requiem 1605

Tomás Luis de Victoria

Despite the great successes of his time in Rome, Victoria was eventually overcome by the lure of home and in 1583 secured a generous post in Madrid, at the Monasterio de las Descalzas, the Royal Convent of the Barefoot Nuns of St Clare, thanks to Philip II. His role was that of chaplain to the Dowager Empress Maria, sister of Philip, daughter of Charles V and widow of Maximilian II. Maria lived in retirement at the convent and her daughter, Princess Margaret, was one of thirty-three cloistered nuns whose daily services were sung by twelve priests and four boys under Victoria's guidance.

Maria died in 1603; the funeral took place at the convent, followed, two months later by memorial services at the grand, and much more spacious, Church of St Peter and St Paul (Madrid Cathedral now occupies the site). For this, Victoria composed his *Officium Defunctorum* or *Requiem*, based on the plainchant of the requiem mass, which we hear

Officium Defunctorum - Requiem 1605

Translation of the text

LECTIO II AD MATUTINUM

The Second Lesson of Matins

Job 10:1-7

My soul is weary of my life, I will let go my speech against myself, I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God: tell me why thou judgest me so? Doth it seem good to Thee that Thou shouldst calumniate me, and oppress me, the work of Thy own hands, and help the counsel of the wicked? Hast Thou eyes of flesh; or, shalt Thou see as man seeth? Are Thy days as the days of men, that Thou shouldst inquire after my iniquity, and search after my sin? And shouldst know that I have done no wicked thing, whereas there is no man that can deliver out of Thy hand.

MISSA PRO DEFUNCTIS

Mass for the Dead

Introuitus

Eternal rest give unto them, O Lord: and let perpetual light shine upon them.

A hymn, O God, becometh Thee in Sion; and a vow shall be paid to Thee in Jerusalem. O hear my prayer, all flesh shall come to Thee.

Kyrie

Lord, have mercy upon us.

Christ, have mercy upon us.

Lord, have mercy upon us.

Graduale

Eternal rest give to them, O Lord: and let perpetual light shine upon them. The just shall be in everlasting remembrance, he shall not fear the evil hearing.

Offertorium

O Lord Jesus Christ, King of glory, deliver the souls of all the faithful departed from the pains of hell and from the deep pit: deliver them from the lion's mouth, that hell may not swallow them up, and may they not fall into darkness: but may the hold standard-bearer, Michael, lead them into the holy light: which Thou didst promise to Abraham and to his seed.

Sacrifices and prayers we offer to Thee, O Lord; receive them for those souls for whom we make memorial this day; let them, O Lord, pass from death unto life. Which Thou didst promise to Abraham and to his seed.

Sanctus – Benedictus

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts. Heaven and Earth are full of Thy glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Agnus Dei

Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, grant them rest.

Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, grant them rest.

Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, grant them eternal rest.

Communio

May light eternal shine upon them, O Lord: with Thy Saints for ever, for Thou art merciful. Eternal rest give to them, O Lord: and let perpetual light shine upon them. With Thy Saints for ever, for Thou art merciful.

May they rest in peace.

Amen.

(The Mass ends)

MOTECTUM

Funeral Motet

My harp is turned to mourning and my music into the voice of those that weep. Spare me, Lord, for my days are nothing.

Responsorium

Deliver me, O Lord, from eternal death in that awful day: When the heavens and the earth shall be moved: When Thou shalt come to judge the world by fire. Dread and trembling have laid hold on me, and I fear exceedingly because of the judgement and the wrath to come, when the heavens and the earth shall be shaken. O that day, the day of wrath, of sore distress, and of all wretchedness, that great and exceeding bitter day, when Thou shalt come to judge the world by fire. Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.

Deliver me, O Lord, from eternal death in that awful day: when the heavens and the earth shall be moved: when Thou shalt come to judge the world by fire.

Lord, have mercy upon us.

Christ, have mercy upon us.

Lord, have mercy upon us.

To the Field of Stars

Gabriel Jackson b.1962

Cello: Alastair Morgan
Percussion: Chris Brice and
Nathan Gregory
Soprano: Abby Morton
Recitation: Andrew Taylor

Intrada – Refrain

1. Prayer for travelling – Refrain
2. Pilgrims' song with history lesson
– Refrain
3. Walking with God – Refrain
4. Miracles – Refrain
5. Our journey had advanced
– Refrain
6. Campus Stellae (The field of stars)
7. Compostela (O quam gloriosum)

Since the very first journeys to Santiago de Compostela began over 1,000 years ago, the Way of St James has been articulated and celebrated in music.

The vast Codex Calixtinus, dating from the 12th century, is a compendium of advice and instructions for pilgrims, sermons, reports of miracles, prayers and polyphonic motets. Over the years many concert programmes have been devised to relive the mediæval pilgrims' journey in song, drawn from the codex and other sources, and new pieces have been composed which also reimagine the experience of travelling the Way of St James.

So the challenge with this piece was to try to say something new and worthwhile about the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela that hadn't already been said. I didn't want to write a literal account of the journey, a series of postcards from the pilgrimage route—today we are in Puente la Reina... tomorrow we reach Finisterre—for that has already been done and done very well. So while *To the field of stars* is about the pilgrimage to Santiago, it is also about journeying in a wider sense—the physical, emotional and psychological struggle to reach a long-sought after and life-changing goal.

One of the first things that struck me was the possible etymological origin of 'Compostela' as

'campus stellae'—the field of stars. This suggested a literal field of stars, and that notion became the sixth movement of the piece, a sustained, glistening carpet of murmured stars' names underpinning a flickering high cello descant.

In order to articulate and give structure to the journey, the piece is divided into seven movements, seven "stations" as it were, points of meditation and reflection which are separated by choral refrains and brief cello envoi. The texts of the refrains are drawn from a mediæval pilgrims' hymn in the Codex Calixtinus and they also act as a Latin grammar primer, each verse addressing St James in one of the six grammatical cases (nominative, genitive, vocative etc.). These bare and rustic-sounding refrains are isorhythmic—the rhythm remains identical each time, only the pitches changing.

The piece begins with an ecstatic and ululatory *Intrada*, a brief choral fanfare which apostrophises St James and his illustrious martyrdom. The seven movements that follow are both stages in the physical journey and reflections on the transforming experience of any arduous voyage, often sparked by key words in the preceding refrain in a kind of free association.

Prayer for travelling is by turns optimistic and apprehensive, full of both fear and excitement about the journey ahead. A quiet chorale is repeatedly answered by melismatic exclamations from upper voices and cello replete with sighing appoggiaturas and declamatory glissandi.

In the second movement, *Pilgrims' song with history lesson*, the female voices sing of the joys of travel in rather obsessively jubilant tones. At this stage of the journey there is much to look forward to, and the almost-nonsense verse of their effusions is anchored by a jaunty march from the cello. Later in the movement we hear an account of the history of the shrine from the second president of the USA, John Adams.

Walking with God is dominated, in contrast, by the male voices, a dark-hued riposte to the bright cheerfulness of the preceding movement. Cowper's poem, so familiar as a comfortable Anglican hymn, is here reimaged as a raw and angry dark night of the soul. Beset by doubt and uncertainty, the pilgrims sing in ornate and anguished tones, thoughts of the dove of peace offering a brief moment of balm, and leading to a quiet and unsure conclusion.

St James was noted for his performance of miracles, and in the fourth movement Walt Whitman tells of his apprehension of the divine in the everyday in a

poem that is truly sacred in the broadest sense. Linguistically rich and full of ritualistic repetition, Whitman's vision is set to some of the lushest music in the piece, its polyphonic intertwining both meditative and sensual.

In Emily Dickinson's *Our journey had advanced*, the end destination is almost certainly death (as was her wont) but that "God at every gate" may equally be found at the shrine of St James. The movement is simple and quiet, for the most part, its bare homophony briefly overlaid with filigree in the second verse.

In a kind of other-worldly interlude, the whispered Field of Stars that is the sixth movement supports a solo soprano cantilena that also longs for those "heavenly citadels among the stars".

And then, at last, we reach our destination—the Basilica of St James—and "O how glorious is the kingdom" indeed!

2011, the year in which the piece was written, was the 400th anniversary of the death of the great Spanish composer Tomás Luis de Victoria and here his iconic four-part motet *O quam gloriosum* is elaborated by a further four polyphonic voices, its long concluding pedal-point launching the final peroration, an exuberant and jubilant hymn to St James. Bedecked by virtuosic cello roudades and chiming bell sounds, the piece ends, exhausted but uplifted, in a clanging pæan of fortissimo ecstasy.

Programme note © Gabriel Jackson 2015

GABRIEL JACKSON - Composer



One of Britain's foremost and most celebrated composers, Gabriel Jackson was born in Bermuda in 1962. After three years as a chorister at Canterbury Cathedral, Jackson went on to study composition with Richard Blackford and with John Lambert at the Royal College of Music.

His music is regularly performed, recorded and broadcast throughout Europe and the USA and has recently been heard as far afield as Campine Grande, Taipei, Skálholt, Ho Chi Minh City, Hamilton, Kie and Kuwait.

Particularly acclaimed for his choral works, his liturgical pieces are in the repertoires of most of Britain's cathedral and collegiate choirs and he is a frequent collaborator with the leading professional groups of the world.

Jackson's music can be heard on over 70 recordings including five discs devoted exclusively to his work on Delphian Records, Hyperion and Signum Classics.

To the field of stars

Translation of the Latin texts

Intrada

First among apostles, martyr in Jerusalem, James is made holy by his extraordinary martyrdom.

Refrain

When God the Father, universal King, bestowed each apostle authority over an earthly province, James, shining light of virtue was chosen to enlighten Spain.

1. Prayer for travelling

Refrain

Galicía asks for the merciful aid of James, his glory illuminates the earthly road that the crowd may sing songs of praise.

2. Pilgrim's song with history lesson

Lord Saint James, good Saint James, onward and upward, help us O God.

Refrain

The whole of mankind freely gives thanks to James, soldier of piety; through his help he redeems all, answering our prayers.

3. Walking with God

Refrain

By the miracles that James accomplishes in the straits of danger, let whoever hopes to be freed from his bonds cry out to him.

4. Miracles

Refrain

O blessed James, truly our strength, take our enemies from us and protect your people and enable us your devotees to please you.

5. Our journey had advanced

Refrain

With James' favour, let us hope for forgiveness, and give the due praises that we rightly owe to so outstanding a Father. Amen.

6. Campus stellae (The field of stars)

James, your servants' hope and healing, restore to your people the life long yearned for, that we may be found worthy to reach the heavenly citadels among the stars.

7. Compostela (O quam gloriosum)

O how glorious is the kingdom in which all the saints rejoice with Christ. Clad in robes of white they follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

O light and glory of Spain, most holy James, who, pre-eminent among the apostles, was the first to be crowned with the laurels of martyrdom. O singular protector, who deservedly saw our Redeemer when, after his mortal life, he was made divine, grant the prayers of your servants, and intercede for our salvation, and that of all peoples.



Writtle Handbell Ringers

are very pleased to be able to lend some of our newly refurbished bells to Writtle Singers for this concert



Two years ago, Writtle Handbell Ringers embarked on a wonderful project to have their set of 45 handbells professionally refurbished at the Whitechapel Foundry. After a great deal of fundraising and a loan through the Handbell Ringers of Great Britain to fund the final stage, the work was completed this summer – to the tune of some £11K in total – in time for the Ringers' 25th anniversary. Writtle Handbell Ringers are very grateful for all the generous local support they have received and are tremendously busy playing for all sorts of groups and occasions to help raise the final monies. If you would like to engage the group for a function – or would like to get involved in ringing yourself – do call Anne on 01245 421508.

Writtle Singers are thrilled and very grateful to be loaned some of the bells for use in tonight's concert – a rather unusual and special context in which to hear them.

Friends of Writtle Singers

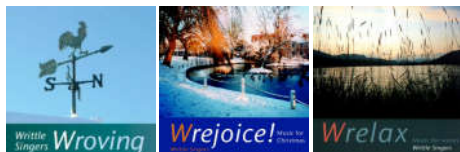
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where concert tickets can also be purchased