

## Jubilation Programme Notes

### Fanfare for the Common Man

Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

The background for what has become one of the most popular short pieces of classical music is somewhat unusual. On 7<sup>th</sup> December 1941, the American naval base at Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese airforce, an event memorably described the next day by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as “a day which will live in infamy”. Mass mobilisation, both military and civilian, began immediately, with all sections of society, including artists of all kinds, wishing to make a contribution.

Eugene Goossens, the chief conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, decided to commission 18 composers to write short, rousing “fanfares for soldiers, or for airmen or sailors” to open each concert of the orchestra’s 1942 season. “It is my idea to make these fanfares stirring and significant contributions to the war effort,” he said, and each fanfare saluted a different aspect of the conflict. Copland wrote that “The challenge was to compose a traditional fanfare, direct and powerful, yet with a contemporary sound”, but it did not come easily and the piece was not delivered until a month after the date of the intended premiere. Copland experimented with several titles including *Fanfare for a Solemn Ceremony* and *Fanfare for Four Freedoms*, but settled on *Fanfare for the Common Man*, a title suggested by a speech made in February 1942 by vice president Henry Wallace which proclaimed that the war would usher in “the century of the Common Man”. This title came as both a surprise and, at first, a puzzle to Goossens, but he was delighted with the music itself and wrote in a deliciously tongue-in-cheek way to Copland, “Its title is as original as its music, and I think it is so telling that it deserves a special occasion for its performance. If it is agreeable to you, we will premiere it 12 March 1943 at income tax time”. Copland replied in kind: “I am all for honoring the common man at income tax time.” When he came to write his Third Symphony between 1944 and 1946, Copland incorporated the Fanfare into the final movement.

Despite the other fanfares being written by such important composers as Walter Piston (*A Fanfare for the Fighting French*), Darius Milhaud (*Fanfare de la Liberté*), Paul Creston (*A Fanfare for Paratroopers*) and Virgil Thomson (*Fanfare for France*), all have fallen into obscurity except tonight’s piece, which has attained a fame and popularity which Copland could never have dreamed of when he wrote it.

Paul Steinson  
Rochester Choral Society

### I was Glad

Hubert Parry (1848-1918)

The first of the pieces by Parry in tonight’s concert was the later of the two to be written. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Parry was at the height of his fame. He had become director of the Royal College of Music in 1895, was knighted in 1898 and became Professor of Music at Oxford in 1900, and so was an obvious choice to write a piece for the coronation of Edward VII in 1902 (Elgar was still a comparatively new voice on the English musical scene). It is, however, interesting that many of Parry’s views were far from Establishment; he wrote “The mission of democracy is to convert the false estimate

of art as an appanage [i.e. a perk] of luxury", and he composed his most famous piece, "Jerusalem", in 1916 for a meeting of a women's group called The Fight for the Right who were agitating for women's right to vote. He later conducted it himself at a Suffragette rally.

*I was Glad* is a setting of Psalm 122 and is sung at the entrance of the monarch into Westminster Abbey. Edward's coronation was the first since Queen Victoria's, almost 65 years before, and, as no-one living had any memory or experience of the ceremony, it is not surprising that it did not go entirely smoothly. Somehow, the message that the king had arrived at the Abbey was given prematurely, so the conductor, Sir Frederick Bridge, started the anthem before the procession had commenced. As a result it had to be sung a second time - the only coronation in British history where there was an encore. That year, Parry was made a baronet for his contribution to the coronation, and *I was Glad* has joined Handel's *Zadok the Priest* as an essential part of the British coronation ceremony.

Paul Steinson  
Rochester Choral Society

### **Mosaique Sonata for Organ Duet**

**David Briggs (1962- )**

David Briggs is one of the most renowned British organists of his generation. He was educated at Solihull School before going on to King's College, Cambridge, where he was organ scholar between 1981 and 1984. He gained his FRCO (Fellow of the Royal College of Organists) at the very young age of 17. During his time at Cambridge, he received the Countess of Munster Award, which allowed him to study in Paris with the great French organist and composer Jean Langlais. He concentrated on interpretation and improvisation with Langlais, improvisation having long been a particular speciality and skill of French organists. This interest led him to study and transcribe, over a period of 11 years, tapes of the improvisations of Pierre Cochereau, a great French organist of the previous generation. David Briggs became the first British organist to win the Tournemire Prize for Improvisation at the St Albans International Organ Festival in 1993. After Cambridge, David Briggs became Organist and Master of Choristers at Truro Cathedral in 1989, before moving to Gloucester Cathedral in 1994. At Gloucester he oversaw a major rebuilding of the cathedral organ, remaining there until 2002, when he became a freelance organist and composer. On 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012, he became Artist in Residence at St James Cathedral, Toronto, where he will play for services and give recitals as well as compose music to be used in the cathedral.

David Briggs has published an impressive number of compositions, mainly of music for organ and choir, and has an equally impressive discography of over 30 CDs, including his own transcription for organ of Mahler's Fifth Symphony.

The piece we are hearing in this evening was commissioned by Gill James in 2007 specifically for tonight's players, Roger Sayers and Charles Andrews. It is a virtuosic and colourful piece which has its roots in the style of the French organist composers whose work has been so central to David Briggs' life.

Paul Steinson / Charles Andrews  
Rochester Choral Society

## **Te Deum**

**William Walton (1902-1983)**

The 1930s had been a golden period for Walton. The Viola Concerto of 1929 had ushered in a series of pieces which were not only masterly but also made headlines and turned Walton into Britain's reigning musical *enfant terrible*. In 1931 came *Belshazzar's Feast*, in 1935, after a long and troubled gestation, the First Symphony, and in 1939 the Violin Concerto (commissioned by the greatest "name" among violinists, Jascha Heifetz). In 1937 came a kind of official recognition when Walton was commissioned to compose a march for the coronation of George VI. The resulting *Crown Imperial's* distinctly Elgarian style came as an unwelcome surprise to those who had thought Britain had finally produced a modernist composer. This decade turned out to be the zenith of Walton's composing career; the 1940s producing very little of any significance. The rising star of Benjamin Britten rubbed salt into the wound, and Walton found it difficult to hide his jealousy and disappointment at Britten's usurpation of his position.

Having provided something for the previous coronation and having been knighted in 1951, Walton was an obvious choice for the coronation of Elisabeth II in 1953 and was commissioned to write another march, *Orb and Sceptre*, and the *Te Deum* which we are hearing tonight. He approached the piece with gusto, writing to a friend, "I've got cracking on the Te Deum. Lots of counter-tenors and little boys Holy-holying, not to mention all the Queen's trumpeters and the side drum." In fact, he had to set aside the composition of his opera *Troilus and Cressida* which had been commissioned by the BBC for performance at Covent Garden in 1954, a piece which confirmed the growing belief that Walton, far from being the *enfant terrible* of the 1930s, had become a distinctly old-fashioned composer. Although the style of the *Te Deum* is considerably more modern than either of his Coronation Marches, by the standards of 1953 it was far from stylistically *avant garde*, though his comment to the Abbey authorities that it was "not at all difficult, no awkward intervals or rhythms and in fact should be fairly plain sailing" distinctly undersells its difficulties (Sir Adrian Boult was quite shocked by its "pagan" sonorities). Walton was often insecure about his own music, but during the composition of the *Te Deum* he wrote to the Abbey organist and director of the coronation music, Sir William McKie, "Though I hesitate to hazard an opinion when I am so near to a work, I think it is going to be rather splendid."

The coronation of Elizabeth II was the first modern coronation in the sense that the arrival of television made it directly accessible to vastly greater numbers of people than ever before. As well as those in the Abbey, millions of people watched the coronation and heard the world premiere of Walton's contribution.

Paul Steinson  
Rochester Choral Society

## **Blest Pair of Sirens**

**Hubert Parry (1848-1918)**

Although in later life many of Parry's beliefs were unconventional, his background could hardly have been less so. His father was a director of the East India Company and he attended Eton, where he was as successful on the sports field as in music. He sat his Oxford Bachelor of Music examination while still at Eton, being the youngest person ever to have done so, and went on to Exeter College, Oxford. However, as we read in many composers' biographies, his parents refused to allow him to study music, and he took his

degree in law and modern history. After Oxford, he joined Lloyd's of London, and was an underwriter there for seven years, though not with any conspicuous success. In 1875 Sir George Grove appointed him assistant editor of his *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, and when Grove became the first director of the new Royal College of Music in 1883, he appointed Parry Professor of Composition and History of Music. Parry had continued to study music with Edward Dannreuther, who introduced him to modern European composers, particularly Wagner, and in 1880 Dannreuther performed Parry's Piano Concerto in F sharp at the Crystal Palace. It was a great success and can be seen as the start of Parry's real fame as a composer. Unfortunately for Parry, the British musical scene being what it was at the time, this resulted in a series of commissions for oratorios and cantatas, a type of music for which Parry had neither taste nor real talent. In 1893, George Bernard Shaw, writing music criticism as Corno di Bassetto for *The World*, described Parry's *Job* as "the most utter failure ever achieved by a thoroughly respectable musician. There is not one bar in it that comes within fifty thousand miles of the tamest line in the poem" (the whole article is a masterpiece of amused scorn, and is well worth the read).

Inspiration did, however, descend in 1887, when Parry was commissioned by the Bach Choir to write the setting of Milton's poem *Blest Pair of Sirens* which we are performing tonight. The lyrical nature of Milton's poem suited Parry; he was not really a dramatic composer, as his oratorios show. His only attempt at opera, *Guinevere* in 1886, was rejected by the Carl Rosa opera company, and, as far as I have been able to discover, has never been performed. The richness of Parry's eight-part choral writing has made *Blest Pair of Sirens* one of very few pieces of 19<sup>th</sup> century British music to have survived in the repertoire, and its sound and style clearly show how much Elgar owed to Parry.

Paul Steinson  
Rochester Choral Society

### **Adagio for Strings**

**Samuel Barber (1910-1981)**

The second American piece in tonight's concert is another of the most popular short pieces of classical music in the repertoire. Indeed, in 2004 listeners to BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme voted it "the saddest classical work ever", and it has been used in countless films and TV programmes when such an emotional response is needed. However, the piece does not seem to have been composed with any personal or specific grief or tragedy in mind, and was originally the second movement of Barber's String Quartet Op.11, a type of composition which is generally considered among the most abstract of musical forms. It was supposedly inspired by a passage in one of the *Georgics* of the Roman poet Virgil, concerning a small stream which grows into a river.

Barber finished the quartet in 1936 and, immediately recognising that this movement had a potential for use beyond this context, arranged it for string orchestra the same year. In 1938, the 27-year-old Barber sent the score to the most famous and respected musician active in America, Arturo Toscanini. To Barber's irritation, Toscanini returned the score without comment, but then sent word through Barber's partner, the composer Gian Carlo Menotti, that he planned to perform the piece and had returned the score simply because he had already memorised it (Toscanini was so short-sighted that he was forced to conduct all his concerts from memory). Toscanini conducted the world premiere on 5 November 1938 with the NBC Symphony Orchestra, the concert being

broadcast throughout the country. The critical reaction was very favourable, especially from the *doyen* of contemporary American critics, Olin Downes, who wrote, “we have here honest music, by an honest musician, not striving for pretentious effect, not behaving as a writer would who, having a clear, short, popular word handy for his purpose, got the dictionary and fished out a long one.” Toscanini’s regard for the work was evidently considerable (he described it as “semplice e bella” - simple and beautiful), as he conducted it on tours to both South America and Europe, and recorded it for the Victor company.

Like many composers who become famous for a single piece, Barber came to feel that he was almost imprisoned by the *Adagio*. Within a decade of its premiere, when asked about it in an interview, he said “I wish you’d hear some new ones. Everyone always plays that.” Despite his ambivalence, the piece soon became the “semi-official music of mourning”, and was played at the funerals of both Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy. Its simple gravity seems to be able to touch the hearts of almost everyone.

Paul Steinson  
Rochester Choral Society

## **Te Deum**

**Patrick Hawes (1958- )**

The text of the ancient hymn, *Te Deum* has been set to music by many great composers, usually as large-scale works for celebrations ranging from military victories to royal weddings. English settings are usually small scale, being written for Mattins in cathedrals and large churches. Settings by English composers including Purcell, Stanford, Howells and Britten are frequently sung at Rochester Cathedral.

Patrick Hawes’ *Te Deum* is a large scale work written for the Lancaster Festival in Ohio where it was first performed with great acclaim in July 2011. Scored for soprano and tenor solo, SATB chorus, strings, brass, percussion, and organ, the style is rooted in the tradition of festive British music. It is tonal, but generously spiced with dissonance – triumphant and exciting, suddenly changing to hushed sustained chords transporting the listener to a mediaeval cathedral, and then moving to lyrical melodies reminiscent of English romantic music or possibly the wide landscapes of Norfolk where the composer has made his home. There is very little contrapuntal writing. Richness of harmony matters more than linear texture. In this Patrick Hawes is a romantic.

The work is in two parts. The first part is a huge hymn of praise based on the words of the Apostles’ Creed with contrasting passages of mysterious chords depicting the song of distant angels in heaven and the ever-present Holy Ghost.

1. The work opens in the bright key of D major with throbbing repeated quavers and scales and sustained chords for the choir, ‘*We praise thee O God*’ giving a sense of triumph that returns again and again throughout the work.
2. ‘*To thee all angels cry aloud.*’ The mood is ethereal with a sustained melody for Soprano solo, accompanied by upper voices and gentle arpeggios, moving into sustained chords and solo violin for the words, ‘*Holy, Holy, Holy: Lord God of Sabaoth.*’

3. The procession of the apostles, prophets, martyrs and the holy Church is depicted with a march gradually building up to a huge climax with, '*The Father of an infinite majesty*', followed immediately by exquisite iridescent chords for, '*.... the Holy Ghost, the comforter.*'
4. The upbeat martial mood returns with an ostinato bass and strong dotted rhythm accompanying the tenor solo, '*Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ.*' then another brief reference to the tranquillity of heaven.
5. '*Thou sittest at the right hand of God in the glory of the Father*' opens with an explosion of sound but more flowing with the time oscillating between 3/2 and 4/4. Then the texture changes to fugato with each part singing, '*We believe that thou shalt come to be our judge,*' in its own time with all the parts ending together in a blaze of sound, swinging between C major and the rich home key on E major.
6. The first part ends by returning to C major for a soprano solo with horn obligato for a prayer '*..... make them to be numbered with thy saints in glory everlasting.*'
- 7-8. The text of second part is a series of prayers for mercy for past sins and a statement of trust in God. It opens with a short petition sung a capella, '*O Lord save thy people .....*' that leads immediately into the brightness of D major and a sense of expectancy for, '*Day by day we magnify thee*', with a brief plunge into the gentler key of Bb for '*Vouchsafe, O Lord to keep us this day without sin,*' before '*Day by day*' returns, building up to a triumphant cadence.
- 9-10. The music changes to a haunting modal melody when the singers hesitantly ask for mercy '*O Lord have mercy upon us .....*' but gains strength as the phrases lengthen and the texture becomes richer. A brass fanfare leads to a long pause, then we return to a shortened version of the very first section but with the choir singing, '*O Lord in thee have I trusted, let me never be confounded.*' A brief unaccompanied passage with whispered, '*O Lord... O Lord*' prepares for the final re-entry of the orchestra in full force with the confident acclamation, '*Let me never be confounded.*'

Margaret Withers  
Rochester Choral Society