

**Programme notes for *Rejoice in the Lamb* (Britten), *Five Bagatelles for Clarinet and Piano* (Finzi), *The Passing of the Year* (Dove), *From the Bavarian Highlands* (Elgar), *Allegro maestoso* from *Organ Sonata No.1 in G* (Elgar), 3 spirituals arr. by William Dawson, 3 songs arr. by Bob Chilcott**

**Rejoice in the Lamb**

**Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)**

*Rejoice in the Lamb* is a comparatively early piece by Britten, having been commissioned by Canon Walter Hussey to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the consecration of St Matthew's Church in Northampton, and first performed in September 1943. Hussey was a great lover of, and believer in, the importance of art in religion. He later became Dean of Chichester Cathedral and was instrumental in the commissioning of music by Leonard Bernstein (*The Chichester Psalms*, which RCS performed in 2007) and Gerald Finzi, as well as poetry by W.H. Auden and paintings and sculpture by Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland, John Piper and Norman Nicholson. Britten had only returned from America in April 1942, so Hussey's commission of someone who had initially fled the war, returned as conscientious objector and was homosexual was a brave one.

Britten's choice of text was most unusual. Christopher Smart was born in 1722 in Shipbourne, a village between Sevenoaks and Tonbridge, and attended Maidstone Grammar School as a boy. He became a prolific writer, but succumbed to mental illness in his 30s and spent a considerable time in various asylums. His marriage and career collapsed and he was imprisoned for debt, dying in prison in 1771 aged only 49. He wrote a considerable amount of poetry during his time in asylums, including *Jubilate Agno* from which the text of tonight's "Festival Cantata" is taken. The poem was not published until 1939, when it caught the interest of W.H. Auden, who brought it to Britten's attention. Hussey approved of the choice of text, writing that it showed "the worship of God by all created beings and things, each in its own way".

The work consists of ten short sections. Britten sets the opening section very quietly rather than the noisy proclamation which might seem the obvious way to set these words. This is followed by a jubilant section where various characters from the Old Testament, each with an attendant animal, are summoned to join in the praise of God. Britten then confounds expectations again by setting the Hallelujah in a "gently moving", largely quiet way. The next section is the most touching, as Smart considers how his cat Jeoffry is the perfect example of a creature who praises God simply by being true to its nature. Britten's use of the treble voice for this deeply perceptive naïvety is perfect. The following section about the mouse continues this idea, and in the next Smart expands the idea from fauna to flora, memorably describing flowers as "the poetry of Christ". In the seventh section Smart refers to his own tribulations, but even these may be used as a means of praising God. A short section of alphabetical symbolism leads to an exuberantly joyous account of how the instruments of music praise God, coming to a climax with the trumpets, but then subsiding to stillness as the Smart considers the time when "malignity ceases". The piece ends with a reprise of the quiet, gently moving Hallelujah.

Paul Steinson  
Rochester Choral Society  
November 2013

## **Five Bagatelles for Clarinet and Piano**

**Gerald Finzi (1901–1956)**

Gerald Finzi was one of the quintessentially English composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of his compositions being songs and choral works. His greatest inspiration came from his love of English poetry, writing nine song cycles, six being settings of poems by Thomas Hardy, music for Shakespeare's plays and a profound setting of *Dies Natalis* by the 17<sup>th</sup> century mystical poet, Thomas Traherne.

Finzi's surviving instrumental works are few, even though he worked on several concertos. His *Clarinet Concerto* is possibly his most famous instrumental work with its sustained lyrical melodies and spontaneous virtuoso writing, supported by imaginative writing for strings.

Finzi's *Five Bagatelles*, a suite of short movements for clarinet and piano, which is being performed this evening, also shows his particular empathy for this solo instrument with its lyrical charm and interaction between the clarinet and piano. It achieved instant popularity after its publication in 1945 and remains a central work in the clarinet repertoire for players of all ages. The first movement, *Prelude (Allegro deciso)*, starts with an animated theme, giving way to a slower, wistful, central section before returning to the original theme. The *Romance (Andante tranquillo)* which follows is a lyrical melody with predominant triplet motifs. A simple setting of a poem by Ivor Gurney that Finzi wrote for the daughter of Herbert Howells was the basis for the *Carol (Andantino semplice)*. The *Forlana (Allegretto grazioso)* is a gentle, lilting dance, not entirely in the character of the traditional dance with the same name. The suite ends with a spirited finale *Fughetta (Allegro vivace)* which showcases the full range of the instrument as well as the skill of the player.

Margaret Withers / Catriona Marshall  
Rochester Choral Society  
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## **Three Songs from *The Passing of the Year***

**Jonathan Dove (b. 1959)**

3 - *Answer July*  
5 - *Ah, Sun-flower*  
7 - *Ring out, wild bells*

Song cycles are usually associated with German romantic composers, especially Schubert and Schumann, but there are examples from most cultures including several English collections dating from the early twentieth century to the present day.

Three of the composers whose works we are performing this evening composed song cycles: Benjamin Britten wrote several cycles, including *Les Illuminations*, and *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings*. Gerald Finzi's many song-cycles include his settings of poems by Thomas Hardy, and we are performing extracts from Jonathan Dove's millennium song cycle, *The Passing of the Year* this evening.

Jonathan Dove is best known as a composer of operas and choral music. He has written over a dozen operas, four large-scale community operas and a church opera, *Tobias*

*and the Angel*. His choral music includes several anthems and carols, among them his song cycle, *The Far Theatricals of Day*, for soloists, choir, brass quintet and organ which is a setting of verses by Emily Dickinson, many of which remained unknown until after her death.

*The Passing of the Year* was commissioned by the London Symphony Chorus. It takes the listener through the seasons of the year, opening with new life in the first shoots of spring and closing with the wild cacophony of bells on New Year's Eve.

Rochester Choral Society performed *The Passing of the Year* in March 2010 and is singing three of the seven songs:

*Answer July* reminds us of the beginning of summer, the excitement of everything bursting into life as questions and answers are tossed between the two choirs and then resolve with summer's brilliant arrival.

*Ah, Sunflower!* passes from summer into autumn. It opens with gentle rocking chords leading to a falling phrase passing from part to part, '*Ah Sunflower! Weary of time,*' giving a feeling of humidity and heaviness, which eventually comes together in a unison melody with ethereal chords in the upper parts as the music looks back at youth and towards death.

The cycle ends in winter with *Ring out, wild bells* - a passage from Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and the clash of celebratory bells at different speeds as the New Year arrives and the world looks forward to the birth of another spring.

Margaret Withers  
Rochester Choral Society  
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## **From the Bavarian Highlands, Op. 27**

## **Edward Elgar (1857–1934)**

<i>The Dance</i>	Sonnenbichl
<i>False Love</i>	Wamberg
<i>Lullaby</i>	In Hammersbach
<i>Aspiration</i>	Bei Sanct Anton
<i>On the Alm - True Love</i>	Hoch Alp
<i>The Marksman</i>	Bei Murnau

Elgar married Alice Roberts in 1889 and from 1892 onward they regularly took holidays in the Bavarian highlands. They became particularly fond of the small town of Garmisch (where, not long after, Richard Strauss built a holiday villa which he used as a refuge for the rest of his life, dying there in 1949). For four years from 1893 they stayed at the Villa Bader, which was owned by an English couple, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Slingsby Bethel. In 1894, Alice (whose pretensions as a poet unfortunately far exceeded her actual ability) wrote a series of poems describing activities which they had particularly enjoyed and the places where each took place. Alice freely adapted examples of Bavarian folk poetry which she had translated, adding her own slants and interests to the originals. Elgar, as a dutiful husband, set these poems to music in 1895 and dedicated them to the Slingsby Bethels. He composed them for chorus and piano, as we will perform them tonight, and

they were first performed in Worcester in 1896. However in 1897 Elgar orchestrated them for a performance at the Crystal Palace, and later that year he turned three of them ("The Dance", "Lullaby" and "The Marksman") into purely orchestral pieces which were published as *Three Bavarian Dances* in 1907.

The subtitles of the songs do not reflect the subjects of the poems, but are simply places which the Elgars had particularly enjoyed. Alice Elgar concocted scenarios which seemed appropriate to these settings. The first song, *The Dance*, was inspired by a wooden Gasthaus at Sonnenbichl which Elgar particularly liked and where he witnessed Bavarian "Schuhplatt" folk dancing. The second song, *False Love*, is set in the village of Wamberg, near Garmisch, though there is no evidence that either of the Elgars encountered any "false love" situations there! Hammersbach is another village close to Garmisch whose beauty and peace inspired the lovely *Lullaby*. St Anton is a place of pilgrimage which the Elgars visited several times and which clearly suggested the hymn-like *Aspiration*. The Hoch Alpen are the high pastures where the cattle graze in summer and in *On the Alm - True Love* the poet imagines a love-lorn young man seeking his "maiden dear" as she tends her cows. The final song, *The Marksman*, was inspired by a local shooting competition at the Staffelsee, a lake near Murnau.

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### **Allegro maestoso from Organ Sonata No.1 in G, Op.28      Edward Elgar**

Elgar's first organ sonata (which is really his only true organ sonata, the second being an arrangement by another hand of his *Severn Suite*, originally written for brass band) is exactly contemporary with *From the Bavarian Highlands*. It was written at the request of Hugh Blair, the organist of the cathedral of Elgar's hometown, Worcester, in 1895. The cathedral was hosting a convention of a hundred American organists, and Blair asked Elgar to write him something that would show off both the cathedral organ and Blair's own talents. Elgar obliged by writing a massive sonata lasting almost half an hour and of tremendous technical difficulty. It was so difficult, in fact, that Novello originally refused to publish it, believable that no-one would buy a piece so impossible to play. Unfortunately, although Elgar had started writing the piece in early April, it was not finished until July 3<sup>rd</sup> – five days before the premiere. One cannot but feel tremendously sorry for poor Hugh Blair, who had to attempt to master it from scratch in five days. When, unsurprisingly, the first performance was a disaster, a rumour circulated that this was because Blair was drunk (which is probably untrue), and he was forced to resign as cathedral organist within months.

The sonata is symphonic in both form and ambition, the first movement being an allegro in sonata form of the type typical of 19<sup>th</sup> century German symphonies.

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## Three Spirituals

arr. William Dawson (1899–1990)

*Soon ah will be done*  
*Every time I feel the spirit*  
*King Jesus is a-listening*

The Spiritual evolved among the black slave population of the deep south of the USA during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. When slaves were first introduced into the North American continent in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, efforts were made to obliterate the memories and traditions which had brought with them from Africa. They were forbidden to speak their own languages and forcibly converted to Christianity. Within a couple of generations, their original languages and religions had become almost completely forgotten, hence the language and theology of the spirituals and their similarities in musical style to European hymns, but enough was left of the African heritage to give them a distinctly individual feel. Although spirituals probably first began to appear in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the first printings were not until the 1860s, so we have little detailed knowledge of their development.

Tonight's spirituals are in arrangements by one of the most important contributors to the genre, William Levi Dawson. He was born in Anniston, Alabama in 1899 and studied music in Chicago, gaining degrees in theory and composition. He returned to Alabama and set up the School of Music at the Tuskegee Institute, a private black university which was one of the earliest and most prestigious of such institutions, eventually teaching there for 25 years. As well as many arrangements of spirituals, he also wrote *A Negro Folk Symphony* in 1934, which was given its premiere by the Philadelphia Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski. He died in Alabama in 1990.

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## Three Songs

arr. Bob Chilcott (b. 1955)

*The Skye Boat Song*  
*Danny Boy*  
*The Lily and the Rose*

Bob Chilcott was born in Plymouth and entered musical life at an early age. He sang in the choir of King's College Cambridge as a boy treble (and was the soloist in the world famous recording of the Fauré *Requiem* made in 1967 under Sir David Wilcocks) and as a tenor after his voice broke. In 1985 he joined the King's Singers, performing with them for 12 years. He left them to concentrate on composing in 1997, becoming one of the most prolific and best-loved choral composers of the present day. His compositions have enjoyed a wide popularity, particularly in this country and the USA, where he has a longstanding association with the New Orleans Crescent City Festival.

The melody of *Danny Boy* was first published in 1855, having been given to George Petrie, the editor of *The Ancient Music of Ireland*, by a collector of Irish folk tunes named Jane Ross who lived in the county of Londonderry, hence the name the tune was given.

More recent research has traced a transcription of this tune to 1792. The tune has been given many sets of words since its first publication (until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was best known as “Would God I were a tender apple blossom”), but in 1910 Fred Weatherly, one of the most prolific writers of song lyrics of the period, wrote the words of *Danny Boy* (originally for another tune) and it was published with them in 1913. This became the standard text, and the song has become world famous, especially among Irishmen living abroad. This arrangement and that of *The Skye Boat Song* were two of three Bob Chilcott made for inclusion in Sir Henry Wood’s *Fantasia on British Sea Songs* for the Last Night of the Proms in 2005 (the other being the Welsh song *Ar Hyd y Nos*).

*The Lily and the Rose* is a highly enigmatic fragment of medieval verse. It seems to tell of a protected, noble young woman who was happy enough with her lot in life until she became aware of the bailey (the bailiff or steward of the estate). He “beareth the bell away” which means he won the prize – which would seem to be her heart. The details (gold and silver, folded robes) seem to imply a trousseau; perhaps she is to marry someone, but her feelings for the bailey leave her confused about what she should do. “How should I love?” seems to imply a reluctance to marry the other man. Is the preference for the rose (a symbol of love) to the lily (symbol of purity) – “the rose I lay” – an indication of her wish for a true love match rather than the purely dynastic union that would be expected of a noble girl at this period? Nothing is certain; our imaginations are left free to ponder this exquisite puzzle.

*The Skye Boat Song* is an arrangement of a traditional song. The melody was collected in the 1870s by Anne Campbelle MacLeod, and lyrics were written by Sir Harold Boulton in 1888. These he based around the story of the escape of Bonnie Prince Charlie after the Battle of Culloden in 1746. The prince avoided capture by English soldiers with the help of Flora MacDonald, who took him, disguised as her maid, in her small boat from the mainland to Skye. As with *Danny Boy*, the tune had no connection whatever to this escapade until Boulton wrote his lyrics, and, indeed, its gentle, barcarolle feel seems singularly unsuited to this tense story of flight from probable execution.

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