



Thursday 8th July, 2021

Precious Things - Choral Works by Bernard Hughes

The Epiphoni Consort

Director: Tim Reader

Programme - descriptions by the composer

Jubilate Deo

Most of the text is Latin, from the Vulgate Psalm 100, but interspersed with lines by Gerard Manley Hopkins, especially the fragment 'Repeat that, repeat', echoing the call to sing joyfully from the Psalm, but in a birdsong-like form.

Perhaps -

Based on a 1916 text by Vera Brittain, a young woman bereaved during the Great War. Tragic but with a vein of hope; understated and folksong-like.

The Singers

Rhythmical, melodic, everyone moving together in a narrative. This sets a poem by Henry Wordsworth Longfellow - a fanciful imagining about how music was first given to mankind in ancient times.

A Ternary of Littles

BBC commission for six-part choir or six solo voices. Musically each movement is quite monolithic and only has one textural concern: the first movement is all about imitative polyphony, the second movement all about melody dominated homophony and the last movement is almost entirely loud and based on block chords.

1.) 'I saw a peacock with a fiery tail'

2.) 'A Ternary of Littles Upon a Pipkin of Jelly Sent to a Lady'

3.) 'A New Song'

Seek the peace of the city

Commissioned for the London Festival of Contemporary Church Music in 2019, and premiered at Evensong at St Pancras Church, Euston. The text, from the Book of Jeremiah, was chosen by Anne Stevens, the vicar of St Pancras, who is also the dedicatee of the piece. Meditative and simple, with shifting soundscapes of key and colour, like shafts of light.



I Sing of Love

Based on three texts from different religious traditions, united by the theme of love: an Old Testament text from the Hebrew poetry of Song of Solomon, a devotional poem by the 13th century Islamic mystic Rumi, and Christian verses by St Paul from the New Testament. These three passages are separated by meditative sections using simply the words 'I sing of love' repeated as a kind of mantra, which is how the piece starts, the voices introduced one at a time in overlapping phrases.

Words to describe the music would be: sincere, rich, textured, and melodic.

Psalm 56

This piece uses a peculiar and little-set psalm, from which all the direct references to God have been removed by the composer, leaving a slightly confrontational and aggressive text, which dissolves into piety only in the last few bars. The text is mainly in English, from the King James Version, with two lines from the corresponding Latin Vulgate translation of the psalm.

If we shadows have offended

A short setting of Shakespeare, from the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act 5 Scene 1, where Puck speaks directly to the audience. It is humble and understated, a quiet coda.

Precious Things, Nos. 1 and 3

This is in three movements, with texts by contemporary poets on elements regarded as precious but which are also finite resources; gold, helium and crude oil. The music is bold, colourful, dramatic, strange, driving, and rhythmical. *All the gold in the world* deals with gold as a weapon of power and influence. *Helium* focuses on the gas as a natural resource which is being wasted: helium is finite on earth and every time a helium balloon leaves the atmosphere we lose something precious. The outer sections of the piece have the free floating quality of helium, the middle is a canonic, machine-like chant that emphasises the industrial uses of helium at risk from its wastage. Lastly *Crude* takes a satirical look at oil as the ultimate precious thing of modern life which we continue to mine and use at the expense of the natural world. The music combines insistent refrains in the lower voices with soaring melodies in the upper parts.

We are only performing movements one and three this evening.

1. *All the gold in the world*

3. *Crude*



Jubilate Domino

Jubilate Domino omnis terra
Servite Domino in laetitia ingredimini coram eo
in laude
Ingrédimini portas eius in gratiarum actione
atria eius in laude confitemini ei benedicite
nomini eius

Psalm 100 (Vulgate)

Repeat that, repeat,
Cuckoo, bird, and open ear wells,
heart-springs, delightfully sweet,
With a ballad, with a ballad, a rebound
Off trundled timber and scoops of the hillside
ground:
The whole landscape flushes on a sudden at a
sound.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Perhaps -

Perhaps some day the sun will shine again,
And I shall see that still the skies are blue,
And feel once more I do not live in vain,
Although bereft of you.

Perhaps the golden meadows at my feet
Will make the sunny hours of Spring seem gay.
And I shall find the white May blossoms sweet,
Though you have passed away.

Perhaps the summer woods will shimmer
bright,
And crimson roses once again be fair,
And autumn harvest fields a rich delight,
Although you are not there.

Perhaps someday I shall not shrink in pain
To see the passing of the dying year,
And listen to the Christmas songs again,
Although you cannot hear.

But though kind Time may many joys renew,
There is one greatest joy I shall not know
Again, because my heart for loss of you,
Was broken, long ago.

Vera Brittain

The Singers

God sent His singers upon earth,
With song of laughter and of mirth,
That they might touch the hearts of men,
And bring them back to heaven again.

The first, a youth, with soul of fire,
Held in his hand a golden lyre;
Through groves he wandered, and by streams,
Playing the music of our dreams.

The second, with a bearded face,
Stood singing in the market-place,
And stirred with accents deep and loud
The hearts of all the listening crowd.

A gray old man, the third and last,
Sang in cathedrals dim and vast,
While the majestic organ rolled
Contribution from its mouths of gold.

And those who heard the Singers three
Disputed which the best might be;
For still their music seemed to start
Discordant echoes in each heart,

But the great Master said, "I see
No best in kind, but in degree;
I gave a various gift to each,
To charm, to strengthen, and to teach.

"These are the three great chords of might,
And he whose ear is tuned aright
Will hear no discord in the three,
But the most perfect harmony."

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



A Ternary of Littles

1. I saw a Peacock with a fiery tail

I saw a Peacock, with a fiery tail,
I saw a Blazing Comet, drop down hail,
I saw a Cloud, with Ivy circled round,
I saw a sturdy Oak, creep on the ground,
I saw a Pismire, swallow up a Whale,
I saw a raging Sea, brim full of Ale,
I saw a Venice Glass, Sixteen foot deep,
I saw a well, full of mens tears that weep,
I saw their eyes, all in a flame of fire,
I saw a House, as big as the Moon and
higher,
I saw the Sun, even in the midst of night,
I saw the man that saw this wondrous
sight.

Anon 17th c.

2. A Ternary of Littles upon a Pipkin of Jelly sent to a Lady

A little saint best fits a little shrine,
A little prop best fits a little vine:
As my small cruse best fits my little wine.

A little seed best fits a little soil,
A little trade best fits a little toil:
As my small jar best fits my little oil.

A little bin best fits a little bread,
A little garland fits a little head:
As my small stuff best fits my little shed.

A little hearth best fits a little fire,
A little chapel fits a little choir:
As my small bell best fits my little spire.

A little stream best fits a little boat,
A little lead best fits a little float:
As my small pipe best fits my little note.

A little meat best fits a little belly,
As sweetly, lady, give me leave to tell ye,
This little pipkin fits this little jelly.

Robert Herrick

3. A New Song

Sing a new song to the Lord
sing through the skin of your teeth,
sing in the code of your blood,
sing with a throat full of earth,

sing to the quick of your nails,
sing from the knots of your lungs,
sing like a dancer on coals,
sing as a madman in tongues,

sing as if singing made sense,
sing in the caves of your heart,
sing like you want them to dance,
sing through the shades of your past,

sing what you never could say,
sing at the fulcrum of joy
sing without need of reply.

Michael Symmons Roberts

Seek the Peace of the City

“Seek the peace of the city whither I have
caused you to be carried away captives, and
pray unto the Lord for it; for in the peace
thereof ye shall have peace.”

Jeremiah 29:7 (KJV)

I Sing of Love

I sing of love....

My beloved spake and said unto me:
Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away.
For lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone.



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The flowers appear on the earth,
The time of the singing of birds is come
And the voice of the turtle[dove] is heard in our
land.

Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

The fig tree putteth forth her green figs,
And the vines with the tender grape give a good
smell.

Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

Song of Solomon 2:10-13

I sing of love....

Through love bitter things seem sweet.
Through love copper becomes gold.
Through love dregs taste like pure wine.
Through love pain is as a balm.
Through love thorns become the rose.
Through love vinegar becomes sweet wine.
Through love a post becomes a throne.
Through love a reversal seems as good fortune.
Through love a prison becomes a rose garden.
Through love a grate full of ashes seems a
garden.
Through love fire turns to light.
Through love the devil becomes an angel.
Through love hard stones become soft as
butter.
Through love wax becomes hard as iron.
Through love grief is as joy.
Through love the follower becomes a leader.
Through love stings are as honey.
Through love a lion is harmless as a mouse.
Through love sickness is health.
Through love a curse becomes a blessing.
Through love the dead man comes alive.
Through love the king becomes a slave.

Jalal-ud-Din Rumi

I sing of love....

Love is patient, love is kind.
It does not envy, does not boast,
It is not proud. It is not rude,
It is not self-seeking,
It is not easily angered,
It keeps no record of wrongs.
Love does not delight in evil
But rejoices with the truth.
It always protects, always trusts,
Always hopes, always perseveres.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Psalm 56

Mine enemies would daily swallow me up:
For they be many that fight against me, O Thou
most High.
Be merciful unto me, O Thou most High.
Every day they wrest my words:
All their thoughts are against me for evil.
Be merciful unto me, O Thou most High.
What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee.
They gather themselves together,
They hide themselves, they mark my steps,
When they wait for my soul.
Quia est salvus
Shall they escape by iniquity?
Be merciful unto me O Thou most High:
For man would swallow me up;
He fighting daily oppresseth me.
(To the chief Musician upon
Jonathelem-rechokim, Michtam of David, when
the Philistines took him in Gath.)
Thou tellest my wanderings,
(*miserere*)
Put Thou my tears into Thy bottle: are they not
in Thy book?
(*miserere mei*)
For Thou hast delivered my soul from death:
wilt Thou not deliver my feet from falling?
Miserere mei quoniam conculcavit me homo
Tota die pugnans tribulavit me
Miserere mei.

Psalm 56 (KJV/Vulgate)



If we shadows have offended

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this and all is mended,
That you have but slumbered here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend:
If you pardon, we will mend:
And, as I am an honest Puck,
If we have unearned luck
Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue,
We will make amends ere long;
Else the Puck a liar call;
So, good night unto you all.
Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends.

William Shakespeare

(A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 5 Scene 1)

Precious Things

1. All the gold in the world

Gold! All the gold in the world,
gold, all the gold, all the gold in the world.

Gather all the gold in the world -
square it all into place, each face
so bright, so light, so soft, so cold.
It means no vote, no choice, no race.

Gold! All the gold in the world,
gold, all the gold, all the gold in the world.

How bright, how light, how soft, how warm.
Name it, call it the president.
It means no harm, it means no harm,
no harm to you or your children.

How kind it is, in fire refined
how good our gold, our world, our kind.

Antony Dunn

3. Crude

We soared over a sign.
It said 'no turning back'.
Our feathers grew heavy.
Our beaks all turned black.
Beneath us, the skin
Of the planet is cracked.
This earth is exhausted.
We still want to frack.

Dark and heavy and under the soil,
Starting to bubble, ready to boil,
Sweet as candy covered in foil,
Waters are troubled - we have found oil.

The grass in those gardens
Used to be lush
The leather in our private
Planes is still plush.
Tell us how little time's left,
We will blush
Show us the burning black fountain,
We'll gush.

Andrew George

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