



The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music

Saturday 22 May 2021, 7.30pm
St Pancras Parish Church

“Standing as I do before God”: Cecilia McDowall at 70

The LFCCM Festival Singers
Antonia Kesel *violin*
Tim Lowe *cello*
Peter Foggitt *piano and organ*
Christopher Batchelor *direction*

pre-concert talk at 7pm by Cecilia McDowall

Programme

Music of Cecilia McDowall

Three Latin Motets

- i. Ave Regina
- ii. Ave Maria
- iii. Regina Caeli

Cavatina at Midnight

Night Flight

Standing as I do before God

Colour of Blossoms

Everyday Wonders: The Girl from Aleppo

- i. Orphans of the World
- ii. Thousands milling at the border (The Journey)
- iii. I had never seen the sea before
- iv. A lost tribe pushed from border to border
- v. Everyday Wonders

Notes

Three Latin Motets SSATB

Ave Regina is a gentle and lyrical setting of the text "Hail, Queen of Heaven". The calm and memorable opening phrase is hinted at in passages of more intensity, and its partial statement at the end leaves it lingering after the voices have faded away.

Ave Maria is the second and most intimate of the motets. Scored for upper voices, this gentle supplication to the Virgin Mary is built on a plainchant opening, and contains expressive dissonances and suspensions in a setting of great purity and directness.

Regina Caeli, a hymn to the "Queen of Heaven", is a glorious work, replete with dramatic changes of mood and texture. The majestic chords of the opening bars quickly give way to a spirited section in which unison altos and basses mimic the insistent flourishes of the sopranos and tenors. This pattern of contrasts is repeated throughout the piece before the final jubilant chords fade away to a modest triple piano. It was first performed by the City of Canterbury Chamber Choir, conducted by George Vass.

Programme note © 2021 by Paul Conway

Cavatina at Midnight *Violin, cello and piano*

Cavatina at Midnight encloses, at its centre, a reference to the opening of the sublime *Cavatina*, the fifth movement from Beethoven's String Quartet in Bb Major, Op 130. Shapes and shades of the long lyrical line are hinted at throughout the work. *Cavatina at Midnight* also brings together songs of another kind, two allusions to the nightingale; one drawn from the poem by John Keats, who wrote *Ode to a Nightingale* one springtime under a plum tree in a Hampstead garden and the other from the first ever birdsong recording in 1924, in which the cellist, Beatrice Harrison, played well-known songs in nocturnal duet with a nightingale in her garden. In the trio the violin takes an agile role, suggestive of birdsong, often with arpeggio motifs, supported by the lyricism of the cello. As I was writing the piece a blackbird sang at my window, not its beautiful, mellifluous evensong but an insistent F sharp which somehow found its way into *Cavatina at Midnight*.

Cavatina at Midnight was commissioned by the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust. This has been recorded by Trio Derazey (including Antonia Kesel, this evening's violinist) on the Deux Elles label.

Programme note © 2021 by Cecilia McDowall

Night Flight *SSATB and cello solo*

Night Flight marked the centenary of the first woman to fly across the Channel, the American aviatrix Harriet Quimby, who flew the Louis Blériot route in reverse from Dover to Calais in 1912. Written for a cappella consort and cello solo these three songs are settings of beautiful poems by British poet Sheila Bryer.

Each song has something about the night or flight about it. In *New Moon*, which gives a sense of flying high over the sea in the light of the silver moon, the repeated phrase to the words "You can be thrown off balance" brings a forward moving urgency to it. In the concluding section, "Spreading silken nets across a sullen sea", the movement slows and the night flyer slips "out of dream ... Plunging earthwards". In each of the three movements much of the solo cello writing is high, using the range of the instrument which is most sonorous and eloquent and at times ethereal.

In *Crow, landing* the choral writing, now homophonic, is angular, jagged, rather like the movement of a bird. In this song, full of tension and resolution, the crow battles against the elements in its struggle to make a landing at the sea's edge, "a blown rag, He angles steeply, legs extended, braced". In the final bars the cello solo slides downwards on to "the tidal runway".

Before Dawn concludes *Night Flight* with an evocation of a fragrant summer's night in the hour before dawn when "the garden, stripped of light and shade, is utterly itself: a place of solid stillness". The pace is now much slower, expansive, and the phrase in the upper voices repeats itself. In contemplating the stars there is a broadening of the phrase with the concluding words, "my hands outstretched, reaching for their vast medieval heaven".

Night Flight was commissioned by the Musique Cordiale Festival in 2012 and generously funded by Richard and Sue Street.

Programme note © 2021 by Cecilia McDowall

New Moon

*You can be thrown off balance here
Amongst the wintry seaweed, rock and sand*

*As if the mind, like some young gull
Left teetering on an icy ledge, dared not look down.*

*Last night a new moon's gleaming keyhole,
Barest sliver of a nail, drew me through*

*And hung me high above the huddled town.
Such soaring freedom there – to fly from star*

*To lightship to an island's throbbing beam,
Trailing silver tightropes on the glittering air -*

*Or tumble headlong through a night cloud, rise
Unseen by all save one who holds the threads,*

*Spreading silken nets across a sullen sea.
They catch us as we waken*

*Plunging earthwards
Out of dream.*

Crow, landing

*Sudden wing-lift, unexpected updraft
And beneath, brushed smooth, the tidal runway
Shelving down to where a white surf melts
The margins, coughing softly to itself.
This tidal stretch and pull becomes a cleansing
Of old weariness, of tangled thought
And malcontent left snagged on grasses
Like the detritus from long forgotten picnics.
Day, swept blue and gold as benediction
Is an invitation to forget ourselves,
Become abandoned, out of place;
To take a chance below the waterline.
Ungainly hoverer, a blown rag,
He angles steeply, legs extended, braced.*

Before Dawn

*One hour before dawn,
the garden, stripped of light and shade,
is utterly itself:*

*a place of solid stillness
filled with Earth's heart murmurings
and heavy scents.*

*After the languor of a wearying heat
we easily forget how wet her dew can be,
stepping out so carelessly*

*barefoot over moonlit grass
with eyes on stars
moulding into prisms.*

*I might have been an early suppliant
hurrying to greet the day
wrapt in summer morning,*

*my foot fall as an anchor,
my hands outstretched,
reaching for their vast medieval heaven.*

© Sheila Bryer

Standing as I do before God SSATB and soprano solo

In November 1914, after the German occupation of Brussels, nurse Edith Cavell began sheltering wounded soldiers, helping these Allies to escape into neutral Holland and beyond. In 1915, she was arrested for treason and after much diplomatic representation she was executed in the small hours of October 12. Her last words were recorded by the Anglican chaplain, the Reverend Gahan.

The poet Seán Street has taken Cavell's words and fashioned a poetical reflection around them. This inspired me to create something both contemplative and intense to mark the life and work of this remarkable, selfless woman in some way. *Standing as I do before God* was written specifically for the Oxford-based choir Sospiri, and was recorded on the Convivium Records label release *A Multitude of Voices: WW1 Centenary in Choral Song*.

Edith Cavell's death encouraged many more young men to enlist and may have influenced American public opinion to support the United States entering the war. A statue of Edith Cavell stands near Trafalgar Square in London with the words "Patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone" engraved beneath.

Programme note © 2021 by Cecilia McDowall

"Standing as I do before God": A reflection on the execution of Edith Cavell, 12 October 1915

*"I have seen death so often that it is not strange or fearful to me.
Standing as I do in view of God and eternity,
I realize patriotism is not enough.
I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone." ***

*And when the time was close,
for once her eyes filled, (with tears)
then she quietly rose,
walked silently through the stilled
prison, the grey dawn light,
passed gas flame, tired flowers,
out beyond her final night,
a flame alight in hours
before infinity,*

*in the presence of death
leaving all enmity:
we are air after breath.**

* © Seán Street, 2013

** Edith Cavell, 1915

Colour of Blossoms *Violin, cello and piano*

Colour of Blossoms was inspired by a 13th century Japanese story, *The Tale of the Heike Family*; the book centres on the emptiness of war, a recurring theme in Japanese literature. *Colour of Blossoms* draws on the delicate imagery from the famous opening passage: "The bell of the Gion monastery echoes slowly, warning that all is vanity. The colour of blossoms symbolizes the truth, that the prosperous will inevitably decline and that the proud will fall in no time like a dream on a spring night. The valiant must perish too, as frail as dust blown by a puff of wind."

For many Japanese people these temple gongs are associated with peace, and they differ considerably from Chinese gongs or European church bells. They are huge, sometimes weighing as much as thirty tons, and are often hung in high places so that the reverberation can be heard across the valley.

Colour of Blossoms is punctuated throughout by the low, deep sonorities of the piano; the violin and cello etch delicate, lyrical lines against this darker resonance, opening into a fast, impassioned central section and then fold back into melodic meditation.

Colour of Blossoms was commissioned and part funded by the English Piano Trio; the commission was also financially supported by the RVW Trust. It was premiered by the English Piano Trio in 2009.

Programme note © 2021 by Cecilia McDowall

Everyday Wonders: The Girl from Aleppo *SATB, violin solo and piano*

Wherever one looks, innocent children are caught up in conflict. During these last years alone, thousands of child refugees have trekked from Syria to Turkey and on into Europe in search of asylum. One of these children was Nujeen Mustafa, a Kurdish teenager with cerebral palsy. She was pushed in her wheelchair by her elder sister, Nasrine, from Aleppo to Germany.

Unsurprisingly her journey was the subject of much publicity. She met the journalist, author and foreign correspondent Christina Lamb, and together Nujeen and Christina have written a memoir of this time called "The Girl from Aleppo". Kevin Crossley-Holland, author and poet, met them both when they were all involved with the Dubai Literary Festival and, with Nujeen and Christina's permission, Kevin explored this rich and perilous adventure in order to create a libretto for a work focusing on Children in Conflict.

Throughout many months Nujeen remained stunningly brave, blithe, and articulate, never missing an opportunity to speak the language she had learned in a fourth-floor flat in Aleppo by watching American quiz shows, soaps, and cookery programmes. In this cantata Nujeen's story unfolds in the musical narrative: chorales, haunting vocal solos, intense solo violin playing, restless choruses, and body percussion all drive a course from country to country to arrive, thankfully, in Germany. It is a journey of hope and extraordinary fortitude against all the odds.

Programme note © 2018 by Cecilia McDowall and Kevin Crossley-Holland

Orphans of the World

Chorale *This wreath of words is what we have,
And flowers of song all we can give.
Singing sorrow but singing tomorrow.
Singing the song of life itself.*

*Nujeen. Nujeen.
New life. That's me!
But I can't walk, can't balance.
My two legs have lives of their own.
Plaster, braces, operations.
I'm stuck forever on tiptoes.
I often dream about being an astronaut.
Floating in space, your legs don't matter.*

*The scent of rosewater, hookah pipes,
Pistachios. That's how Aleppo used to be.
Dust, rubble. Every window broken.
Aleppo, Aleppo... like a ghost town.*

*We Kurds: orphans of the world.
My mother, father, my siblings.
All ten of us in three rooms.
TV was my school, TV was my friend. I learned
Soap-opera English by watching TV.
Shelling, looting, hammering, bombing.
We knew we had to leave.
Just me, my sister Nasrine, and my wheelchair.
Sometimes sisters can be as sweet as birds.*

Chorale *Remember me? Remember.
I'm not a baby, not a girl, not a boy.
I'm just a number, an obstacle.
I'm on the wrong side.
Remember. Remember me?*

Thousands milling at the border (The Journey)

*Thousands milling at the border. Suitcases.
Bundles. Refugees nothing!
We sold heirlooms. Family homes.
One man said he sold his kidney.
We raised money to buy life jackets,
A place on a dinghy, freedom.*

I'd never seen the sea before

*I'd never seen the sea before,
The mist, the spray. How beautiful it is!
Our phones we tied inside party balloons
To keep them dry on the crossing.
Of course I can't swim. I've never been in water.
None of us could swim. I became Poseidon.
That dove pebble a little Afghan boy
Gave me: I held it for luck between my awkward fingers.*

A lost tribe pushed from border to border

*A lost tribe pushed from border to border.
Stampeding for a bus, swarming across fields.
In the camps children drew pictures
With coloured pencils: a flower bright as blood.
The guards lobbed food at us – lawyers, doctors,
Professors, businessmen. We aren't animals.
The jerking, the jolting, the pain, the pain.
And Nasrine always pushing, pushing.
Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary,
Croatia, Slovenia, Austria...
"Please, Germany? Where is Germany?"
The policeman smiled.
"Wilkommen! Welcome to Germany!"*

Everyday Wonders

My head, my heart. Skipping and singing.

*What delights me are everyday wonders:
People talking to me because I'm smiling.*

My head, my heart. Skipping and singing.

*Happy frogs croaking, summer rain falling,
Even the ducks seemed to welcome me.
A chance to brush my teeth in the morning.
Everything on time, all the strict rules,
Waking early, my first ever morning at school,
My pink-and-blue rucksack, red subject folders.*

Sometimes in my dreams I make friends...

*The animals at the zoo, some are as weird
As I am. A smiling refugee. Am I an alien?
Laugh as long as you breathe. Love as long as you live.
These are my favourite sayings.*

My head, my heart. Skipping and singing.

Nujeen. Nujeen. New life. That's me.

Chorale *This wreath of words is our choice.
These flowers of song, they are our voice.
Singing sorrow, singing tomorrow, singing tomorrow.
Singing the song of life itself.*

© 2018 by Kevin Crossley-Holland and Nujeen Mustafa

Biographies

Cecilia McDowall

Born in London, 1951, Cecilia McDowall has won many awards, been short-listed eight times for the British Composer Awards and in 2014 won the Choral category of the British Composer Awards for her haunting work *Night Flight*, which celebrates the pioneering flight of the American aviatrix Harriet Quimby across the English Channel. McDowall's distinctive style speaks directly to listeners, instrumentalists and singers alike. Her most characteristic works fuse fluent melodic lines with occasional dissonant harmonies and rhythmic exuberance. Her music has been commissioned and performed by leading choirs, including The BBC Singers, The Sixteen, Oxford and Cambridge choirs, Kansas City Chorale, ensembles, and at festivals worldwide.

Recent commissions include *When time is broke* (Three Shakespeare Songs) for The BBC Singers and *Adoro te devote* for Westminster Cathedral Choir. The *Three Latin Motets* have been recorded by the renowned American choir Phoenix Chorale, conductor Charles Bruffy; their Chandos recording *Spotless Rose* won a Grammy award and was nominated for Best Classical Album. The National Children's Choir of Great Britain commissioned a work focusing on "children in conflict", called *Everyday Wonders: The Girl from Aleppo*, a cantata based on the real-life escape of Nujeen Mustafa and her sister from war-torn Aleppo; it tells of their harrowing journey across some 3,500 miles, through seven countries, eventually arriving in Germany with relief and great gratitude.

In May, 2019, Wimbledon Choral Society and the Philharmonia Orchestra premiered McDowall's large-scale choral work *The Da Vinci Requiem* to coincide with the 500th anniversary of Leonardo's death. The work received its first performance on 7 May in the Royal Festival Hall, London. McDowall's works are regularly broadcast on BBC Radio and readily available on CD.

In 2013 McDowall received an Honorary Doctorate from Portsmouth University and in 2017 was selected for an Honorary Fellow award by the Royal School of Church Music. In 2019 she was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from West London University. In 2021 Naxos released a CD of her entire organ catalogue, performed by sub-organist of St Paul's cathedral William Fox, and The Choir of Trinity

College, Cambridge, released a CD of her choral music on the Hyperion label in April. In 2020 McDowall was presented with the prestigious Ivor Novello Award for “outstanding music collection” for a “consistently excellent body of work” from The Ivors Academy (formerly the British Composers’ Academy).

The LFCCM Festival Singers

Soprano Emily Wenman Felicity Hayward

Alto Cathy Bell Karl Gietzman

Tenor William Sharma Edward Saklatvala

Bass Christian Goursaud John Evanson

The Festival’s own professional vocal ensemble, The LFCCM Festival Singers, expands and augments the Choir of St Pancras Parish Church with additional singers from London’s world-class choral institutions. Most members of the ensemble have come from a collegiate background and gone on to study as postgraduate students at one of the London conservatoires. This combination of superb sight-reading and world-class vocal training gives the group tremendous flexibility, enabling the performance of a repertory that spans five centuries: ranging from motets from the Eton Choirbook to new commissions by composers such as Roxanna Panufnik, Michael Berkeley, Cecilia McDowall, Howard Skempton, Michael Finnis, Gabriel Jackson, Francis Pott, Sebastian Forbes, Francis Grier, Kerry Andrew, Antony Pitts, and many more.

Christopher Batchelor

Christopher was an organ scholar of Hertford College, Oxford, during which time he was taught by James Dalton. After graduating he moved to Cambridge where, under the supervision of Peter le Huray, he pursued research into 17th century English church music, being awarded both an MPhil and a PhD. During this time he held positions at both Downing and Gonville & Caius Colleges. He moved to London in 1988, succeeding Christopher Bowers-Broadbent as Director of Music and Organist of St Pancras Parish Church. He has taught at a number of institutions, including University College School and the Royal Military School of Music where he was Professor of Orchestration and Arranging. Following the re-establishment of the London College of Music in 2006, Christopher became head of the institution, working with many well-known colleagues and establishing a modern conservatoire. His contributions to education and contemporary church music have recently been acknowledged by the award of an Hon. FLCM. Alongside his performing experience, he has a long-standing practical interest in the organ and was Managing Director of Harrison and Harrison Organ Builders until July 2017; his legacy has been described as “unprecedented”. He continues his association with the organ as an advisor/consultant.

Christopher founded The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music in 2002.

Antonia Kesel

Antonia Kesel graduated from the Royal Academy of Music with a First Class honours degree in 2015. Since then she has won many prizes as a chamber musician, including the St Martin-in-the Fields chamber music competition and the Malta International Music Competition, with her ensemble *Phacelia Ensemble*, a sextet that now regularly performs in both the UK and Germany.

Antonia is a passionate member of the London Mozart Players, playing as co-principal second violin as well as being a member of their education team. She also enjoys working as a freelance violinist in London, playing for commercial recording sessions and for orchestras such as the Academy of St Martin in the Fields and Aurora Orchestra.

Antonia plays on a Francois Fent violin from Paris, circa 1780.

Timothy Lowe

Following his recent Wigmore Hall recital, the playing of Tim Lowe was described as "... compelling in every respect: probing, virtuosic and yielding by turns - a true example of outstanding musicianship" (Musical Opinion).

Tim spends much of his time playing solo and chamber recitals throughout the UK and Europe and has played recitals many times in major London venues including Wigmore Hall, QEH, Cadogan Hall and Purcell Room. He has played most of the major cello concertos in recent seasons.

He is the cellist of the Rossetti Ensemble and he enjoys many other collaborations, for example, in contemporary chamber operas such as In the world premiere of Philip Glass's *The Trial* and in OperaGlass Work's production of Britten's *Turn of the Screw* conducted by John Wilson.

Tim has recorded chamber music CDs for various labels, including recently for Deutsche Grammophon, Naxos, and Champs Hill. In another collaborative project the recording of Walton's *Piano Quartet* for Naxos was highly recommended by Andrew McGregor on BBC Radio 3. Tim has played live on TV and radio in the UK and across Europe including regularly on BBC Radio 3.

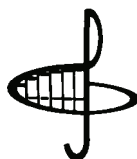
As an orchestral player, Tim is Guest Principal Cello with many major UK orchestras including the English Chamber Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia and the John Wilson Orchestra.

Tim is a Cello Professor at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama where he has a large class and also coaches chamber music. He teaches and coaches regularly on courses and festivals throughout the UK and Europe. He is Artistic Director of York Chamber Music Festival. Tim plays a cello made by Carolus Tononi in Bologna in 1716.

Peter Foggitt

Peter Foggitt is a conductor, composer, pianist, and organist. He made his concerto debut at fourteen, and his Radio 3 broadcast debut at twenty-one (Rachmaninov *Piano Concerto* No. 3). His music is published by Novello, Stainer & Bell, and Shorter House; he has recently completed a PhD in composition at Durham, where he also lectured in conducting and directed the Chapel Choir of St John's College. Peter is Director of Chapel Music at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and teaches on the Music undergraduate course. Recent engagements as a pianist include a programme of Thomas Adès' early songs, Mendelssohn *Variations sérieuses*, and Bach keyboard works; recent performances as a conductor include Elgar *The Dream of Gerontius*, Monteverdi *Vespers*, Handel *Messiah*, Bach *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*, Tchaikovsky *Nutcracker Suite*, and two silent films: *The Snowman* (at the British Museum), and his own choral score for *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (for the Hampstead Arts Festival). Future plans include tours to France, Switzerland, and the US with Emmanuel College Choir, and a recording of Ravenscroft's 1621 *Book of Psalmes*.

RVWTrust



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The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music was founded in 2002
with the aim of showcasing contemporary liturgical music
in both service and concert.

*The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music is an artistic project of
The PCC of The Ecclesiastical Parish of St Pancras, London,
Registered Charity No. 1133802*

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