



The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music

Friday 10 May 2024, 7.30pm
Hampstead Parish Church

“I Am Not Yet Born”: The Prayers of the Innocents

The LFCCM Festival Singers
Joshua Ryan *organ*
Alastair Carey *direction*

Programme

A concert of meditations on prayers for peace in times of conflict, featuring sacred music by Stephen Dodgson in his 100th anniversary year and Ronald Corp's Dhammapada, a selection of Bhuddist scripture verses set to music for choir accompanied by pre-recorded bells and gongs.

Stephen Dodgson
1924 – 2013

I Am Not Yet Born *from* The Innocents (1975)

Kyrie Eleison *and* Gloria in excelsis Deo
from Missa Brevis (1991)

The Psalm *from* In Wilde America (1977)

Kenneth Leighton
1929 – 1988

Lully, lulla, thou little tiny child

Stephen Dodgson

Sanctus *and* Benedictus
from Missa Brevis (1991)

Leoš Janáček
1854 – 1928

Veni Sancte Spiritus (c. 1900)

Stephen Dodgson

All Bells in Paradise (? *early*)

Agnus Dei *from* Missa Brevis (1991)

Benjamin Britten

Rosa mystica
from Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam (1939)

Stephen Dodgson

Magnificat
from Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis (1974)

Interval

Ronald Corp
1951 –

Dhammapada

- I. Buddham saranam gacchami
- II. Homage to the Blessed One
- III. Dhammapada I
- IV. Dhammapada IV
- V. Dhammapada V
- VI. Meditation on the Four Sublime States

“... He was my composition teacher in those days [1955] ... not only was he an outstanding composer and teacher but ... a kind and understanding soul of great sincerity and integrity. His sense of humour was acute ... much of our time together was spent in tears of laughter” – *John Lill*

I Am Not Yet Born seems like a radical departure for a composer with a reputation for infectuous humour and wit. The text, by 20th century Irish poet Louis MacNeice, was written during World War II and is a deeply confrontational examination of the depravity of the human condition. Framed from the perspective of an unborn child – the ultimate innocent – the narrator prays for deliverance and forgiveness from an increasingly distressing list of terrors, incarcerations, and evils; finally, in the last stanza, the child prays to be given strength against those “who would freeze my humanity ... and, like water held in the hands, would spill me”, references to the authoritarian opposing forces in World War II and the spilling of blood of an entire generation on both sides of the battlefield. Ultimately, if the child cannot be spared these horrors, it prays to never be born.

Stephen Dodgson’s response in music is equally challenging. The alto part is singled out for prominence; recurring melodies sung from the perspective of the unborn are juxtaposed with increasingly dramatic and fragmented material in the other voices. High-voiced and low-voiced groups are arrayed against each other, as if in battle; jagged passages of melodic unison are contrasted against passages of rich, romantic harmony. This is a work of enormous compositional sweep, yet the composer’s economy and meticulous attention to detail result in a remarkably focused work that is powerfully dramatic without ever verging into sentimentality. Part of a motet sequence commissioned by The London Chorale in 1975, this is Dodgson at his most challenging, both musically and emotionally, and a far departure from the composer’s usual lightheartedness.

The composer’s character is more apparent in the other works in tonight’s programme. The *Missa Brevis*, composed for Holy Trinity, Sloane Square, is boisterous and cheerful, full of rhythmic vitality and spark; the simple carol *All Bells in Paradise* and the *Magnificat*, for St George’s Hanover Square, are both flowing and melodious, with a delightful sense of gracefulness. Three of Dodgson’s key 20th century influences are also present here. The fearless harmonic language of Leoš Janáček’s music clearly influenced Dodgson’s own approach to harmony and part-writing, which shows a strong basis towards whole-tone scales and tritonal harmonies. Benjamin Britten was also an important influence, with a similar approach to compositional economy, meticulousness, and rhythmic drive as Dodgson. His confidence in the handling of the choral ensemble is reminiscent of Leighton, whose carol *Lully lulla* continues tonight’s overall theme of the victimless innocents.

But it is perhaps the unusual setting of *The Psalm* that is most representative of this remarkable composer’s particular style. Flowing melodic lines are constantly disrupted and interrupted by divergent instrumental themes, quirky rhythmic interjections, and an increasingly uncomfortable harmonic canvas that verges on self-destructive in the second half of the piece. Challenging, disruptive, and constantly energised by continuous invention and surprise: these are the hallmarks of Dodgson’s distinctive and unique body of sacred choral music.

“Stephen’s music is all about disruption: he’ll set up an idea and then, as soon as he feels like you’ve got it, he’ll cut straight through it with a knife: a sudden change of rhythm, or a melodic line with a new twist ... his music is characterised by a direct honesty” – *Mark Eden*

Programme note by Alastair Carey

After the interval, composer Ronald Corp introduces Dhammapada, a sequence of sayings of the Buddha in verse form. The texts were translated from Pali and Sanskrit by Francis Booth. The opening movement is a Buddhist chant commonly recited by both lay people and Buddhist monks in Buddhist communities:

Bhuddam saranam gacchami.	<i>I take refuge in the Buddha.</i>
Dhammam saranam gacchami.	<i>I take refuge in the Dharma (divine cosmos).</i>
Sangham saranam gacchami.	<i>I take refuge in the Sangham (the community that follows the teachings of the Buddha, seeking enlightenment).</i>

Biographies

Stephen Dodgson

Stephen Dodgson was born in London in 1924 and lived there with few interruptions all his life. He was educated at Stowe and served in the Royal Navy during World War II. He received his musical training at the Royal College of Music, and was subsequently for many years a member of its teaching staff in theory and composition. He started working at the College in the Junior Department where he also conducted the orchestra, for which he wrote several pieces. In 1950 he lived in Italy on a scholarship.

From 1957 he was often employed by the BBC; as provider of incidental music for many major drama productions, as well as a frequent and familiar broadcaster of reviews and other musical topics.

Stephen's output is prolific and his compositions cover almost every genre, including opera (*Margaret Catchpole*, 1979), seven piano sonatas, nine string quartets, and much other chamber music. There is also a substantial body of music for symphony orchestra and many concertos with chamber orchestra. His large output of vocal music ranges from a *Magnificat* and a *Te Deum* for chorus, soloists and orchestra, through to music for unaccompanied choir and songs for one or two singers with instrumental accompaniment. As Chairman of the National Youth Wind Orchestra for many years, Stephen also wrote music for this and other wind orchestras. For the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble he wrote and arranged music for various combinations of brass instruments. He is, however, probably best known worldwide for his numerous works for guitar. His interest in this instrument was prompted by Julian Bream.

Much of this music has now been recorded, including six orchestral Essays, all the String Quartets, a String Sextet, Quintets for Clarinet, Flute and Guitar, all the Piano Sonatas, Bagatelles, and Piano Trios, other chamber and vocal music, and most of the guitar music.

Ronald Corp

Ronald Corp, OBE, SSC is a composer, conductor, and Anglican priest. He is founder and artistic director of the New London Orchestra (NLO) and the New London Children's Choir. Ronald is musical director of The London Chorus, a position he took up in 1994, and is also musical director

of Highgate Choral Society. He was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the 2012 New Year Honours for services to music.

He has worked with the BBC Singers, the BBC Concerto Orchestra and various orchestras in the United Kingdom and abroad. Among an extensive discography are his award-winning Hyperion discs of British Light Music Classics. His own compositions include four symphonies, two piano concertos, concertos for flute recorder and cello, three string quartets and a clarinet quintet. His choral works include large sacred cantatas (including *And all the trumpets sounded*) and shorter works for unaccompanied choir including *Dover Beach*, commissioned for the BBC Singers. He has written over one hundred songs; significant cycles include *Fields of the Fallen* and *Letters from Lony* as well as the scena *The Yellow Wallpaper*. His operas include *The Ice Mountain* (for children) and *The Pelican*.

His experience and expertise in choral directing are crystallised in the textbook *The Choral Singer's Companion*, which is now in its third edition.

Ronald attended the Southern Theological Education and Training Scheme to prepare for the priesthood. He was ordained in the Church of England as a deacon in 1998 and a priest in 1999. From 1998 to 2002, he served as a non-stipendiary minister (NSM) of St Mary's Church, Kilburn, London. From 2002 to 2007, he served as a NSM at St Mary's Church, Hendon. Since 2007, he has served as a NSM at the Church of St Alban the Martyr, Holborn. He is a member of the Society of the Holy Cross (SSC).

Alastair Carey

Alastair Carey has been involved in choral performance since the age of six. He has performed, recorded, and broadcast throughout the United Kingdom and Europe, appearing as a vocal performer with ensembles including The Gabrieli Consort, The Oxford Camerata, The Brabant Ensemble, and The Nederlandse Bachvereniging in performances ranging from the BBC Proms to the Leipzig Bach Festival. As a conductor, Alastair has directed concerts in Asia, Australasia, Europe, and throughout the United Kingdom, including award-winning performances at competitions in the European Grand Prix in Spain and the World Choir Games in South Korea.

Joshua Ryan

Australian organist and accompanist Joshua Ryan is a prize-winning graduate of the Royal Academy of Music, where he studied as a Bicentenary Scholar under Professor David Titterington. Joshua is quickly establishing himself as one of his generation's most exciting interpreters of Olivier Messiaen's organ works, having performed almost all of Messiaen's religious suites and standalone works. He is currently Organist and Assistant Director of Music of Hampstead Parish Church, Organist of St Sepulchre-without-Newgate in the City of London, and accompanist of Dulwich Choral Society.

Joshua's musical interests are diverse and wide ranging. He has worked across Europe and Australia as a soloist, accompanist, and continuo player with a vast array of conductors, singers, choirs, and ensembles including The Academy of Ancient Music, London Mozart Players, Sydney

Chamber Choir, Allegri Ensemble, Philippe Herreweghe, John Butt, Rachel Podger, Edward Gardner, Susan Landale, David Ponsford, Hans Davidsson, Eamonn Dougan, Nicky Spence, and Nicholas Mullroy. Joshua has also featured on four critically acclaimed discs as the accompanist with the Choir of the Royal Hospital Chelsea and William Vann, recorded for the SOMM and Albion labels. Reviews by BBC Radio 3 have described his accompanying as “wonderful and beautiful” and “full of colour.”

Alongside Joshua’s performance career, he is also a musical researcher, and is the curator of The Mulliner Project, a significant research project on the reinterpretation of the music of The Mulliner Book on a range of historical and modern instruments.

The LFCCM Festival Singers

Soprano Eleanor Bray Olivia Hugh-Jones Eve McGrath Emily Wenman
Alto Emma Ashby Hannah Cooke Leonora Dawson-Bowling
Tenor John Cuthbert Hamish MacGregor Clifford Lister Louis Watkins
Bass Geoff Clapham David Le Prevost Reuben Thomas

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 Finnissy, Gabriel Jackson, Francis Pott, Sebastian Forbes, Francis Grier, Kerry Andrew, Antony Pitts, and many more.

The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music

The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music was founded by Christopher Batchelor in 2002 with the aim of showcasing contemporary liturgical music in both service and concert. Now more than 20 years old, the LFCCM has grown to include nearly 60 events, dozens of composers, hundreds of performers, and thousands of audience members, both live and online.

Make the LFCCM part of your Legacy

Artistic groups across the United Kingdom have seen funding cuts and financial pressures since the global coronavirus pandemic. In the face of challenges like these, the secure future of classical music in this country can no longer be taken for granted.

The LFCCM’s endowment fund ensures the Festival’s ongoing financial security and independence for generations to come. Your lasting legacy will be reflected in new commissions, live performances, educational programmes, and supporting the development of church music in perpetuity.

Find out more at lfccm.com/support/legacy, or write to legacy@lfccm.com.

More events this week at
The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music

All events are free unless otherwise noted

Monday 13 May
8.30pm

Compline at All Saints Church, Fulham, SW6 3LA

Singers from The LFCCM Festival Singers perform contemporary music for evening prayer, including new works for choir and organ by student composers, and Stephen Dodgson's *Nunc Dimittis* (1984) for unaccompanied chamber choir.

Friday 17 May
5.30pm

"Cymbals and Dances":

Organ and dance recital at St Pancras Parish Church, NW1 2BA

Dancers from the London Contemporary Dance School are joined by organist Martyn Noble in this presentation of newly-choreographed dances to organ music submitted to the Festival's "Call for Scores" project.

Saturday 18 May
7.30pm

"The Hunt of the Unicorn":

Concert at St George's Bloomsbury, WC1A 2SA

This event is ticketed. Book online at lfccm.com/tickets

A selection of the medieval "unicorn" tapestries, portraying key moments in the life of Christ, are accompanied by contemporary sacred music from the Festival's "Call for Scores" project in this depiction of the journey from Christmas to Easter.

The
Stephen Dodgson
Charitable Trust

