

The Scottish Chamber Choir

Directed by Michael Harris

The Way of the Cross

Music by Franz Liszt
and Herbert Howells

Saturday 10th March 2007 8.00pm
St Giles' Cathedral, High Street, Edinburgh

The Scottish Chamber Choir

Director: Michael Harris

Organist: Peter Backhouse

FRANZ LISZT
(1811–1886)

VIA CRUCIS

I N T E R V A L of 15 minutes

HERBERT HOWELLS
(1892–1983)

TAKE HIM, EARTH, FOR CHERISHING

REQUIEM

- I SALVATOR MUNDI
- II PSALM 23
- III REQUIEM AETERNAM (1)
- IV PSALM 121
- V REQUIEM AETERNAM (2)
- VI I HEARD A VOICE FROM HEAVEN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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PROGRAMME NOTES

Franz Liszt *Via crucis*

Liszt's setting of *Via crucis*, the fourteen Stations of the Cross, is without parallel in the choral repertoire. Written in 1878, it was a work that had occupied his mind for some years, and which he finally committed to paper in the romantic surroundings of the Villa d'Este in Tivoli, outside Rome.

There is much that is experimental in the music, and certainly it stretched the limits of tonality at the time. In terms of the text he includes a wide variety of sources, including a plainsong hymn, the *Stabat Mater* sequence and two Lutheran chorales, *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden* and *O traurigkeit, o herzeleid*.

To a great extent this work needs to be seen in the light of the religious culture of Liszt's time. The Stations of the Cross are rooted in popular religion, and probably date from the fourteenth century; it is highly likely that they derived from pilgrimages to the Holy Land and the processions associated with them. By 1600 in Germany, fourteen stations had become the established number of stopping places. Whilst they have been depicted in many carvings or other visual art, there is little other representation of them in music apart from in some hymns. Liszt envisaged his settings being used, perhaps accompanied by harmonium, in the Good Friday devotions that took place in the Colosseum in Rome. In fact the work was not performed until 1929, and not published until 1936, the fiftieth anniversary of his death.

Liszt divides the setting between movements that are for organ only, some that are for organ, but with baritone solo added, and the plainsong and chorale settings for full choir. The three cries at *Jesus cadit*, in Stations 3, 7, and 9, sung by male chorus, form the pivotal points of the first part of the work, which opens with an introduction that is the plainsong hymn, *Vexilla regis*. The climax is reached with the setting of *O traurigkeit, o herzeleid* at the conclusion of Station 12.

Herbert Howells *Take him, earth, for cherishing*

Herbert Howells' motet *Take him, earth, for cherishing* arose from an American commission to write a work to mark the assassination of John F Kennedy.

Howells himself wrote the following: "Within the year following the tragic death of President Kennedy in Texas, plans were made for a dual American-Canadian Memorial Service to be held in Washington. I was asked to compose an *a capella* work for the commemoration. The text was mine to choose, biblical or other. Choice was settled when I recalled a poem by Prudentius (348–413AD). I had already set it in its medieval Latin, years earlier, as a study for *Hymnus Paradisi*. But now I used none of that unpublished setting. Instead, I turned to Helen Waddell's faultless translation:

Take him, earth, for cherishing,
To thy tender breast receive him.
Body of a man I bring thee,
Noble even in its ruin.

Here was the perfect text – the Prudentius *Hymnus circa Exsequias Defuncti*.

Formally it is roughly A–B–A; in texture variably 4 to 8-part. Tonality anchors (first and last) on B, but admits chromatic phrases, as at

Ashes that a man might measure
In the hollow of his hand.

Finally, a near funeral march, tethered again to B, but in the more consoling major mode.

At the Washington memorial service, the motet's first performance was given by the choir of the Cathedral Church of St George, Kingston, Canada, under the direction of Dr George Maybee."

Herbert Howells *Requiem*

Howells' *Requiem* dates from 1936, the year that he took up the post of Director of Music of St Paul's Girls' School in Hammersmith, in succession to Gustav Holst. He was to teach there until the early 1960s, although he continued to compose until well into his eighties.

1936 was also the year after the tragic death from polio of his son Michael Kendrick Howells at the age of nine. The *Requiem* dates from the same period as *Hymnus Paradisi*, the large-scale work for chorus and orchestra that was also written in response to his son's death, but such was the personal nature of the *Requiem* that it was not released for publication until 1980.

The work is of a meditative nature, combining psalm settings in English with words from the Latin requiem text. After the harmonic intensity of the opening *Salvator mundi*, there follows a simple setting of Psalm 23 that utilises the fluid rhythms of plainchant; three solo voices take the first half of the text, and, when the choir enters, much of the writing is in unison. The third movement is the first of two settings of the *Requiem aeternam* text, notable for its warmth and colour, and the portrayal of eternal light.

Psalm 121, which follows this, returns to the recitative idiom of the first psalm, employing baritone and tenor solo voices responsorially, with the choir at the beginning and end. The second setting of *Requiem aeternam* is harmonically tauter than the first, and reaches its climax at *Et lux perpetua* before returning to a quiet and reflective conclusion. This mood is continued into the last movement – I heard a voice from Heaven – which also contains some tortured chromatic writing before returning to the final D major.

Programme notes by Michael Harris

Keep in touch with the Scottish Chamber Choir – visit our web site at:

www.scottishchamberchoir.org.uk

You will find there our plans for the season, details of forthcoming concerts and useful links, plus an archive of our programmes back to 1993.

TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

LISZT VIA CRUCIS

Introduction

*Vexilla regis prodeunt,
fulget crucis mysterium
qua vita mortem pertulit
et morte vitam protulit.*

*Impleta sunt quae concinit
David fideli carmine
dicendo nationibus,
regnavit a ligno Deus. Amen*

*O crux ave, spes unica,
hoc passionis tempore
piis adauge gratiam
reisque dele crimina. Amen*

Abroad the royal banners fly,
now shines the Cross's mystery;
upon it Life did death endure,
and yet by death did life procure.

That which the Prophet-King of old
hath in mysterious verse foretold,
is now accomplished, whilst we see
God ruling nations from a Tree.

Hail, Cross, of hopes the most sublime!
Now in this mournful Passion time,
improve religious souls in grace,
the sins of criminals efface.

Station I Jesus is condemned to death

Innocens ego sum a sanguine justi hujus.

I am innocent of the blood of this just man.

Station II Jesus takes up his Cross

Ave, ave crux!

Hail! Hail, O Cross!

Station III Jesus falls the first time

Jesus cadit.

Jesus falls.

*Stabat mater dolorosa
juxta crucem larymosa,
dum pendebat filius.*

At the Cross her station keeping,
stood the mournful Mother weeping,
close to Jesus to the last.

Station IV Jesus meets his holy mother
(organ)

Station V Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the Cross
(organ)

Station VI Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

*O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden,
voll Schmerz und voller Hohn!
O Haupt, zum Spott gebunden
mit einer Dornenkron!*

*O Haupt, sonst schön gezieret
mit höchster Ehr und Zier,
jetzt aber hoch beschimpfet,
gegrüßet seist du mir!*

O sacred head sore wounded,
defiled and put to scorn!

O Kingly Head surrounded
with mocking crown of thorn!

What sorrow mars Thy grandeur?
Can death Thy bloom deflower?
O countenance whose splendour
the hosts in heaven adore.

Station VII Jesus falls the second time

Jesus cadit.

Jesus falls.

*Stabat mater dolorosa
juxta crucem larymosa,
dum pendebat filius.*

At the Cross her station keeping,
stood the mournful Mother weeping,
close to Jesus to the last.

Station VIII Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

*Nolite flere super me,
sed super vos ipsas
flete et super filios vestros.*

(Daughters of Jerusalem,)
weep not over me;
but weep for yourselves and for your children.

Station IX Jesus falls the third time

Jesus cadit.

Jesus falls.

*Stabat mater dolorosa
juxta crucem larymosa,
dum pendebat filius.*

At the Cross her station keeping,
stood the mournful Mother weeping,
close to Jesus to the last.

Station X Jesus is stripped of his garments
(organ)

Station XI Jesus is nailed to the Cross

Crucifige!

Crucify him!

Station XII Jesus dies on the Cross

Eli, Eli, lama Sabacthani?

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

In manus tuas commendo spiritum meum.

Into Thy hands I commend my spirit.

Consummatum est.

It is finished.

*O Traurigkeit, o Herzeleid
ist das nicht zu beklagen?
Gott des Vaters einigs Kind
wird ins Grab getragen.*

O darkest woe! Ye tears, forth flow!
Has earth so sad a wonder?
God the Father's only Son
Now lies buried yonder.

O Traurigkeit, o Herzeleid.

O darkest woe! Ye tears, forth flow!

Station XIII Jesus is taken down from the Cross
(organ)

Station XIV Jesus is laid in the tomb

*Ave crux, spes unica,
mundi salus et gloria,
auge piis justitiam,
reisque dona veniam!*

Ave crux!

Hail, O Cross, our only hope
in this time of suffering,
grant justice to the faithful
and mercy to those awaiting judgement.

Hail, O Cross!

HOWELLS TAKE HIM, EARTH, FOR CHERISHING

Take him, earth, for cherishing,
To thy tender breast receive him.
Body of a man I bring thee,
Noble even in its ruin.

Once was this a spirit's dwelling,
By the breath of God created.
High the heart that here was beating,
Christ the prince of all its living.

Guard him well, the dead I give thee,
Not unmindful of His creature
Shall He ask it: He who made it
Symbol of His mystery.

Comes the hour God hath appointed
To fulfil the hope of men,
Then must thou, in very fashion,
What I give, return again.

Not though ancient time decaying
Wear away these bones to sand,
Ashes that a man might measure
In the hollow of his hand:

Not though wandering winds and idle
Drifting through the empty sky
Scatter dust was nerve and sinew,
Is it given to man to die.

Once again the shining road
Leads to ample Paradise;
Open are the woods again,
That the Serpent lost for men.

Take, O take him, mighty Leader,
Take again thy servant's soul.
Grave his name, and pour the fragrant
Balm upon the icy stone.

Take him, earth, for cherishing,
To thy tender breast receive him.
Body of a man I bring thee,
Noble even in its ruin.

By the breath of God created.
Christ the prince of all its living.
Take, O take him,
Take him, earth, for cherishing.

Prudentius (348–413)
from *Hymnus circa Exsequias Defuncti*
translated by Helen Waddell

HOWELLS REQUIEM

I *Salvator mundi*

O Saviour of the world,
Who by thy Cross and thy precious Blood hast redeemed us,
Save us and help us, we humbly beseech thee, O Lord.

II *Psalm 23*

The Lord is my shepherd: therefore can I lack nothing.

He shall feed me in a green pasture: and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.

He shall convert my soul: and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: thy rod and thy staff comfort me.

Thou shalt prepare a table before me against them that trouble me: thou hast anointed my head with oil, and my cup shall be full.

But thy loving kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

III *Requiem aeternam (1)*

Requiem aeternam dona eis,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.

Grant them eternal rest,
and may perpetual light shine upon them.

IV *Psalm 121*

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills: from whence cometh my help.

My help cometh even from the Lord: who hath made heav'n and earth.

He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: and he that keepeth thee will not sleep.

Behold, he that keepeth Israel: shall neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord himself is thy keeper: he is thy defence upon thy right hand;

So that the sun shall not burn thee by day: neither the moon by night.

The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: yea, it is even he that shall keep thy soul.

The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in: from this time forth and for evermore.

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills: from whence cometh my help.

V *Requiem aeternam (2)*

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,
requiem dona eis,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.

Grant them eternal rest, O Lord,
grant them rest,
and may perpetual light shine upon them.

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine.

Grant them eternal rest, O Lord.

VI *I heard a voice from heaven*

I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, From henceforth blessed are the dead which die in the Lord. Even so saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours.

Revelation 14:13

The Scottish Chamber Choir

Since its formation in 1968, the **Scottish Chamber Choir** has performed throughout Scotland and Northern England to great acclaim. Each season the choir presents four concerts in Edinburgh, climaxing with an appearance at the Festival Fringe. These are usually supplemented by a Christmas concert and guest appearances at local Music Societies and Festivals throughout the year, keeping members quite busy!

The choir sings both shorter items from the chamber choir repertoire and more extended works, such as the Bach *St John Passion* at our Festival Fringe concert in 2004. Whilst some concerts are given *a cappella*, at others we are joined by a variety of instrumental forces, making possible an exceptional freedom of programming and great interest for both participants and audience.

The choir's hallmark has always been its breadth of repertoire, encompassing a wide range of music from the 16th century to the present day, with music by living composers featuring in programmes during most seasons. Often there is a thread linking a series of concerts, encouraging regular attendance. The highly successful and critically praised Silver Jubilee season, for example, concentrated on 20th century British music, and was recognised by an Enterprise Award from the Performing Rights Society – one of only three such awards in Scotland.

From time to time, vacancies occur in all sections of the choir. Any singer interested in obtaining further details should contact Bill Wood, the President, by phone on 0131 339 7663 or by email at info@scottishchamberchoir.org.uk. Rehearsals are held on Monday evenings in the Ian Tomlin School of Music at Napier University's Craighouse campus.

Michael Harris received his earliest musical education as a chorister of Gloucester Cathedral. He was Organ Scholar of St Peter's College, Oxford, and continued his studies at the Royal College of Music. He studied organ with Nicholas Danby and has taken part in masterclasses given by, among others, Nicolas Kynaston, Daniel Roth and Piet Kee.

Michael has been Organist and Master of the Music of St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh, since November 1996; he is also a Lecturer at the Ian Tomlin School of Music in Napier University, Edinburgh. Prior to moving to Edinburgh he held posts as Sub-Organist of Leeds Parish Church and Assistant Organist of Canterbury Cathedral. As Organist of St Giles' Cathedral he hosts many organ concerts on the famous Rieger organ (built in 1992) and his work has involved him in numerous recordings and broadcasts, both for Television and Radio. Under his direction the Cathedral Choir has visited the USA and Greece, and most recently, in October 2006, they undertook a short tour of southern France.

His solo recordings include *The Organ at St Giles'*, and he has directed the Cathedral Choir in a number of CD recordings, including *An Edinburgh Celebration* to mark their first tour of the USA in Autumn 2004.

Elsewhere Michael has given recitals at many venues in Germany, Belgium, Italy and the USA, as well as in the UK. Since 1998 he has been Musical Director of the Scottish Chamber Choir. He is also much involved in organ and choral education and is Director of the Edinburgh Organ Academy, an international annual Springtime organ course founded in 1998.

Peter Backhouse was appointed Assistant Organist at St Giles' Cathedral in August 2000, a post he combines with teaching music at The Edinburgh Academy. His musical training began as a chorister in the choir of York Minster. Later he studied music at Edinburgh University where he graduated BMus (Hons), having won the 3rd Year Class Medal as well as the Tovey Memorial Prize for his organ playing. He is a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists and holder of their Choir Training Diploma, as well as an Associate of the Royal College of Music. He has played for services and given recitals in many cathedrals, including Westminster Abbey, Canterbury Cathedral, York Minster, Durham Cathedral and St George's Chapel Windsor. As a continuo player he has played with all the major professional ensembles in Scotland.

He was appointed Assistant Organist at St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral in 1977. This post, with its daily accompaniment of services, as well as many concerts, recitals, broadcasts and recordings, kept him busy for over 20 years until he retired in 1997. He has served on the Council of The Edinburgh Society of Organists for many years, including two as President. He supports the work of the Royal School of Church Music and has been an organ adviser in the Edinburgh area for the Scottish Federation of Organists.

Railways have interested him all his life and he is a qualified signaller on the Bo'ness and Kinneil Railway. His photographs, principally of organs, choirs and churches, continue to be published, and he tries to find time to enjoy cricket and walking.

The Scottish Chamber Choir

Sopranos	Rachel Bucknall	Julie Morrice
	Adrienne Burgess	Sue Shoosmith
	Lorraine Fraser	Adriana Skaraas
	Jenny Mackenzie	Milda Zinkus
Contraltos	Pauline McClellan	
	Anne Barker	Marjory Lobban
	Jean Brodie	Alison McCleery
	Myra Brown	Sheila Robertson
Tenors	Guen Innes	
	Andrew Polson	John Wilson
	James Verge	Malcolm Wood
Basses	Mike Arthur	Frank Lucas
	George Burgess	James McDonald
	Hugh Hillyard-Parker	Martin Tarr
	Wilf Krause	