



Cantabile

CHAMBER CHOIR – LEEDS

PRESENTS

‘ARCADIA’

ST. EDMUNDS CHURCH, ROUNDHAY
SATURDAY 13TH JUNE 2015

A CONCERT OF MUSIC INSPIRED BY NATURE AND THE RURAL IDYLL: Including works by John Bennet, Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst and John Tavener and featuring choruses from Henry Purcell's opera 'DIDO and AENEAS'

The term Arcadia has been passed down to us from antiquity and derives from a Greek province of the same name. Arcadia's natural beauty, bounty and pastoral charms, away from the clamour and stress of city life caused its name to become a poetic byword for an idyllic vision of unspoiled countryside and the simplicity of a rural life where man and nature exist in harmony.

Arcadia has been a popular artistic subject since antiquity, both in visual arts and literature and its influence re-emerged strongly in all art-forms at the beginning of the Renaissance. In literature, Arcadia became an icon of the Renaissance and although this paradise was usually depicted as being populated by shepherds, nymphs and fauns, by the end of the 16th century it was also a place suitable for Royal visitors as can be heard in Bennet's 'All Creatures Now...'. Here, the author sets a scene of Arcadian bliss into which the first Queen Elizabeth comes naturally and lightly tripping, to the acclaim of the goddess Diana's pastoral attendants.

The Spanish playwright and poet Lope de Vega wrote in 1598:

'...Does not the pleasantness of this place carry in itself sufficient reward for any time lost in it, or for any such danger that might ensue? Do you not see how everything conspires together to make this place a heavenly dwelling? because no beauty here should ever fade? Is not every echo here a perfect music?'

Arcadia: Prose and Verse

Much of the music that you will hear this evening is a celebration of love. Love for a Queen; love of the natural landscape and the creatures inhabiting it; love of a suitor. However, in our Arcadian setting, far away from the constraints of 'civilized' urban society, love is sometimes expressed with unabashed lustiness. Listen carefully to the words of 'Fair Phyllis' and 'Now is the Month of Maying', where there is candour and joyous abandon in the representation of physical pleasure.



In 1637-38 Nicholas Poussin painted the second, more famous, of his pictures entitled '*Et in Arcadia ego*'. Though not without ambiguity, the title is translated thus:

'Even in Arcadia, there am I' (where 'I' refers to Death).

In what is considered to be an idyllic and enduring place of refuge, death is present. This idea is expressed most eloquently in tonight's concert in Tavener's setting of William Blake's poem 'The Tyger', where the cruelty and amorality of nature is depicted to devastating effect. This work is coupled with Tavener's earlier Blake setting, 'The Lamb'. This is the final thread in our Arcadian tapestry – Arcadia as the setting for contemplation of the spiritual and the divine.

We present four hundred years of music inspired by an ancient landscape and an imagined idyllic way of life. The theme remains constant, though the interpretation has changed across the centuries. From the Renaissance world's passion for the ideas and ideals of Antiquity to our modern desire for idyllic escape and fantasy the theme has retained its relevance. Through the movement of populations from the countryside to the burgeoning cities, and the steady industrialization of society in the 18th and 19th centuries; the horror and destruction of two world wars and grief over the loss of a simpler, sweeter bygone age; to contemporary concerns over global warming and environmental disaster; the fears, anxieties and challenges of every age have, to some extent, lead thinkers, writers and composers to return to the Arcadian ideal as a means of expressing man's deepest emotions.

Musical Director

Ian Akroyd

PART 1:

There was a Tree

Trad. Hampshire folk song arranged for voices by Gustav Holst (1874 - 1934)

Come Gentle Zephyr

William Horsley (1774 - 1858)

'Dido and Aeneas.....'

Henry Purcell (1659 – 1695)

An opera in three acts and a prologue

The actual date of composition and year of first performance of this wonderful work are unknown. However, it is certain that the work was performed in the summer of 1688 at Josias Priest's girl's school in Chelsea where it is likely that all parts were taken by girls and young women from the school. Following this first performance the work fell into decline and was not staged again during Purcell's lifetime. Not until 1895, when students of the Royal College of Music revived the opera to mark the bicentenary of Purcell's death, was the full work heard again. During the 20th century renewed interest in Baroque music led to the preparation of many editions of this and other works by Purcell. The work is now acclaimed as the first true English Opera, and a dazzling and charming representation of Purcell's musical and dramatic skills.

For his libretto Purcell turned to Nahum Tate, who re-worked the story of the Trojan hero Aeneas and his ill-fated love affair with Dido, Queen of Carthage, as described in Virgil's Aeneid.

Tate adapted some details of the story, possibly to reflect contemporary fear and mistrust of Catholicism and also to stand as a warning of the dangers of England being ruled by a Catholic monarch.

This may or may not be true. However, what is apparent is that Purcell took Tate's pithy text and created vivid and moving musical evocations of the main characters and their plight, interspersed with richly varied choruses in which courtiers, evil spirits and even sailors take part in and comment on the story as it unfolds. It is these choruses that we present this evening.

To set the Scene:

Carthage, a great city and centre of the Carthaginian Empire is situated on the Mediterranean coast of Africa, in what is now Tunisia. The young Queen Dido, also known as Elissa, is recently widowed and rules her empire alone.

Aeneas has escaped from the sacking of Troy with a small group of fellow Trojans. For six years they wander the world, sailing from port to port until at last their fleet is driven by a storm to the North African coast and Carthage. Aeneas' fate has been determined from birth – as the son of Aphrodite he is favoured by the Gods and they have plans to use him for great ends.

Once in Carthage, Aeneas falls in love with the Queen and she with him. At first Dido is reluctant to acknowledge her feelings towards the young hero, but she is persuaded by her loyal courtiers to return his affections and give in to his advances. In doing so she can find true happiness and also strengthen her Empire.

The Courtiers plan to decant to the countryside where the union of the two lovers can be celebrated – and perhaps consummated. Once away from the city the court is free to express its joy at the Queen's liaison and she is free to express, and act on, her love for Aeneas. It is at this point that we join the story.....

'To the Hills and the Vales'

However, not everything is as it seems. There are evil spirits abroad intent on bringing about Dido's downfall and the ruin of Carthage.

The spirits gather to revel in their mischief, and finally repair to a cave to prepare the charms that will bring about their magical deception.....

'Harm's Our Delight'

'In Our Deep Vaulted Cell'

Unaware of impending doom, the court prepares to go hunting. Aeneas prowess as a warrior, and possibly as a lover, is confirmed when he returns to Dido's encampment displaying the head of a huge boar upon his spear.....

'Thanks To These Lonesome Vales'

PART 2:

Cattle Call

Trad. Orkney cattle call arranged for voices by Katy Lavinia Cooper

The Lamb

John Tavener (1944 - 2013)

The Tiger

John Tavener (1944 - 2013)

The Blue Bird

Charles Villiers Stanford (1852 – 1924)

Spring Song

Philip Thomas (born 1953)

Linden Lea

R Vaughan Williams (1872 - 1958)

Now Is The Month Of Maying

Thomas Morley (1557 – 1602)

Cantabile is a chamber choir based in Chapel Allerton, Leeds. We're a small group of experienced and enthusiastic singers who enjoy the challenge of performing a varied repertoire spanning six centuries and including works by contemporary composers. We're dedicated to making a beautiful sound together in a choir where every voice counts.



For more information about Cantabile and details of future performances including:

ARCADIA

Sunday 5th July 2015. 3.00pm. Priory church of St Mary and St Lawrence at Ellerton East Yorkshire

VIVALDI GLORIA &
SCHUBERT MASS No 2 in G

Saturday 28th November 2015. 7.30pm.
St Edmunds Church, Roundhay

Please visit our website:

www.cantabile-choir-leeds.org.uk

