



CHOIR OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Sir Peter Maxwell Davies *patron*
Registered Charity No 1090286

Howard Williams *conductor*
Helen Tunstall *harp*

Music for a summer's evening

Saturday 11 July 2009 at 8 pm

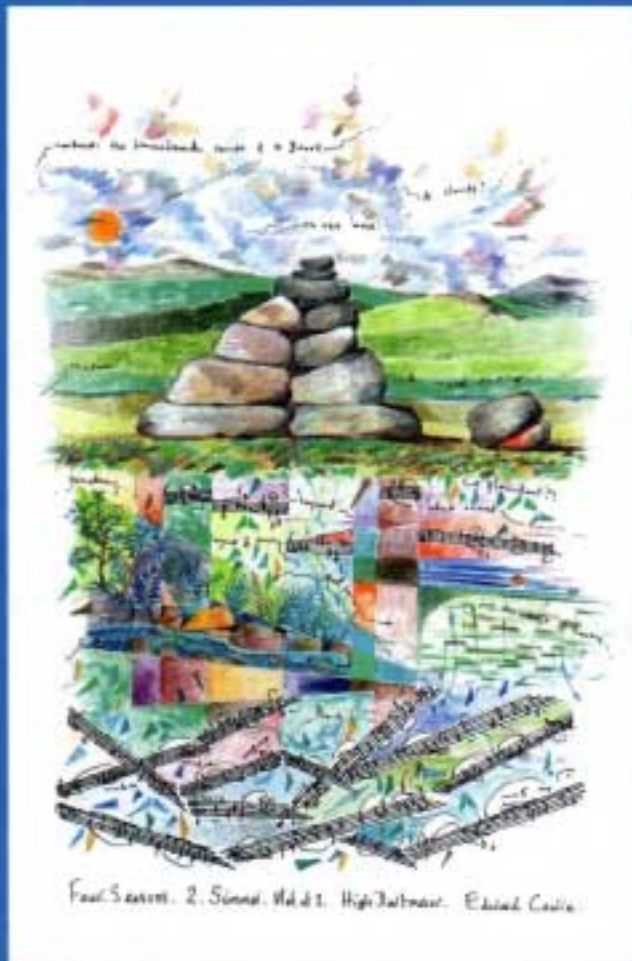
GROSVENOR CHAPEL

featuring the World Première
of Edward Cowie's
Summer from Four Seasons

Commissioned by CC21 with financial support from



Benefactor Friends



Edward Cowie's *Summer* is the second episode in his choral portrayal of the *Four Seasons*, but the first to be performed. This evening's concert therefore marks the launching of the four-part commission, shared by CC21 and the Oxford choir Commotio, who will give the première of *Winter* on 5 December. Presenting a programme of music in which the word 'summer' appears in every single choral title might seem suspiciously like an exercise in mere tidiness (or perhaps the response to a wager), were it not for the delight that each piece offers the listener and performer. If that is more of a bonus, however, then the underlying reason lies in my desire to give Edward Cowie's new seasonal work an appropriate context, in which the light and moods of summer resonate through the work of a variety of composers. To enhance further the setting for the new work, I have chosen to include works for solo harp, an instrument which has a special place in Edward's musical language and output.

Robert Walker: *Canonic Madrigal*

Robert Walker was a chorister at St Matthew's in his home town of Northampton, which has long boasted one of the country's finest church choirs. He was then to become both a choral and organ scholar at Jesus College, Cambridge. 'Englishness' has all along been the primary characteristic of his artistic activity. He founded the Petworth Festival of English Music and Art (centred on the pictures Turner painted at Petworth House), and lived for a while in the cottage in Sussex in which Elgar wrote his *Cello Concerto*. His music constantly makes original use of old materials and techniques. His first of the *Five Summer Madrigals* (1986) uses the words of *Summer is ycomen in*, giving them new but palpably mediaeval melodic clothes.

Herbert Howells: *The Summer is Coming*

The Summer is Coming (1964) is inscribed 'To the memory of Arnold Bax'. It is a setting of a poem by Bryan Guinness, an heir to the brewing empire, who was married to Diana Mitford. The aristocrat poet's picture of summer in County Mayo nicely reflects the Celtic obsession of the music's dedicatee. The opening female-voice section is eerily reminiscent of the atmosphere set by Vaughan Williams in his Irish opera *Riders to the Sea*. Thereafter, however, we can hear Howells in his best chromatic mood, in a piece which shows how well he responded to words. In this case, the text inspires some of Howells' most original choral textures.

Benjamin Britten: *Suite for Harp*

Britten wrote his *Suite for Harp* in 1969 for Osian Ellis, who performed it that year at the Aldeburgh Festival. Britten's thorough understanding of the technique and musical resources of the harp is as abundantly and happily in evidence in this work as in all his writing for the instrument. The composer himself provided the following concise description for the programme of the first performance:

1. A classical *Overture*, with dotted rhythms and trumpet chords
2. *Toccata*, a rondo busy with quavers and semiquavers, with much crossing of parts
3. *Nocturne*, a clear tune with increasing ornamentation over a low, chordal ground
4. *Fugue*, a brief scherzo, in three voices
5. *Hymn* (St Denio), a Welsh tune, a compliment to the dedicatee, with five variants

Frederick Delius: *Two Songs to be Sung of a Summer Night on the Water* *Midsummer Song*

Delius' music may be tinged with a more sultry atmosphere than is entirely typical of these shores, but his three pieces in tonight's programme - two of them wordless - go fairly close to the heart of what we perhaps like to think is typical of musical Englishness, as well as to the atmosphere of those summer nights that do indeed occur... sometimes.

☞ INTERVAL – 15 MINUTES ☞

Edgar Bainton: *Summer*

Bainton perhaps needs a little introduction. Born in London, he studied piano and theory at the Royal College of Music, and later composition with Sir Charles Villiers Stanford. In 1914, while visiting the Bayreuth Festival, he was arrested as a British civilian in wartime Germany and interned for the duration of the war at a prison camp at Ruhleben, near Berlin. There Bainton directed his own madrigal group (known as Bainton's Magpies), as well as conducting an *ad hoc* orchestra and even playing concertos. Continuing after the war as Principal of the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Conservatory, a post he had held since 1912, he had a busy life as composer, conductor and pianist, up to his acceptance in 1934 (the year of the deaths of Elgar, Delius and Holst) of the Directorship of the New South Wales Conservatorium in Sydney. As a conductor Bainton introduced to Australia such works as Elgar's *Symphony No 2*, *The Dream of Gerontius* and *The Apostles*, and conducted the inaugural concert in 1934 of the New South Wales Symphony Orchestra (later the Sydney Symphony Orchestra).

In addition to his considerable output of large-scale orchestral and choral works, Bainton had nearly 100 solo songs and 114 part-songs published. The part-songs were written at a time when choirs, competitive festivals and school singing demanded a ready supply of such works. Three-part female voices was a common format, as in his charming setting of Shelley's *Summer*.

Gustav Holst: *Summer*

Holst, too, was a student of Stanford's at the Royal College of Music, and was drawn to a similar genre of choral writing as the slightly younger Bainton. His pair of *Easter Pictures* follow his interest in orientalism, a theme continued in such works as the opera *Savitri* and the *Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda*, the third set of which is also for women's voices and harp.

Carlos Salzedo: *Song in the Night*

French-born harpist, composer and pedagogue Carlos Salzedo spent most of his adult life in the United States. As a performer he was one of the great virtuosi of all time and, as a composer, produced a prodigious amount of material for harpists.

Edward Cowie: *Four Seasons: II – Summer*

World Première

1. *Late Afternoon. Le Gorge du Tarn, France*
2. *Sunset. High Dartmoor, Devon*
3. *Nocturne. Woods – Maurens, Dordogne, France*

Edward Cowie was born in Birmingham, but most of his early life was spent in rural countryside, Suffolk and the Cotswolds in particular. These early years in quiet natural landscapes were major influences on a life that has always been deeply affected and influenced by the forces of Nature. By the late 1960s some of his early works were finding their way onto professional platforms such as the Edinburgh Festival in 1969. In 1971, he was awarded a Chopin Fellowship to study under Witold Lutoslawski in Poland, and also came under the direct influence of Michael Tippett.

Cowie's career as a composer was firmly established with his BBC Prom Commission, *Leviathan*, which was premièred by the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1975. In 1983 Cowie was awarded the first Granada Composer Fellowship with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. He worked with the orchestra for three years, both as composer and conductor.

As a painter, Cowie has exhibited internationally, and his works are in public and private collections in many countries. He has made several television films, including his acclaimed *Leonardo* of 1986. In 1988 and 1989 he wrote and presented two major radio series commissioned by ABCFM in Australia. After twelve years in Australia he returned to England to live in 1995. He was appointed the first Composer in Association with the BBC Singers, 2002-2006, and created the first Artist in Residence with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, also for the period 2002-2006. His music continues to be featured in festivals throughout the world. His recent work for the BBC Singers, *National Portraits*, was short-listed for the 2007 British Composer, Radio 3 Listeners' Award.

Edward Cowie writes:



Four Seasons is a joint-commission between CC21 in London and Commotio in Oxford. It runs the same seasonal course as that of the Vivaldi: Spring to Winter. *Summer* is the first set to be completed.

My music has often been described (both by musicians and audiences), as having a strong sense of visual as well as sonic stimulation. This is hardly surprising since a great deal of my music is 'prepared' (and often formally tested) in a progressively elaborate series of working-drawings and/or paintings.

I have chosen to make landscapes (and the things that sound, move, live and activate in them), the core-inspiration for the entire work. These are landscapes I know well; that I have studied in depth, and recorded in many ways, including the drawings and a great deal of textual and sonic notation. As it happens, two of *Summer* are French landscapes, the reason being that I also have a house in South West France and live there quite a lot.

I don't, however, try to copy or transcribe the exact sounds of any place, but I do try to evoke an atmosphere, or as I'd rather put it, a *sensation* of landscapes. So the three pieces you are about to hear, are intended to stimulate the listener into a form of inter-sensual *reverie*. Each section (movement) is called a *Motet*, which has traditionally been for smaller forces than a full choir. But it is to the great motets of the Elizabethan composers, and to the magnificent ones from the mid to late 19th century that I make *homage*.

The entire cycle is dedicated to the memory of Lydia Corfe Press who loved singing very much.....

The Performers

Howard Williams has conducted most of the leading orchestras of the UK, as well as the Austrian Radio Symphony, Bavarian Radio Symphony, Swedish Radio Orchestra, Belgian Radio Orchestra, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Symphony and Chamber Orchestras, Slovak Philharmonic, Hungarian National Philharmonic, Hungarian Radio Symphony, Orchestre National de Lyon, Orchestre de Strasbourg, Orchestre Symphonique de Montpellier, Orchestre de Picardie, RTE Symphony Orchestra, Dublin and the Portuguese National Symphony Orchestra. Howard studied music at Oxford and Liverpool Universities and conducting at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. After joining English National Opera as répétiteur and then Chorus Master he went on within a short while to conduct a number of productions there, thus laying the foundations for his operatic repertoire of more than seventy works.

Following his appointment in 1989 as Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Pécs Symphony Orchestra, Howard has devoted a significant amount of his time to working with the leading symphony orchestras in that country, including the National Philharmonic, Budapest Philharmonic and Hungarian Radio Orchestra. For his services to new Hungarian music, Howard has been the recipient of an *Artisjus* award, and in 1997 was honoured with the Bartók medal for services to Hungarian music abroad.

On leaving Pécs in 2000, Howard was created Permanent Guest Conductor by the orchestra - now renamed the Pannon Philharmonic. In the same year he was appointed Head of Conducting at the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama. Through his close involvement with singers and singing he has developed a strong and continuing association with many professional and amateur choirs both with and away from the orchestra.

Howard has previously conducted premières of Cowie's *Concerto for Orchestra* and *Second Clarinet Concerto* (issued on Hyperion) and *Choral Symphony*.



www.howardwilliams.com

Helen Tunstall studied at the Royal College of Music with Marisa Robles and Fiona Hibbert. She is Principal Harpist of the London Sinfonietta, Endymion and the Orchestra of St John's, Smith Square and leads a busy freelance career playing solo, chamber and orchestral music with all the major London orchestras and ensembles.

Performances this year include the BBC Proms, South Bank, Barbican, Aldeburgh, Kings Place, Bregenz, Krakow and St Paul Minneapolis Festivals and appearances with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, English Chamber Orchestra, Academy of St Martin in the Fields, Lontano, Orchestra of St John's Smith Square, London Sinfonietta, and Endymion.

She is a top London studio player recording classical, contemporary, film, TV and commercial music. Recent recordings are Harrison Birtwistle's new work *Orpheus Elegies* for oboe and harp, works by Tarik O'Regan for Collegium, chamber works by Silvina Milstein, *Among Angels* with The Sixteen and songs with Chris Botti for Columbia label.

She has worked on films such as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Wallace and Gromit*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Batman*, *Secrets and Lies*, as well as music for Guy Barker and pop artists Robbie Williams, Annie Lennox, Joni Mitchell, Bjork, Il Divo, Leona Lewis, Amy Winehouse, Katie Melua, and Rufus Wainwright. Recent film recordings are *Milk*, *Hellboy 2*, *Golden Compass*, *Inkheart*, *Wolfman*, *Nine*, *An Education* and TV music for *Life in the Undergrowth* and the *Natural World* series.

Helen is a Professor at the Royal Academy of Music and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama.

CC21 - Choir of the 21st Century is an innovative chamber choir, formed at the beginning of the new millennium to create performances with a 21st-century perspective. It is made up of some of London's most experienced amateur singers, and performs three to four concerts each year. The choir's repertoire is deliberately broad, both sacred and secular, to reflect the depth and richness of the choral music which is our heritage.

CC21 has appeared at venues including St John's, Smith Square, Cadogan Hall & St James's, Piccadilly, and has given concerts for the English Music Festival, English-Speaking Union, European Union of Women and National Children's Orchestra. Recent concerts have included works by composers as diverse as Lassus, Purcell, Bax, Britten, Schubert, Maxwell Davies & Glass. Last season's concerts included both a sell-out performance of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* in the English Chamber Orchestra's Cadogan Hall series, and a concert entitled *Signposts to the 21st Century*. The first part of this season has had an Eastern European slant, with an all-Hungarian programme performed in London and at Jesus College, Cambridge for the Szeged Society, and a programme entitled *To Poland and Bach again!* featuring music by Bach and Polish composers including Andrzej Panufnik, Penderecki, Noskowski & Zieleński.

The choir's recordings on the SOMM label include both the Elgar & Kodály versions of *The Music Makers* (with the Oxford Orchestra da Camera) and Philip Glass's *Another Look at Harmony - Part IV* with Christopher Bowers-Broadbent (organ), both critically-acclaimed. The Glass CD was recommended by *Gramophone* magazine and described by the *All Music Guide* as "wonderfully engaging."

This concert sees the first results of a major commission from composer Edward Cowie, whose *Four Seasons for a cappella* choir is launched today by CC21 with a performance of *Summer*. This is the first stage of a significant project which will result in the entire work, Cowie's *Four Seasons*, coming to fruition in 2011. The choir will perform the World Première of *Spring* from *Four Seasons* in 2010. CC21 is delighted to be commissioning these new works and believes they represent a very important addition to the *a cappella* choral repertoire.

The Church Times wrote of CC21's Grosvenor Chapel concert *To Poland and Bach again!* in March 2009:

"The case was made by this magnificent display, in which the choir showed remarkable strength in depth — no weak links in any of the triple ensemble... Williams had instilled a Monteverdian liveness that uplifted other parts of the evening, too...The upper voices' a cappella launch in three parts was impressive enough, and the fine climax Williams engineered from full choir in the seventh and last verse was remarkable."

Choir of the 21st Century



CC21 performing at Grosvenor Chapel (photo: Ray Sojan, May 08)

Sopranos

Jane Armstrong
Elaine Close
Jan Hart
Nicola Ihnatowicz
Nicola Johnstone
Joanne Kilpatrick
Gaby Molloy
Isabel Rogers
Miranda Rogers
Jill Shutt

Altos

Christy Billings
Gill Blenkinsop
Alex Brougham
Rosemary Burch
Penny Burton
Philippa Dodds John
Susannah Edwards
Sian Evans
Louise Gowman
Virginia Harding
Kate Kermodé

Tenors

Colin Bex
Peter Birts
John Cuthbert
Stephen Cviic
Nigel Eastman
Andrew Evans
Alan Jolly
John Perry
Ian Priest
Paul Renney

Basses

Aubrey Botsford
Graham Cooper
Ian Crawford
Richard Evans
Phillip Gowman
David Henderson
Martin Johnson
Anthony Leigh
Chris Moore
Nigel Press

CC21 CDs on sale this evening @ £10 each

Elgar & Kodály: The Music Makers

"The listener returns again and again to these endearing performances of such moving music." Birmingham Post

Philip Glass: Another Look at Harmony - Part IV

"Glass's gradually expanding and contracting sequences eventually generate musical peaks and troughs of quite monumental proportions. Such moments are heard especially during the closing sections of this recording, made by the impressive Choir of the 21st Century under Howard Williams." Gramophone

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Many thanks to the **Friends of CC21** for their support and encouragement

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We are also grateful to a number of Friends and Benefactors who wish to remain anonymous

CC21 is funded mainly by voluntary donations, ticket sales and Friends' membership subscriptions. **Our Friends really *do* make a difference.** Through the support of the Friends of CC21 the choir can explore interesting repertoire and perform music to the highest standard. The support of our Friends is crucial to the choir's continued success and Friends' subscriptions provide CC21 with support for the following:

- music hire
- concert venue hire
- rehearsal venue hire
- conductor's fees
- commissioning new works
- soloists
- ticket printing
- programme printing
- leaflet design
- postage costs
- web page hosting
- *and much more*

Friends' membership makes a wonderful gift and has some great benefits, including:

- Exclusive Friends' Newsletters
- Complimentary interval or post-concert drink at concert receptions
- Acknowledgement in concert programmes
- Opportunities to meet the conductor and choir
- Support of one concert or new commission per season (Benefactors)

**For further information, contact Jill Shutt at friends@cc21.org.uk
or pick up a Friends' leaflet at this evening's concert**

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