



Choir of the 21st Century

Patron: Peter Maxwell Davies

Conductor: Howard Williams

www.cc21.org.uk

Saturday 12 July 2008; St James's Church, Piccadilly

Signposts to the 21st Century

Igor Stravinsky *Ave Maria*
Carlo Gesualdo/Stravinsky *Illumina nos (3 Sacres Cantiones)*
Henryk Górecki *Amen*

Claude Debussy *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest*
Erik Satie *Troisième Gnossienne*
Henry Cowell *The Tides of Manaunaun*
Fabric
Aeolian Harp
(Adam Swayne, piano)

Peter Maxwell Davies *Orkney Norn Paternoster*
Arnold Schoenberg *Friede auf Erden*

– INTERVAL –

Olivier Messiaen *O Sacrum Convivium*
György Ligeti *Lux Aeterna*
George Gershwin *Three Preludes*
Frederic Rzewski *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*
(Adam Swayne, piano)

Henry Purcell *Hear My Prayer*
Bob Chilcott *My Prayer*

NOTES

It is surely axiomatic that the future of the arts is hard to predict, and particularly in the case of music - in many ways the most cautious branch. With the past 200 years leaving us a legacy which we have so conveniently and even meaningfully labelled "19th-" and "20th-century music", it is tempting to wonder if "21st century music" will acquire a distinct character, and if so, what will be its derivations. At this early stage in the century we can perhaps profitably examine existing influences and speculate as to which will prove most telling.

The history of the arts differs fundamentally from that of the sciences in that it is not predicated on progress and discovery (much though technical developments play their part). While scientific progress can be said to have defined modern history, the function of the arts has been to reflect it. This process of reflection enjoys the luxury of being able to shift its perspectives, harking back generations and even centuries in order to enrich its comment or rediscover its roots.

And so, in putting together this retrospective of "signposts" which seem to me to point towards us and beyond, I have visualised a series of mirrors, some of which form interactive reflections and others of which may appear to stand alone. Certain of these are paired in such a way that is - I hope - self-evident: Gesualdo coupled with Stravinsky within one work, Stravinsky himself with Górecki, Gershwin being reflected in the new naïveté of Rzewski, and finally Bob Chilcott's reworking of Purcell alongside its model. These perspectives help us, I believe, to imagine what may pass through the minds of composers of the present and coming generations. Almost inevitably - and irresistibly - we include certain works by composers from the past century, such as Messiaen and Ligeti, whose originality defined entire new trends which will continue to make their presences felt for a long time. Not least, within Schoenberg's *Friede auf Erden* alone we can also experience a developmental process that encapsulates the painful and delicious dilemma facing many revolutionary composers.

- Howard Williams

Carlo Gesualdo (1560-1613) & Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

Duke Carlo Gesualdo, Prince of Venosa, was the second son of Italian feudal landowners with a modest castle in the village of Gesualdo (60 miles from Naples), a larger one in the town of Venosa, plus a palace in Naples. Known as the perpetrator of his wife's murder after discovering her *in flagrante* with her lover, his character - combined with undoubted guilt he felt for the remainder of his life - would seem to go a long way to explaining his composition of some of the most boldly inventive, complex and idiosyncratic vocal music of the Renaissance, found in six books of madrigals, two of sacred songs and one of responsories. His aristocratic birth and his freedom from both formal musical training and patronage provide further reasons.

It was probably the Italian composer's aristocratic disdain for convention and resulting avant-garde harmonic daring that appealed to Igor Stravinsky. For the 400th anniversary of Gesualdo's birth in 1960 Stravinsky produced both the *Monumentum pro Gesualdo di Venosa* (a recomposition for instruments of three of his madrigals), and the *Tres Sacrae Cantiones*. These latter are recompositions of three of Gesualdo's Sacred Songs from his first book, in which the *sextus* and *bassus* parts are missing. Two of these were intended in six parts, while one, *Illumina nos*, was in seven. While Stravinsky might have just reconstructed the two missing parts, what he did was to recompose the whole texture adding the missing parts, thus producing a fascinating fusion of two musical minds separated by four centuries. The unique use of seven voices in this concept of Gesualdo's may be taken to respond to the "*septiformi Paracliti*" in the text.

The *Ave Maria* of 1934 was Stravinsky's fourth sacred setting. He set the text originally in the Slavonic of the Russian Orthodox Church, for a *cappella* choir because the Russian Church forbade the use of instruments. Saying "I can endure unaccompanied singing in only the most harmonically primitive music", Stravinsky made his setting extremely simple, as he had earlier in his *Pater Noster* (1926) and *Credo* (1932), adopting the Phrygian mode for

the latest piece. These are in contrast with his choral and orchestral *Symphony of Psalms*, (1930) which adopts a more contrapuntal treatment. In March 1949, Stravinsky adapted the *Ave Maria* into the Latin setting performed tonight, which resulted in several changes, an overall lengthening and the addition of a final "Amen".

Henryk Górecki (b. 1933)

The evolution of Górecki's musical language has been a consistent search for his musical roots. He holds Poland's musical past, its church and its folk culture to be the rock on which both his and his country's identity and heritage are founded. From the combusive energy of *Scontri* (Collisions) to the reflective lamentations of his Symphony no. 3 (*Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*) and beyond, it is this deeply-felt awareness of his roots that gives his music a directness and emotional impact all its own. Long regarded in his native Poland as a composer of uncommon individuality, Górecki is now acknowledged in the West as a major figure.

Claude Debussy(1862-1918)

Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest is from Debussy's first book of *Préludes*, published in 1910. With these works Debussy continued the development of a form that has flourished since the Baroque, giving it new life as a medium for conveying a single concentrated thought, emotion or impression. With the titles appearing only at the end of each piece, the music rather than the programme is in the foreground. But the imagery is nonetheless there, and it necessitated great advances in Debussy's harmonic language, bridging the transition from complex tonal to post-tonal. In *Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest*, brilliant virtuosity is applied to a harmonic language based on the pentatonic and whole-tone scales. Showing the destructive powers of nature, it portrays the powerful wind off the Atlantic on the French west coast.

Erik Satie (1866-1925)

Satie wrote his three *Gnossiennes* in 1890 (a further three were published posthumously in 1968, but only spuriously given the title *Gnossiennes*). Satie coined quasi-adjectival nouns as titles for various of his sets of piano pieces, such as "*Ogives*", "*Vexations*" and "*Croquis et Agaceries*", using them to suggest new types of composition. While these others had existing meanings before being purloined by Satie, the word "*Gnossienne*" can be said to make only unconfirmed reference to either agnostics or perhaps the Knossos of the Minotaur myth. The three *Gnossiennes* are without time signatures or bar lines, indicating what is known as "absolute time".

Henry Cowell (1897-1965)

The American composer, pianist, theorist, and teacher Henry Cowell was an important innovator who sought to create an "ultramodern" style based on the synthesis of Western, Asian and African music. As a boy, he was in fact better acquainted with Appalachian, Irish and oriental music than with European forms. From the start of his career as a composer and performer, Cowell demonstrated his powers of innovation. His piano composition *The Tides of Manaunaun* (1912) was the first to include tone clusters, while *Aeolian Harp* (1923) was one of Cowell's first pieces to require performers to manipulate the strings of a piano directly, a practice to be associated with the prepared piano technique of Cowell's student, John Cage.

Peter Maxwell Davies (b. 1934)

Sir Peter Maxwell Davies was appointed Master of the Queen's Music in March 2004. He has also been greatly involved in the creation of the Queen's Gold Medal for Music, which will reward individuals who have made a significant contribution to the community at large, though music. On the appointment of Sir Peter, the term of the royal position was changed

from "life" to 10 years to give more composers the opportunity to take up this honorary position.

Maxwell Davies lives in the Orkney Islands, off the north coast of Scotland, where he writes most of his music. He has written across the widest gamut of musical genres, and in many styles. His major theatrical works include the operas *Taverner*, *Resurrection*, *The Lighthouse* and *The Doctor of Myddfai*; the full-length ballets *Salome* and *Caroline Mathilde*; and the music-theatre works *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot*. His huge output of orchestral works includes eight symphonies, 14 concertos and several light orchestral works, including *An Orkney Wedding, with Sunrise*.

Written in 1977, *Westerlings* is a setting of texts by George Mackay Brown concerning the sea voyages of the first Norse settlers from Scandinavia to Orkney in the eighth century. It ends with a simple and evocative prayer - *Orkney Norn Paternoster*.

Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1851)*

In 1907, Schoenberg entered his Expressionist phase, during which the familiar frame of tonality would eventually be shattered by rampant chromaticism. In retrospect, he was able to perceive a "first period" in his creative life, brought to a close with the *First Chamber Symphony* in 1906. So our piece, from early 1907, is effectively on the cusp.

Yet just as the *First Chamber Symphony*, for all its audacity, is clearly rooted in E major, so *Friede auf Erden* (Op. 13) is firmly planted in D. The piece begins in gentle four-part harmony, but from the second stanza onwards this dissolves into divided lines, taking on the polyphonic independence typical of Schoenberg. Even so, its impact on the ear is mainly harmonic. At moments, the clash of dissonant triads tugs severely at the key sense - notably in the long-drawn cadences to the refrain "*Friede, Friede auf der Erde...*", which exploit distant relationships. But the stability of late romantic harmony is not challenged for long.

At first, however, the piece was widely considered unsingable, and Schoenberg reluctantly supplied an instrumental accompaniment. (Of course it is a point of honour with modern choirs to dispense with such a prop.) In later life, when its optimistic message had worn a little thin, he referred to it as "My Illusion for mixed choir: written at a time when I believed that such harmony between human beings was possible." As an impassioned plea for peace on earth, it remains as relevant as ever.

Olivier Messiaen(1908-1992)

Entering the Paris Conservatoire in 1919, Olivier Messiaen studied a broad range of music topics, including composition with Paul Dukas and improvisation and organ with Marcel Dupré. He went on to become perhaps one of the most original compositional voices of the twentieth century, and in this exquisite Communion motet, written in 1937 and his only work for liturgical performance, Messiaen displays his highly individual approach to harmonic colour, melody and rhythm. The text of *O sacrum convivium* is the first stanza of a poem by Saint Thomas Aquinas honouring the Holy Sacrament.

György Ligeti (1923-2006)

As Stephen Plaistow wrote in the *Guardian*, following the Hungarian composer's death in 2006, reaching a large public was never a priority for György Ligeti. Ironically, when the film director Stanley Kubrick helped himself, in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, to chunks of *Atmosphères*, the *Kyrie* of the *Requiem* and *Lux Aeterna*, without permission, he did indeed reach a wide audience, even if not everyone who liked the film registered the composer's name.

Born in the Transylvanian town of Dicsószentmarton, lost by Hungary to Romania in 1920, and now known as Tarnaveni, Ligeti belonged to a Hungarian Jewish family. As a student at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest from 1945, his own training in counterpoint followed the rigorous regime of that time and place - Palestrina, Ockeghem

* Note by Laurence Howes.

and the old techniques - and he taught theory, harmony and counterpoint there after graduating in 1949.

In 1956, at the time of the Hungarian uprising, he fled, hidden in a mail-train until he could make a dash across the border into Austria. Ligeti was given refuge in Stockhausen's electronic music studio in Cologne, from the luxurious haven of which he flourished. When *Apparitions*, for orchestra, caused a sensation at the International Society for Contemporary Music's festival in 1960, he had already developed quickly enough to have established a textural concept of music embodied in a new type of sound. This dense texture of interwoven voices has come to be thought of as "the Ligeti sound". This is demonstrated in his *Lux Aeterna*, written for unaccompanied voices in 1966.

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

George Gershwin was born in Brooklyn, and began his musical career as a song-plugger on Tin Pan Alley, but was soon writing his own pieces. In 1924, George collaborated with his brother, lyricist Ira Gershwin, on a musical comedy *Lady Be Good*, which included such standards as "Fascinating Rhythm" and "The Man I Love." It was the beginning of a partnership that would continue for the rest of the composer's short life. When he was 25 years old, his jazz-influenced *Rhapsody in Blue* was premiered in New York at a concert entitled "An Experiment in Music." The audience included Jascha Heifitz, Fritz Kreisler, Leopold Stokowski, Sergei Rachmaninov and Igor Stravinsky. In 1935, he presented the folk opera *Porgy and Bess*, now recognized as one of the seminal works of American opera. He planned a string quartet, a ballet and another opera, which were never written due to his death at the age of 38 from a brain tumour.

His *Three Preludes* for piano (*Allegro ben ritmato e deciso; Andante con moto e poco rubato; Allegro ben ritmato e deciso*) are again jazz-oriented. The first is based on a snappy blue-note riff, while the second turns the same riff into a slow blues lullaby. The third blends Caribbean rhythms with jazz harmonies.

Frederic Rzewski (b. 1938)

The American Frederic Rzewski studied with Walter Piston, Roger Sessions and Milton Babbitt at Harvard and Princeton Universities. He went to Italy in 1960, where he studied with Luigi Dallapiccola and began his career as a performer of new piano music. In Rome in the mid-1960s he helped form the Musica Elettronica Viva group, which quickly became known for its pioneering work in live electronics and improvisation.

During the 1970s he experimented further with forms in which style and language are treated as structural elements. The remarkable *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*, last of his four *North American Ballads* of 1979, is in two distinct sections. The first is dominated by a vivid sonic evocation of the sound of the machinery and oppressive atmosphere within the millhouse, above which can be heard snatches of the blues in question. After a silence, a plainly Gershwin-esque blues sequence is played. This gives way to more mechanical sounds - this time trained as a conventional accompaniment over which longer melodic phrases are played. The piece ends with a complete setting of the verse and refrain in ragtime style, to which, gentle reader, you might be able to fit the words:

Old man Sargent sitting at the desk,
The damned old fool won't give us no rest.
He'd take the nickels off a dead man's eyes,
To buy a Coca-cola and a Pomo Pie.
I've got the blues, I've got the blues,
I've got the Winnsboro Cotton Mill blues,
Lordy, lordy, spoolin's hard,
You know and I know, I don't have to tell:
Work for Tom Watson, got to work like hell.
I've got the blues, I've got the blues,
I've got the Winnsboro Cotton Mill blues.

Henry Purcell (1659-1695) & Bob Chilcott (b. 1955)

Soon after his marriage, on the death of Edmund Lowe in 1682, Henry Purcell was appointed organist of the Chapel-Royal, an office which he was able to hold simultaneously with his position at Westminster Abbey. For some years after this he was busy in the production of sacred music, odes addressed to the king and royal family, and other similar works. Purcell provided a number of verse anthems and full anthems for the liturgy of the Church of England, as well as settings of the Morning and Evening Service, the *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis*, *Te Deum* and *Jubilate*. Other sacred vocal music includes the Latin psalm setting *Jehovah, quam multi sunt* and many English psalm settings, among which can be counted this setting of the first verse of Psalm 102, "Hear my prayer, O Lord".

Bob Chilcott is one of the most active composers and choral conductors in Britain today. He has been involved in choral music most of his life: he was a chorister in the choir of King's College, Cambridge, and sang the "Pie Jesu" on the renowned 1967 King's recording of Fauré's *Requiem*, conducted by Sir David Willcocks. He returned to King's as a Choral Scholar, and between 1985 and 1997 was a member of The King's Singers. He has been a full-time composer since 1997. *My Prayer* was written at the very beginning of the 21st century to go alongside Sandström's famous "deconstruction" of Purcell's *Hear My Prayer*. Chilcott's version adheres mostly to the concept of Purcell's eight-part texture while exulting in the bluesy nature of the second phrase in the original.

PERFORMERS



Adam Swayne works with a vast range of musical media and styles that go beyond conventional labelling. He is just as much at home giving a solo piano recital or conducting an orchestra as he is organising an interactive performance of Riley's "In C" or composing for mixed ensembles and electronics. He takes an inclusive, informative and innovative approach to his music-making that is drawing an increasingly large audience.

A graduate of the joint course between Manchester University and the RNCM, Adam gained first class degrees from both institutions and an MMus from the RNCM. Manchester University gave him its highest award (Sir Thomas Beecham Medal) along with other prizes including the Recital Prize. Prizes from the RNCM included the John Ireland Prize and an award for performances of contemporary music.

In 2003, Adam was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to begin doctoral studies at Northwestern University, USA. He graduated in 2006 with distinction, having presented several US premieres of works by British composers.

As a pianist, Adam takes a special interest in neglected works of the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. He has performed on BBC Radio 3, at the BBC Proms (Composer Portrait 2004) and for capacity audiences at the Bridgewater Hall (Manchester) and the Purcell Room (London), as well as in solo recitals all over the UK and in the United States. He has worked as piano soloist with the conductors Victor Yampolsky, Mallory Thompson, Clark Rundell and Baldur Brönnimann. He also plays harpsichord: at Harpsichordfest 2006, he presented the UK premiere of Steve Reich's *Harpsichord Phase* with harpsichordist Jane Chapman.

Research projects that Adam has undertaken include a new edition of Ferdinand Ries's Piano Concerto in C# minor; he presented the new edition in a performance that he conducted from the piano. Adam also directed the multi-piano ensemble 88X from the keyboard, having founded this Chicago-based contemporary music group. He is also no

stranger to the podium, and frequently conducts orchestras and new-music ensembles. In 2007, he was guest speaker and conductor at the CoMA conference "Changing Dynamics".

Adam also has a growing reputation as a composer. He has received commissions from the RNCM, Project Keyboard: EXCEL and the Ebony Duo with funds from the Scottish Arts Council and Hope Scott Trusts. His recent piece for the Manchester University Wind Orchestra was featured at the International Wind Festival 2007 in Glasgow. Adam has benefited from collaborations with composers including Sir Harrison Birtwistle, John Corigliano, John Casken, Graham Fitkin, John Adams and Gary Carpenter, and works have been composed especially for him by Kevin Malone, Gareth Parry and Geoffrey Poole. Adam attracted funds from Arts Council England through the National Lottery to commission Ailis Ni Riain's *Beautiful Cracked Eyes*.



Howard Williams is one of Britain's most experienced conductors, both in the opera house and concert hall. He 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 Nationale 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 and Drama, London. After joining English National Opera as répétiteur and then Chorus Master he went on within a short while to conduct 11 operas for ENO. At the same time he worked with David Freeman in the opening seasons of Opera Factory in London, first to conduct the sensational new production of Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy* and then to premiere the reduced orchestration of Tippett's *The Knot Garden*, both televised by Channel 4. With the English Bach Festival Baroque Orchestra he has conducted productions at Covent Garden of Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*, Purcell's *Fairy Queen* and *Dido and Aeneas* and Handel's *Oreste*. With them he also took to Madrid a production with historical instruments of Rossini's *Le siège de Corinthe*.

Following his appointment in 1989 as Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Pécs Symphony Orchestra, which made him the first British conductor ever to hold such a position in Hungary, Howard devoted a significant amount of his time to working with the leading symphony orchestras in that country, including frequent appearances with the National Philharmonic, Hungarian Symphony Orchestra and Hungarian Radio Orchestra. For his services to new Hungarian music, Howard has been the recipient of an Artisjus award, and in 1997 he was honoured with the Bartók Medal for services to Hungarian music abroad. Later this year he makes his debut with the Budapest Philharmonic.

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 to the new post of Head of Conducting at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff, as well as becoming Artistic Director of the Oxford Orchestra da Camera. His subsequent six years' work at the RWCMD enabled Howard to explore and develop his attitude to the teaching of conductors, while at the same time training student orchestras. A founder member of the group K12-Conductors in Education, Howard is constantly involved with student orchestras at conservatoire and university level in the UK, Europe and beyond.

Through his close involvement with singers and singing he has developed a strong and continuing association with choirs both with and away from the orchestra. The list of those would be too long to summarise, but includes the choirs of Austrian Radio and of Bavarian Radio, the Hungarian State Choir, the French Army Male Voice Choir, the Leeds Festival Chorus and the BBC Singers.



CC21 (Choir of the 21st Century) was formed at the beginning of the new century. It is made up of about 32 of some of London's most experienced amateur singers, and performs three or four times a year at central London venues. The choir's repertoire is deliberately broad, both sacred and secular, to reflect the depth and richness of the choral music that is our heritage. Recent concerts have included works by composers as diverse as Bax, Britten, Purcell and Schubert. While in December 2007 it performed Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* in the English Chamber Orchestra's Cadogan Hall series, the current season's concerts also include *Signposts to the 21st Century*. The choir's commercially available recordings on the SOMM label include both the Elgar and Kodály versions of *The Music Makers* (with the Oxford Orchestra da Camera) and their new release of Philip Glass's *Another Look at Harmony - Part IV* with Christopher Bowers-Broadbent (organ).

SOPRANO

*Jane Armstrong
Elaine Close
Nicola Johnstone
Gaby Molloy
Wendy Norman
Andra Patterson
Christine Rush
Hilary Todd*

ALTO

*Gill Blenkinsop
Alex Brougham
Penny Burton
Philippa Dodds John
Sian Evans
Virginia Harding
Kate Jackson
Lorna Perry
Alison St Denis*

TENOR

*Peter Birts
Nigel Eastman
Andrew Evans
Paul Harrison
Laurence Howes
Simon James
John Perry
Ian Priest
Paul Renney
Ben Revill*

BASS

*David Barnard
Aubrey Botsford
Ian Crawford
Richard Evans
Philip Gowman
David Henderson
Jake Kirner
Richard Lea
Michael Paine*

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