

Oxford Youth Choirs
Mansfield College, Oxford
Sunday 2nd May 2004, 4pm

directed by Penelope Martin-Smith
and Richard Vendome
with the Aesop Ensemble
and Colin Good (piano)

Aesop's Fables – John Whittaker (first performance)

sung by Oxford Girls' Junior Choir (director, Joyce Morris) and Oxford Boys' Choir (director, Penelope Martin-Smith).

Benjamin Thompson (Aesop)
Matthew Eccleston (tortoise)
Ruby Behrendt-Reed (hare)



1. The Lion and the Mouse
2. The Fox and the Crow
3. The Greedy Dog
4. The Vain Jackdaw
5. The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse
6. The Tortoise and the Hare

What little we know about the life of Aesop is shrouded in obscurity. Historical opinion suggests the following facts. He was probably born in about the year 620 B.C. He was a slave by birth and served two masters – Xanthus and Jeadmon - inhabitants of Samos in Greece. It was the latter who gave him his freedom as a reward for his learning and wit. Once a free man, Aesop elevated himself into a high position in society, and mixed with the greatest philosophers and thinkers of the day. He became known for his stories which he used as a vehicle for his knowledge and insights into solving the many problems and dilemmas of everyday life. His travels took him to Sardis where in recognition of his diplomatic skills, he was employed as an ambassador for the king. Unfortunately it was on one of his many diplomatic visits to the other nearby Greek city-states which brought about the occasion of his death. He was sent to Delphi with a large sum of gold to be given to the citizens. However when he arrived, he was so upset at their greediness and miserliness that he decided to send the money back to his master. The citizens of Delphi were so enraged when they found out what he had done, that they executed Aesop as a common criminal. However the memory of Aesop lives on in the many stories that are attributed to him – and perhaps as human nature has not changed very much in all the centuries, we can still learn a lesson or two from them today....

This work for children's voices incorporates six of Aesop's best known fables. The choir is accompanied by an ensemble of eight musicians (flute, two clarinets, horn, bassoon, oboe, double-bass and percussion). The lyrics are by Alf Williams (1945-2001) a Liverpool-based author, with whom the composer collaborated on several musical projects, including a short operetta for young children *The Selfish Giant* for the Liverpool Garden Festival. The composer would like to dedicate this first performance of *Aesop's Fables* to Helen Williams. We wish to thank June Dent and other parents for help with costumes, and the Cotswold Wildlife Park for peacock feathers.

Music sung by Oxford Girls' Choir

Au bord du clair ruisseau (*Alicia Clarke, soprano*) - Gabriel Fauré

Set me as a seal (*Penelope Martin-Smith, soprano, Sasha Brown, mezzo*) - Roderick Williams
(first concert performance)

composed for the marriage on 17th April 2004 of Dr Ruth de Newtown (Head Girl, 1990-91) to Stephen Davis.

Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.

Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.

(Song of Solomon 8, 6-7)

Somebody loves me - George Gershwin, arr. Colin Good
Summertime (*Amy Charles, soprano*) - George Gershwin

Miss Otis regrets (*Jessica Butcher, mezzo*) - Cole Porter
Ain't misbehavin' (*Sasha Brown, soprano*) - Fats Waller, arr. Richard Vendome
Can't help lovin' dat man (*Rosie Dilnot, Rita Oldenbourg, mezzos*) - Jerome Kern, arr. Roderick Williams

My romance (*Daisy Venables, mezzo*) - Rogers and Hart
The girl from Ipanema (*Jessica Butcher, mezzo*) - Antonio Carlos Jobim, arr. Roderick Williams
Big yellow taxi - Joni Mitchell, arr. Roderick Williams

[encore – Good Vibrations – Beach Boys, arr. Roderick Williams]